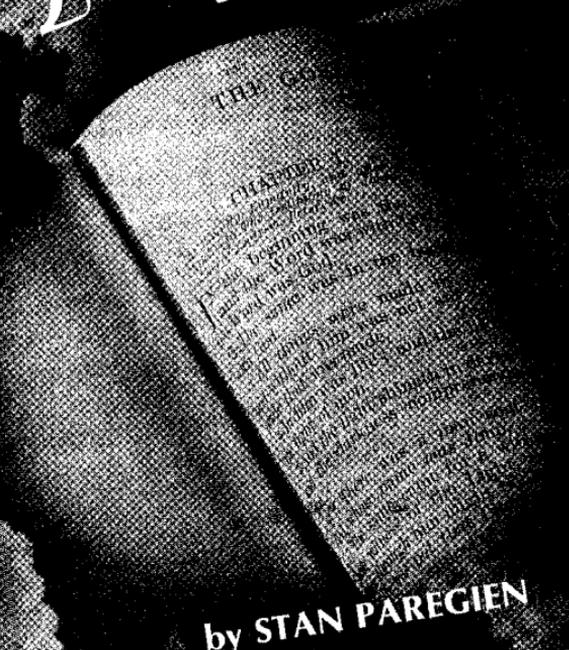


# Twenty-Six Lessons on the Gospel of John



by STAN PAREGIEN

Student's Book  
to be used with the study of  
**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**  
by Paul T. Butler



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**TWENTY-SIX LESSONS**  
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**GOSPEL OF JOHN**

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# Introduction

This workbook was designed for use as a six month study of the life of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of John. Actually, it contains both a "short" and a "long" course. It was impossible to write out in full the hundreds of scriptures which relate to the subjects covered by John. But the really serious student may take the "long" course by looking up the scriptures which have been listed (usually in parentheses) and reading them in his own Bible.

Those who teach this course would do well to purchase and study the following books: Paul Butler, *The Gospel of John* (2 Vol.; College Press, Joplin, Mo.); Frank Pack, *The Gospel According to John* (2 Vol.; Sweet Publishing Co., Austin, Tx.); and Burton Coffman, *Commentary on John* (Firm Foundation Publishing House, Austin, Tx.).

The questions at the end of each of the 26 lessons were carefully planned to stimulate serious and meaningful thought. Most of

them were drawn directly from the text of John's gospel. Others of them require the student to draw on his own experiences or, in some instances, to actually do certain things. The aim was to make Bible study what it should always be: exciting, inspiring, and challenging.

This workbook is lovingly dedicated to my son, Stanley Eugene ("Gene") Paregien, Jr. It is my prayer that he will (along with many of you who are now students of the Word) become a faithful and enthusiastic teacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

# Lesson One

*(John 1:1-18)*

## **Background Notes**

John the Apostle was the son of Zebedee (Matt. 4:21). He was a commercial fisherman on the sea of Galilee, along with his father and his brother James. John and James were in a partnership with Simon Peter when Jesus called them all to work with him as fishers of men (Luke 5:1-11). But James was killed during the reign of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-2).

John quickly became one of Jesus' most trusted disciples. John was present when Jesus was transfigured (Matt. 17:1-5), when Jesus was crucified (John 19:16-35), and when the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost in 30 A.D. (Acts 1 and 2). He and Peter cured a lame man and were thrown into prison by the Jewish authorities (Acts 3 and 4). Later, John went to Samaria to help those whom Phillip the Evangelist had led to the Lord (Acts 8:5-25). And he was present at the special conference at Jerusalem

(Acts 15; Gal. 2:9). Late in life he was exiled to the Island of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation.

John's record of the good news about Jesus was a direct result of the Holy Spirit's influence upon him. Jesus himself had promised John and the other apostles, "The Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and make you remember all that I have told you" (John 14:26). So this book or letter was actually composed with the help of the Holy Spirit. It was probably written at Ephesus sometime between 80 and 100 A.D.

The Gospel of John was written as a tool for witnessing, for John says: "Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life" (John 20:30-31). So John's primary concern is not for strict chronological accuracy, but for the impact which each line would have upon his readers.

Like a skillful lawyer, John introduces solid, reliable evidence to show that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. One by one he calls witnesses to the stand. John the Baptist, a man who was loved and admired by the common people, gives his striking testimony about Jesus. A noted Jewish leader admits that the works of Jesus confirm his authority from God. A Samaritan woman meets Jesus and convinces an entire village to come and listen to his teachings. A government official presents evidence that his dying son was healed the exact moment when Jesus pronounced him well. A man who was born blind says that Jesus healed him. 5,000 people express amazement and gratitude for being fed by Jesus.

And then there are those marvelous actions which speak for themselves: his ability to walk upon the raging sea; the raising of Lazarus from the grave; and his own resurrection. No wonder that John had to explain, "Now, there are many other things that Jesus did. If they were all written down one by one, I suppose that the whole world could not hold the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

Throughout this Gospel (and also his Epistles), John emphasizes that God sent Jesus Christ — his Son who existed with him always and who is co-equal with him and the Holy Spirit — to live as a human upon the earth for a special purpose. John paints a picture of powerful contrasts: truth (light) verses

falsehood (darkness), the children of God verses the children of Satan, good verses evil. From a human viewpoint, man didn't stand a chance.

But the joyous and hope-building message of this Gospel comes through loud and clear: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life" (John 3:16). John, like every faithful preacher and Bible teacher, focuses our attention directly upon Jesus. It is Jesus who brings victory over sin, despair, and death. Praise the Lord!

### The Word of Life

(John 1:1-18)

The first eighteen verses of the Gospel of John form an introduction (often called "The Prologue") detailing some essentials of the Christian faith. Carefully notice what John asserts about the background and character of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup>Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God. <sup>2</sup>From the very beginning, the Word was with God. <sup>3</sup>Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him. <sup>4</sup>The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to mankind. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out (John 1:1-5).

When Paul visited Athens, he noticed that the people had inscribed one of their many altars "To the Unknown God." So Paul took that concept and used it to reveal the real God to them (Acts 17:23). In a similar way, John uses a popular concept of his day to tell his readers what they needed to know about Jesus Christ.

The Greek term *logos*, here translated as "Word," was commonly used to describe the way or means by which God gave wisdom to people. So John picks the concept up at that point and argues that the Word is not a mystical method, but a man who is also God — Jesus Christ! This approach was especially appropriate for the non-Jewish population, for many of the Jewish ideas (such as the promise of a Messiah and their emphasis upon geneologies) were unfamiliar to the Gentile mind.

So John affirms that the Word, Jesus Christ, was co-equal with God the Father and actually existed with him before anything at all was created. The Old Testament conveys the idea that the

word of God is an expression of God's rational, creative energy (Genesis 1:3,6,11). And John applies that idea to him who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me" (John 14:6). Jesus was to God what your own thought and word is to you, a medium through which God the Father expressed his personality and revealed his will for mankind.

1:3 stresses the unity of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and their mutual participation in the creation of all things. "In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son. He is the one through whom God created the universe, the one whom God has chosen to possess all things at the end. He reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being, sustaining the universe with his powerful word. After achieving forgiveness for the sins of mankind, he sat down in heaven at the right side of God, the Supreme Power" (Hebrews 1:1-3).

In 1:4-5, John introduces the idea that the life which Jesus offers is the only one that provides eternal safety (John 3:16; 3:36; 6:47). Then he states that just as the morning sunrise chases night's dark shadows away, Jesus dispels spiritual darkness. For Jesus reveals things as they really are. Lust is not normal; it is sinful (Matt. 5:28). Hatred is actually a form of murder (Matt. 5:22). And so by the light of his word, Jesus shows us the right path to follow (John 12:36).

Just as physical light was given to the world (Genesis 1:3), spiritual light came through Jesus Christ and is available to all people (John 8:12; 9:5; 11:10). But those who reject the Light and have fellowship with works of darkness will one day be cast into darkness for eternity (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

Make no mistake about it: the darkness of which John speaks was and still is violently opposed to the light. Evil people love to do their wicked deeds by cover of darkness (John 3:19-20). But there is hope! "For the darkness is passing away, and the real light is already shining" (1 John 2:8).

<sup>6</sup>God sent his messenger, a man named John, <sup>7</sup>who came to tell people about the light, so that all should hear the message and believe. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light. <sup>9</sup>This was the real light — the light that comes into the world and shines on all mankind.

<sup>10</sup>The Word was in the world, and through God made the world

through him, yet the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup>He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>Some, however, did receive him and believed in him; so he gave them the right to become God's children. <sup>13</sup>They did not become God's children by natural means, that is, by being born as the children of a human father; God himself was their Father (John 1:6-13).

The apostle's purpose here is not to degrade the faithful service of John the Baptist, but to make sure that his status is kept in perspective. The Baptist's own ministry was as spectacular as a fireworks display, but it was only a prelude to the miraculous works of Jesus. For the light of Jesus shined upon all men through the witness of John the Baptist, the witness of his own testimony (John 8:14,18), the witness of God the Father (John 5:37), the witness of his actions (John 5:36; 10:25), the witness of the Old Testament scriptures (John 5:39,46), the witness of God the Holy Spirit (John 15:26), and the witness of all those whose lives he touched.

It is sobering to realize that the Greek noun *marturia*, often translated as "witness," is closely related to another Greek noun, *martur*. It is from *martur* that we get our English word, "martyr," signifying one who bears testimony through his death. When one remembers that John the Baptist, Stephen, James, and countless others have died for Jesus, there is an awakening to the truth that to become a witness for Jesus often results in becoming a martyr for him as well.

In 1:9 John speaks of each person as potentially, rather than actually, having this spiritual enlightenment. Contrary to the subjective and passive "Inner Light" theory of the Society of Friends (Quakers), no person is every enlightened against his will. Jesus came to illuminate the minds of those who are open and honest with great truths which have been hidden since before the world itself began (Eph. 1:7-10).

In 1:11-13 we are reminded that the events recorded in the Old Testament should have acted as a "school of hard knocks" to bring the Jewish people to their knees before the Son of God (Gal. 3:24). But by and large they were more interested in having a great military commander or an aggressive king to lead them. That is why Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem, knowing that they would pay a terrible price for rejecting his authority over them (Luke 19:41).

But then, as today, there were some among the Jews who loved and accepted Jesus as their Messiah or Christ. And when they did

so, God welcomed them as his children. "See how much the Father has loved us! His love is so great that we are called God's children — and so, in fact, we are" (1 John 3:1).

However, as 1:13 and 3:1-15 point out, the New Birth does not depend upon being in the right line of genealogy, a concept in which the Jews placed much hope. Jesus told his apostles to tell others about him, to immerse those who believed in him and repented of their sins, and to give each convert further instructions on how to live the Christian life (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). It was no accident, then, that in Acts 2 the apostles preached the Word of God, immersed those who believed and repented, and taught them further. That is also the work of every Christian today!

<sup>14</sup>The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son.

<sup>15</sup>John spoke about him. He cried out, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'He comes after me, but he is greater than I am, because he existed before I was born.'"

<sup>16</sup>Out of the fullness of his grace he has blessed us all, giving us one blessing after another. <sup>17</sup>God gave the Law through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is the same as God and is at the Father's side, he has made him known (John 1:14-18).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote as much as 35 years before John did, and they thoroughly discussed the birth and genealogy of Jesus. So John chooses simply to affirm that the Divine became human and lived upon the earth for a time. In his later writings, the apostle warns that there are false teachers who actually deny that God would do such a thing (1 John 4:2-3).

John asserts that it was not only Jesus' teachings that gave men a glimpse of God, but also his own character and life style. "We write to you about the Word of life, which has existed from the very beginning. We have heard it, and we have seen it with our eyes; yes, we have seen it, and our hands have touched it. When this life became visible, we saw it; so we speak of it and tell you about the eternal life which was with the Father and was made known to us. What we have seen and heard we announce to you also, so that you will join with us in the fellowship that we have with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-3).

There is a story about a Chinese youth who wanted to become an authority on jade jewelry. So he became an apprentice under

an elderly man who was recognized as an expert in the field. The old gentleman began by putting a piece of jade into the young man's hands and telling him to hold it tight. Then he began to casually talk about the rice crops, the weather, philosophy, and anything else that wandered across his mind. After an hour of this activity, he took the jade stone back and sent the young man home for the day.

The next morning the young man came back to the old man's shop, eager to actually begin learning about jade. To his amazement the same thing happened again. And after this procedure was repeated daily for several weeks, the young man was tempted to interrupt his venerable teacher and ask when he was really going to learn about jade. But one day as the teacher put a stone into his hands, the young man perceptively objected, "Sir, that's not jade!"

So it was that Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, became a man and lived upon the earth. And those who study his life can clearly see that he is Divine. It was because of Jesus' unique relationship with God the Father that John uses the Greek adjective *monogenes* (one of a kind; unique) five times in reference to him in this book.

Paul Butler notes that "John uses an interesting word in the Greek for 'declared'. He uses *exegesato*, from which we get our English words exegesis and exegetical, meaning literally to lead out, or interpret. In other words, Christ, through His incarnation, has interpreted God for us" (*The Gospel of John*, I, 34).

### Thought Stimulators on John 1:1-18

1. Why did John write this gospel?
2. Define "Logos" in your own words.
3. What characteristics do you see in John the Baptist that Christians today should imitate?
4. List what John 1:1-18 tells you about Jesus.
5. Strengthen your own faith this week by sharing what Jesus has done in your own life. Either write a letter to a non-Christian friend, or strike up a spiritual conversation with a stranger. (NOTE: Don't merely invite the person to church; tell him what Jesus has done for you.) Report your own feelings about your experience to your teacher.
6. Tell what you know about the apostle John.
7. Who helped John to write this gospel?
8. When was this gospel written?
9. Does John record all of the miracles which Jesus performed?

10. Through whom was the world created?
11. Where will those people who reject the Light be spending eternity?
12. How does a person become a child of God?
13. Explain the statement that "No one has ever seen God" (John 1:18).
14. Why does John the Baptist say that Jesus "is greater than I am"?

# Lesson Two

(John 1:19-2:12)

In John 1:19 through 2:11, the apostle gives a carefully detailed account of the first week of Jesus' public ministry. These passages contain the personal witness of John the Baptist, the witness of the first disciples of Jesus, and the witness of the first miracle Jesus ever performed.

## The First Day

(John 1:19-28)

<sup>19</sup>The Jewish authorities in Jerusalem sent some priests and Levites to John to ask him, "Who are you?"

<sup>20</sup>John did not refuse to answer, but spoke out openly and clearly, saying: "I am not the Messiah."

<sup>21</sup>"Who are you, then?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?"

"No, I am not," John answered.

"Are you the Prophet?" they asked.

"No," he replied.

<sup>22</sup>"Then tell us who you are," they said. "We have to take an

answer back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

<sup>23</sup>John answered by quoting the prophet Isaiah: "I am the voice of someone shouting in the desert: Make a straight path for the Lord to travel!" "

<sup>24</sup>The messengers, who had been sent by the Pharisees, <sup>25</sup>then asked John, "If you are not the Messiah nor Elijah nor the Prophet, why do you baptize?"

<sup>26</sup>John answered, "I baptize with water, but among you stands the one you do not know. <sup>27</sup>He is coming after me, but I am not good enough even to untie his sandals."

<sup>28</sup>All this happened in Bethany on the east side of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

A famous theologian often asked his "preacher boys" how their Sunday sermons went. His favorite questions were: "Did you convert anybody?" and "Did you make anybody mad?" He figured that when the gospel of Christ is clearly and forcefully preached one result or the other will take place. John the Baptist preached like that. His listeners either repented and were immersed, or they got mad and left.

So John the Baptist's fame quickly spread throughout the region. And when the Jewish authorities could no longer disregard his scorching — not preaching, they sent a committee of priests and Levites out to investigate. In unpretentious humility, the Baptist denied (1) that he was the Messiah; (2) that Malachi 4:5 literally referred to him, for many of the Jews believed that Elijah would physically return from the grave before the coming of the Messiah; and (3) he denied that he was "the Prophet" whom Moses mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:15-18. And so he quotes from Isaiah 40:3-5 to describe himself simply as one preparing the way for the Lord.

This delegation of Jews was particularly concerned about John's authority for introducing the new rite in which those adult Jews who heard and believed his message were totally immersed in water. The Baptist's answer is that Jesus is his authority. And there is not the slightest hint that Jesus would not also require repentance and immersion of adult believers (Matt. 28:19-20). Nor was this the last committee to end its work in total frustration!

## **The Second Day**

*(John 1:29-34)*

<sup>29</sup>The next day John saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "There

is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup>This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man is coming after me, but he is greater than I am, because he existed before I was born.'

<sup>31</sup>I did not know who he would be, but I came baptizing with water in order to make him known to the people of Israel."

<sup>32</sup>And John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and stay on him. <sup>33</sup>I still did not know that he was the one, but God, who sent me to baptize with water, had said to me, 'You will see the Spirit come down and stay on a man; he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>34</sup>I have seen it," said John, "and I tell you that he is the Son of God."

John the Baptist was probably thinking of Jesus as a symbolic Passover Lamb (Exodus 12 and 13; I Cor. 5:7; I Peter 1:19), a similar symbolism having been used in Isaiah 53. But unlike the hundreds of thousands of lambs sacrificed by the Jews over the years, this Lamb: (1) was provided by God himself, not by man; (2) could actually, rather than symbolically, take care of men's sins; and (3) made salvation available to all people, not just the Jews.

The baptism which John practiced was for the remission or forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). Those who were immersed by him looked forward to the cross of Calvary, while we today look backward to that day nearly 2,000 years ago when Jesus purchased our salvation.

Obviously, however, John the Baptist did not immerse Jesus for the remission of his sins. Instead, the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17) served to reveal his true identity to John and was a symbolic, public anointing of Jesus as the Messiah. Prior to that event, John had been unaware that his own cousin, Jesus, was the long-awaited Messiah (1:31).

### **The Third Day**

*(John 1:35-39)*

<sup>35</sup>The next day John was standing there again with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup>when he saw Jesus walking by. "There is the Lamb of God!" he said.

<sup>37</sup>The two disciples heard him say this and went with Jesus.

<sup>38</sup>Jesus turned, saw them following him, and asked, "What are you looking for?"

They answered, "Where do you live, Rabbi?" (This word means "Teacher.")

<sup>39</sup>"Come and see," he answered. (It was then about four o'clock in the afternoon.) So they went with him and saw where he lived, and spent the rest of that day with him.

John the Baptist preached a short sermon to his "two-member congregation" and both were converted (one was Andrew and the other was probably the apostle John himself). It was a small beginning, but these two men in turn led many others to Jesus.

Note that at the sound of Jesus' voice, these two men quickly responded. Unnecessary delay is always dangerous. It is significant that when the Jews heard the gospel on the Day of Pentecost, "Many of them believed his message and were baptized, and about three thousand people were added to the group that day" (Acts 2:41). And when the Philippian jailer became convinced of his need for Jesus, he wasted no time. "At that very hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; and he and all his family were baptized at once" (Acts 16:33).

There is another important lesson in this passage: every soul is important. Many years ago James A. Harding preached a revival for a small congregation in Clark County, Kentucky. He only immersed one boy, little Jimmie Shepherd. That boy, however, grew up to be known as James W. Shepherd. He served the cause of Christ as a preacher, as a missionary to Australia, and as the author and/or compiler of three books about Jesus! As someone has said, "Man can tell how many seeds are in an apple, but only God can tell how many apples are in a seed."

### **The Fourth Day**

*(John 1:40-42)*

<sup>40</sup>One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. <sup>41</sup>At once he found his brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah." (This word means "Christ.") <sup>42</sup>Then he took Simon to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "Your name is Simon son of John, but you will be called Cephas." (This is the same as Peter and means "a rock.")

Jerry Clower is a highly successful comedian. But he is also known for his deep faith in Jesus. He once told a reporter, "I don't cram Jesus down anybody's throat, but it just sets me on fire when one of those prissed up, highfalutin folks say, 'Mr. Clower, what makes you behave as you do?' Man, I couldn't keep from telling them what Jesus has done for me if my life depended on it!"

And that's exactly how Andrew, who later became an apostle, felt about it (6:8-9; 12:22). Although he was overshadowed by

other men, there is no indication that he resented their success. As William Barclay says, "It was Andrew's great joy to bring others to Jesus. He stands out as the man whose one desire was to share the glory. He is the man with the missionary heart" (*The Gospel of John*, I, 73). And you and I may do what Andrew did, single out one person and bring him to Jesus.

### The Fifth Day

(John 1:43-51)

<sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Come with me!" (<sup>44</sup>Philip was from Bethsaida, the town where Andrew and Peter lived.) <sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the book of the Law and whom the prophets also wrote about. He is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth."

<sup>46</sup>"Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," answered Philip.

<sup>47</sup>When Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, he said about him, "Here is a real Israelite; there is nothing false in him!"

<sup>48</sup>Nathanael asked him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you when you were under the fig tree before Philip called you."

<sup>49</sup>"Teacher," answered Nathanael, "you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

<sup>50</sup>Jesus said, "Do you believe just because I told you I saw you when you were under the fig tree? You will see much greater things than this!" <sup>51</sup>And he said to them, "I am telling you the truth: You will see heaven open and God's angels going up and coming down on the Son of Man."

Galilee boasted such a large non-Jewish population in Old Testament days that Isaiah spoke of it as being "where the foreigners live" (Isaiah 9:1). It was this interaction of different races which produced the easily distinguished Galilean accent (Matt. 26:69-73). During the Roman occupation, first Herod the Great and then Herod the tetrarch ruled this area. It was 60 miles long (north to south) and 30 miles wide (east to west), and was the wealthiest and most beautiful province in Palestine. Such Old Testament personalities as Deborah, Barak, Jonah, and Elisha called it "home".

And much of Jesus' own private life and public ministry took place in Galilee. John tends to place the emphasis upon Jesus' ministry in Judea, perhaps because Matthew, Mark, and Luke covered the events of the Galilean ministry in such depth.

In 1:43 Jesus starts north to Galilee and stops at Bethsaida for the express purpose of finding Philip and asking him to become his disciple. There was no hesitancy on the part of Philip. His response to Jesus' request was fast, favorable, and final.

Nor did Philip drag his heels when it came to sharing the news that the Messiah had actually arrived. Jack Exum wrote, "The prime difference between a salesman and a clerk is simple. The customer finds the clerk, while the salesman finds the customer. The Lord has many clerks but few salesmen" (*The Glory of the Ordinary*, p. 75). Philip was a salesman for the Lord!

And Philip's first customer, Nathanael, was a tough one. By his question about Nazareth (1:46), Nathanael was probably questioning Philip's interpretation and application of the Old Testament prophecies, rather than expressing some kind of community rivalry. This understanding is in keeping with his character, for Jesus even praised him for being a person of transparent, if sometimes blunt, honesty (1:47).

The Jews often rested in the dense shade of the groves of large fig trees to escape the boiling sunshine. And the fact that Jesus knew he was there (and knew things about him which John does not stop to record) caused Nathanael to proclaim that Jesus is "the Son of God" (1:49). Frank Pack says that Nathanael "may not have understood fully the significance of these terms, but he implied that he was a believer in Jesus's divinity and that Jesus was surely more than an ordinary man. Throughout this chapter in the calling of the first disciples, the writer impresses upon the reader the attractive power of Jesus which was a key to that popular favor which characterized his early ministry" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 48).

In 1:51 Jesus uses the imagery found in Jacob's dream of a ladder reaching into heaven in order to describe how God was revealing himself through the life and works of Jesus.

### **The Sixth Day**

Since this was simply a day spent in uneventful travel on toward their destination (2:1), no record of this day's activities was made by John.

### **The Seventh Day**

(John 2:1-12)

<sup>1</sup>Two days later there was a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, <sup>2</sup>and Jesus and his disciples had

also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup>When the wine had given out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They are out of wine."

<sup>4</sup>"You must not tell me what to do," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

<sup>5</sup>Jesus' mother then told the servants, "Do what ever he tells you."

<sup>6</sup>The Jews have rules about ritual washing, and for this purpose six stone water jars were there, each one large enough to hold between twenty and thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to the servants, "Fill these jars with water." They filled them to the brim, <sup>8</sup>and then he told them, "Now draw some water out and take it to the man in charge of the feast." They took him the water, <sup>9</sup>which now has turned into wine, and he tasted it. He did not know where this wine had come from (but, of course, the servants who had drawn out the water knew); so he called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup>and said to him, "Everyone else serves the best wine first, and after the guests have drunk a lot, he serves the ordinary wine. But you have kept the best wine until now!"

<sup>11</sup>Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

<sup>12</sup>After this, Jesus and his mother, brothers, and disciples went to Capernaum and stayed there a few days.

This was the third day since Jesus had originally announced plans to go to Galilee (1:43), and was the last day of an exciting week. It had taken Jesus nearly three whole days to travel about sixty-five miles, but he arrived in plenty of time to meet his mother at the wedding ceremony which probably started at dusk (the fact that Joseph is not mentioned is taken as evidence that he probably had died some years before).

The village of Cana was located about nine miles north of Nazareth. It was here in this obscure place that Jesus performed the first of seven miracles recorded in John's gospel. And we should note that it was done in the context of a joyous occasion. John the Baptist was something of a loner; but Jesus enjoyed being with people. His presence at this wedding celebration not only indicates his approval of the marital relationship but also refutes the notion that gloom is a sign of godliness. As Charles Spurgeon once said, "An individual who has no geniality about him had better be an undertaker, and bury the dead, for he will never succeed in influencing the living."

In 2:3 Mary, who was probably aware of her son's power by now, may have felt that this large gathering was a perfect time for him to reveal his identity as the Messiah. So in an effort to also

keep the hosts from embarrassment at the lack of refreshments, she asks Jesus to take appropriate action.

But in 2:4 Jesus firmly reminds Mary that he is not under her authority, and that her timing is not right. This incident certainly refutes the Catholic claim that Mary was without error and, therefore, is worthy of worship. It is foolish for anyone today to pray to Mary in order for her to "command her Son" to fulfill our wishes, for Jesus here flatly refuses to work a miracle at the snap of her fingers.

Jesus' words in 2:4 must have enlightened Mary without offending her, for she told the servants to do whatever he might command. Such words came from one who trusted Jesus completely, even though she did not understand. And with each of us there are those times when the best advice that can be given is simply, "Do whatever Jesus tells you."

John explains to any Greek readers that conscientious Jews always washed their hands and cooking utensils both before and after eating, so as to be ceremonially clean (Matt. 15:1-11; Mark 7:1-9).

Paul Butler says of verse 10, "It was, and is, a common practice to pass off an inferior wine when men's taste becomes blunted by even a small amount of drinking. It is obvious that the ruler was not drunk. He recognized the difference in the juice instantly. It is only the perverse mind that could imagine Jesus condoning drunken revelry, let alone using his power to furnish men something destructive to their physical and spiritual well-being" (*The Gospel of John*, I, 69-70).

The Greek word for wine (*oinos*) may mean either fermented or unfermented. It is unwise, however, for any Christian today to drink alcoholic beverages. I know of one outstanding Christian leader who, upon the advice of his doctor, began taking a "nightcap" to relax him each evening. Less than three years later his career was ruined, and one person was killed, when he was so "relaxed" that he rammed another car from behind and was convicted of drunken driving and manslaughter. But even if one could drink and not get drunk, his example may cause a weaker person to sin (Romans 14:13-23).

While useful and productive in themselves, the miracles were "signs" (John's favorite term) which were intended to point beyond themselves to the authority of Jesus. As Burton Coffman notes, "Compared with the first great miracle wrought by Moses, in which water was changed into blood, this sign resembles that

one . . . ; but it also contrasts dramatically. Moses' sign impoverished; this one enriched. This was a source of joy, that one a source of revulsion and disgust. That changed water into something worse; this changed water into something better. The superiority of Christ over Moses, so starkly visible here, was to appear in all the miracles that followed. Moses' miracle was a curse, this a blessing" (*Commentary on John*, p. 67).

In 2:12 John adds a brief postscript to the previous week's activity. The focal point of Jesus' ministry now shifts to Capernaum, the new base of his operations from now until the end of his public ministry in Galilee (7:9-10).

Capernaum was located on the northwestern edge of Lake Galilee, probably where Tell Hum is today. In the time of Jesus it was large enough to be called a "city" (Matt. 9:1). It was one of the places where the Romans maintained a tax-gathering station (Matt. 9:9). And it had a synagogue which had been built by a pious Roman centurion (Matt. 8:8). But because most of the citizens here coldly rejected Jesus, he warned that the city would be destroyed (Matt. 11:23). And it was!

The New Testament offers ample evidence that Mary had other children after the birth of Jesus (2:12; 7:3; Matt. 12:46-50; 13:55-56; Mark 3:31; 6:3; Luke 8:19; Acts 1:14; I Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:9). Since Jesus had at least two sisters and four brothers, the Roman Catholic doctrine of Mary's "perpetual virginity" is false. John does not mention Mary again until the crucifixion.

### Thought Stimulators on John 1:19-2:12

1. How did John the Baptist describe his own role?
2. How did John the Baptist compare himself with Jesus?
3. Where did John the Baptist immerse people?
4. In what sense is Jesus "the Lamb of God"?
5. What event convinced John the Baptist that Jesus was the Son of God?
6. What was the purpose of the baptism that John performed upon the Jews who believed his message?
7. Why did John the Baptist immerse Jesus?
8. Why is it dangerous to delay obeying Jesus?
9. Who was Andrew?
10. Whom did Andrew bring to Jesus?
11. What was the name which Jesus gave to Simon Peter?
12. Whom did Philip bring to Jesus?
13. Where did Jesus perform his first miracle?

14. Why is it best for Christians not to drink alcoholic beverages?
15. Sometimes one hears a Christian say, "I'm going to convert somebody someday!" It can't be done. God is the one who converts, *through* us. "Somebody" is not listed in any phone book or directory. And "someday" is not on the calendar. Complete these lines: "I want God to convert \_\_\_\_\_ through me by \_\_\_\_\_."
- (person's name) (date)

## Lesson Three

*(John 2:13-2:36)*

This section begins as Jesus leaves Peter's house in Capernaum and briefly returns to Jerusalem. He is deeply disturbed by what he finds taking place there.

### **Jesus Goes to the Temple**

*(John 2:13-25)*

<sup>13</sup>It was almost time for the Passover Festival, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>There in the Temple he found men selling cattle, sheep, and pigeons, and also the moneychangers sitting at their tables. <sup>15</sup>So he made a whip from cords and drove all the animals out of the Temple, both the sheep and the cattle; he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and scattered their coins; <sup>16</sup>and he ordered the men who sold the pigeons, "Take them out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that the scripture says, "My devotion to your house, O God, burns in me like a fire."

<sup>18</sup>The Jewish authorities came back at him with a question, "What miracle can you perform to show us that you have the right to do this?"

<sup>19</sup>Jesus answered, "Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again."

<sup>20</sup>"Are you going to build it again in three days?" they asked him. "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple!"

<sup>21</sup>But the temple Jesus was speaking about was his body. <sup>22</sup>So when he was raised from death, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and what Jesus had said.

<sup>23</sup>While Jesus was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in him as they saw the miracles he performed. <sup>24</sup>But Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew them all.

<sup>25</sup>There was no need for anyone to tell him about them, because he himself knew what was in their hearts.

The Passover Feast was the most important of the three great feasts which every able-bodied male Jew who lived within twenty miles of Jerusalem was expected to attend. Held in our month of April, its purpose was to remind the Israelites of how God spared their first-born sons in Egypt and freed them from slavery (Exodus 12 and 13).

The Law of Moses required animal sacrifices during each of the seven days of the Feast (Numbers 28:16-25). Rather than bringing animals long distances, visitors to Jerusalem usually bought animals from the local dealers who had set up shop in the large Court of the Gentiles just inside the Temple grounds. This degenerated into a racket, however, as dishonest priests refused to approve any animal which had not been bought from these dealers at highly inflated prices.

In addition, the moneychangers charged the visitors extremely high "service charges" for converting their foreign money into the Jewish money which each male worshiper had to have in order to pay his annual Temple tax (Exodus 30:11-16; Matt. 17:24-27).

Here, then, were merchants and priests working together in order to rob people who came to worship God. The stench and noise of the animals, along with the shouting of the merchants, filled the only area in which a devout Gentile could draw near to God!

So Jesus reacted to this sad scene by an outburst of righteous anger. He was deeply upset by their irreverence toward the Temple and their calloused mistreatment of those who really

wanted to worship. He uses a whip to scatter the animals, then he overturns the tables stacked high with coins. But there is no evidence that he uses the whip on people, for he was not an advocate of physical aggression (John 18:36; Matt. 26:51-56). The merchants could easily round up their animals (he does not free the doves, as they would have escaped) and the money changers could retrieve their coins from the dust. Jesus makes his point without injuring a single person and without destroying any personal property.

In 2:18 the Jews do not actually question the correctness of what Jesus did. What they want to know is upon whose authority he is acting, so they demand a miracle from him. Jesus later performs several miracles which caused many people, including Nicodemus, to believe in him (2:23). But for now he answers them by saying that if they destroy the temple of his body he will rise from the dead in three days (2:19).

Neither the Jewish authorities nor even his own disciples understood at this time exactly what Jesus meant. The Jews make reference to the fact that Herod the Great began reconstructing the Temple complex in about 20 B.C. and that the job was still continuing at this time. Little do they know that by rejecting the promised Messiah they will seal the doom of the Temple (Matt. 27:25,51). The Romans demolished the Temple in 70 A.D., just six years after the final phase of reconstruction was completed.

This episode stands as a vivid warning to those today who are so willing to use church buildings for their money-making gimmicks, including bingo games and lotteries. And let those congregations who think they must raise money by sponsoring teas and chicken dinners wake up to the fact that they are as weak as the tea and as dead as the chicken! We must be careful not to build any barriers between the Lord and his people.

### **Jesus and Nicodemus**

*(John 3:1-21)*

<sup>1</sup>There was a Jewish leader named Nicodemus, who belonged to the party of the Pharisees. <sup>2</sup>One night he went to Jesus and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher sent by God. No one could perform the miracles you are doing unless God were with him."

<sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, "I am telling you the truth: no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again."

<sup>4</sup>"How can a grown man be born again?" Nicodemus asked.

"He certainly cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time!"

<sup>5</sup>"I am telling you the truth," replied Jesus, "that no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>A person is born physically of human parents, but he is born spiritually of the Spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not be surprised because I tell you that you must all be born again. <sup>8</sup>The wind blows wherever it wishes; you hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

<sup>9</sup>"How can this be?" asked Nicodemus.

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered, "You are a great teacher in Israel, and you don't know this? <sup>11</sup>I am telling you the truth: we speak of what we know and report what we have seen, yet none of you is willing to accept our message. <sup>12</sup>You do not believe me when I tell you about the things of this world; how will you ever believe me when I tell you about the things of heaven? <sup>13</sup>And no one has ever gone up to heaven except the Son of Man, who came down from heaven."

<sup>14</sup>As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. <sup>16</sup>For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its savior.

<sup>18</sup>Whoever believes in the Son is not judged; but whoever does not believe has already been judged, because he has not believed in God's only Son. <sup>19</sup>This is how the judgment works: the light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil. <sup>20</sup>Anyone who does evil things hates the light and will not come to the light, because he does not want his evil deeds to be shown up. <sup>21</sup>But whoever does what is true comes to the light in order that the light may show that what he did was in obedience to God.

Because the Greek text does not use quotation marks, translators have had trouble deciding where the words of Jesus end and those of the apostle John begin in this section. The TEV ends Jesus' words at verse 13, the RSV at 15, and the NASB at 21.

Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish sect which believed in angels and in the resurrection from the dead. He was also a member of the powerful Jewish Sanhedrin, where he later urges fairness in dealing with Jesus (7:50). And still later we see him help remove Jesus' body from the cross (19:39). He appears, therefore, to have been an honest person searching for greater

spiritual insight. And the miracles he saw caused him to believe that Jesus is "a teacher sent from God" (3:2).

Nicodemus probably expected Jesus to expound upon the Law of Moses or to emphasize the Jewish traditions as ways of achieving salvation. Instead, Jesus lays down the principle that "no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (3:5). The birth of which Jesus speaks is not a physical one, nor is it one that man can accomplish by himself — not even by the power of positive thinking! It must come from God.

What is "the Kingdom of God"? In *The Gospel of John* (I, 101), Paul Butler quotes the following words of Seth Wilson:

It is not easy to give a definite and brief answer which would be satisfactory to all students or true to all the Scriptural uses of the phrase. *Its essential idea is the reign or government of God over the lives of men.* Sometimes it comprehends the characteristics and advantages of the complete submission of an individual life to the rule of God. Sometimes it refers to the whole community of men who obey God on earth. Sometimes it has reference to heaven itself as a place where God reigns in perfect peace, wisdom, and glory. But regardless of all other circumstances, it is essentially the rule of God in the hearts of men.

What does being "born of water" mean? It has only been since the beginning of the Reformation period that men have tried to rewrite baptism out of what Jesus says here. Men like John Calvin over-reacted to the distortion of baptism by the Roman Catholics. Neither Jesus nor anyone else in the New Testament ever taught the concept of baptismal regeneration, i.e., that the physical act itself saves people.

That being "born of water" means being immersed in water is clear by three things. First, there is the example of Jesus himself as he was immersed and received the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:13-17). Second, there is Jesus' command to immerse those who believe in him (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). And, third, there is the example of the apostles who told believers to repent and be immersed "in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

What "mode" of baptism is the proper one? There would be no confusion on this matter if the translators would be daring enough to list "immerse" as the literal translation of the Greek

word *baptizo*. But to avoid controversy with established church traditions, most merely transliterate *baptizo* into the English as "baptize". The Greeks had a word for "sprinkle" (*rhantizo*) and a word for "pour" (*ballo*), but in all the scriptures given above (and in all the cases of conversion in Acts) the word used is *baptizo*. That evidence should haunt anyone who has not been immersed into Jesus. To any of our readers who have not done so, we repeat the words which Ananias spoke to Paul: "And now, why wait any longer? Get up and be baptized and have your sins washed away by praying to him" (Acts 22:16).

What does being born "of the Spirit" mean? Jesus tries to further clarify his principle by saying, "The wind blows wherever it wishes; you hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (3:8).

The Greek word *pneuma* (here translated as "wind") is actually translated as "spirit" in 384 out of 386 times that it is found in the New Testament. That may also be a better translation here. But in any case, the point Jesus is making is that the Holy Spirit gives spiritual life. The Holy Spirit was the one who guided the apostles as they preached on the Day of Pentecost in 30 A.D. (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit helped them to write the New Testament, just as he once inspired godly men to write the Old Testament.

Since we know that saving "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ" (Romans 10:17), we can see that the Holy Spirit is the one who leads us to God through the message which the scriptures give to us about Jesus. Thus, the apostle Peter tells the Christians of his day: "Now by your obedience to the truth you have purified yourselves and have come to have a sincere love for your fellow believers, love one another earnestly with all your heart. For through the living and eternal word of God you have been born again as the children of a parent who is immortal, not mortal" (1 Peter 1:22-23).

Who has been "born again"? The New Testament teaches that a person is not a Christian until he has (1) believed what the scriptures say about Jesus, (2) repented of his own sins, and (3) has been immersed into Jesus. Only then may we lay hold of the twin promises of forgiveness of sins and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

In 3:14 reference is made to Numbers 21:4-9, where the

Israelites were punished for their endless complaining against God's provisions for them in the wilderness. So God sent poisonous snakes among them and many died. Under God's directions, "Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who had been bitten would look at the bronze snake and be healed" (Numbers 21:9). The point here is that Jesus is now man's only hope of salvation and that God, once again, has provided the way of salvation because he loves us (3:16-17).

In 3:16 the Greek phrase *monogenes huios* is properly translated as "only Son" in the TEV. *Monogenes* appears nine times in the New Testament and means "the only one of its kind, unique." So the emphasis here is upon the fact that there never was before and never will be again anyone like Jesus Christ. We are made sons of God by adoption; Jesus was the Son by nature. We become sons by being born into God's spiritual family; but Jesus has always been with God and is, in fact, God (John 1:1).

3:17 tells us that the primary purpose for Christ living upon the earth was to save people, not to condemn them. But each of us brings judgment upon himself when we reject Jesus as our Lord. When Jesus returns a second time, it will be for two purposes: to gather the saved; and to punish the lost, who will be punished forever (Matt. 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Concerning 3:18, Frank Pack says, "A sharp distinction is drawn here between those who truly believe and those who do not believe, those who have passed out of condemnation. Eternal life is now as well as future; judgment is now as well as future" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 64). Those who reject Jesus deliberately and intentionally choose to do evil rather than good (3:19-20), so "they will perish because they did not welcome and love the truth so as to be saved" (2 Thess. 2:20).

A dishonest man must live in fear of having his real self revealed, perhaps by an income tax audit or a traced fingerprint, not to mention the judgment of God. But the servant of Jesus is happy and fearless (3:20).

### **Jesus and John the Baptist**

(John 3:22-36)

"Actually, Jesus himself did not baptize anyone, only his disciples did" (4:2). These baptisms apparently were done for the same reasons as those performed by John the Baptist, namely to get people to repent of their sins in preparation for the coming of the kingdom. John's baptism was only for the Jews and there was

no bestowal of the Holy Spirit. (That is why it was not valid after Pentecost in 30 A.D. See Acts 18:24-26; 19:1-7.) The promise of remission of sins was in anticipation of Christ's death, while Christian baptism involves remission of sins because of Christ's death hundreds of years ago. Christian baptism also involves immediate forgiveness of sins and receipt of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

3:23 is another of the many scriptures which indicate that baptism in New Testament days was only by immersion. Not much water is needed for sprinkling or pouring, but the Baptist went to Aenon "because there was plenty of water in that place." Even the founder of the Presbyterian Church, John Calvin, admitted: "From these words, we may infer that John and Christ administered baptism by plunging the whole body beneath the water." We cannot go wrong by doing exactly what Jesus did!

In 3:25-26 some of John the Baptist's overly zealous disciples become defensive and bitterly sectarian when they encounter a Jew who had been immersed by the followers of Jesus. In their unbridled loyalty to the Baptist, they could not understand how those other fellows could cut in on John's territory. So they ask him to set the record straight.

And he does (3:27-30). The Baptist compares his work to that of a best man in a wedding ceremony. The best man is to make sure that everything is ready for the bridegroom. And when the wedding ceremony has been successfully completed, the best man may rejoice in a job well done. The Baptist's ministry was destined to be eclipsed by the marvelous ministry of the Son of God, just as the brightest star fades when dawn brings the morning sun.

Back when Henry Ward Beecher was the world-famous minister at Plymouth Church, he had to be out of town one Sunday. So his own brother agreed to preach in his absence. The sanctuary was packed with people that Sunday. But when it became obvious that Henry Ward Beecher would not preach, many in the audience got up and headed for the door. Suddenly the guest speaker arose and said, "All who came to worship Henry Ward Beecher this morning may leave at this time. The rest will stay to worship God." Praise the Lord that there are people who, like John the Baptist, point our attention in the right way!

It is toward Jesus, who is "greater than all," that our words and actions should point. Not everyone will accept him as their Savior

(3:32), but to those who do Jesus has the power to grant them eternal life (3:35-36). Those who are not born again are still dead in their sins, destined for hell (3:36).

### Thought Stimulators on John 2:13-3:36

1. Why did Jesus go to Jerusalem at this time?
2. What happens to the image of Jesus being "meek and mild" in the light of his cleansing the Temple?
3. Why was Jesus upset with the animal sellers and moneychangers?
4. Is "righteous anger" ever an appropriate response for Christians today? Why?
5. In what ways might our own actions keep people from God just as much as did the actions of the merchants and moneychangers?
6. Who was Nicodemus?
7. What is "the Kingdom of God"?
8. What does being "born of water" mean?
9. What "mode" of baptism does the New Testament teach?
10. What does being "born of the Spirit" mean?
11. Have you been "born again," as the scriptures teach?
12. Share with the class how you felt just before and just after you were immersed.
13. Memorize John 3:16, using the TEV text.
14. How many people did Jesus personally immerse?
15. Why did John the Baptist go to Aenon?
16. Put yourself in the shoes (or sandals!) of John the Baptist for a minute. As the most popular preacher in town, how would *you* have reacted to the news of Jesus' success? (circle one)  
(A) Resentment                      (C) Confusion  
(B) Amazement                      (D) Happiness

## Lesson Four

(John 4:1-42)

The following episode gives us a fascinating glimpse into the social customs which existed during New Testament times, and it provides a useful model for us in our attempts to witness to others about the grace of God. (For an extended discussion of this model, see the essay by Paul E. Little on "How to Witness" in *Tell It Like It Is*, a paperback edited by Fritze Ridenour and printed by Gospel Light Publications.)

<sup>1</sup>The Pharisees heard that Jesus was winning and baptizing more disciples than John. (<sup>2</sup>Actually, Jesus himself did not baptize anyone; only his disciples did.) <sup>3</sup>So when Jesus heard what was being said, he left Judea and went back to Galilee; <sup>4</sup>on his way there he had to go through Samaria.

<sup>5</sup>In Samaria he came to a town named Sychar, which was not far from the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup>Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by the trip, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

Why does Jesus leave Judea? John does not bother to make the reason clear. Perhaps he wishes to avoid a confrontation with the Pharisees at this moment in his ministry, or it could be that he does not want to detract from the work of John the Baptist. As with many other such questions in the Bible, we may speculate but we dare not legislate our opinion about the matter.

Orthodox Jews normally crossed over to the eastern side of the Jordan River and then travelled north, thus avoiding the province of Samaria (it was only about 20 miles wide and 30 miles long). For the Jews wanted nothing to do with the Samaritans, whom they regarded as heretical religious and racial half-breeds. This attitude was due to the fact that when most of the Jews were enslaved by the Assyrians in about 722 B.C., a small number of these people remained in this area and intermarried with people brought in from the surrounding idolatrous nations. So the captured Jews never forgave the Samaritans. And the Samaritans were equally angered by the refusal of the returning Jews to let them help rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem (see the books of Ezra and Nehemiah).

This split was further widened when the Samaritans built their own place of worship on Mt. Gerizim in about 409 B.C. And although it was destroyed by the Jewish leader John Hyrcanus in about 129 B.C., the Samaritans continued to revere that location. In fact, the "Samaritan Chamber of Commerce" went so far as to claim that it was here that Adam was formed from the dust of this mountain, that it was here that Noah's ark came to rest, and that this was the mountain on which Abraham tried to offer Isaac to God!

And to top it off, the Samaritans were guilty of rejecting all of the Old Testament scriptures except for the books of Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). So there were ample reasons for animosity between the Jews and Samaritans. Yet Jesus ignores that conflict and chooses to violate Jewish custom by going through the heart of Samaria.

As Jesus and his party march along they reach the edge of the town of Sychar. This town (known also as Schechem, Sichem, and Sychem) had been one of the most important towns in Palestine as early as 2,000 B.C. It was here that Abraham pitched his tent and made an altar during his first visit to Canaan. It was here that Jacob bought a field which later became the burial place for Joseph (Genesis 33:19; Joshua 24:32). It was here that Simeon and Levi killed all the male citizens in retaliation for the seduction

of their sister Dinah. It became one of the cities of refuge (Joshua 21:20-21), and was the spot in which Joshua gave his farewell message (Joshua 24:1-25). It was here that the citizens made Abimelech their king (Judges 9), only to have their city totally destroyed three years later. It was here, when the city was rebuilt, that Rehoboam was made king. It was here that the tragic division between the northern and southern tribes took place. It was this town which was the capital of the northern kingdom, but which was again destroyed and its people enslaved (2 Kings 17:5-6). No doubt Jesus and his companions were familiar with the town's long, if not glorious, history.

The well mentioned in 4:6 was located about one-half mile northwest of the town. It is about 7½ feet in diameter, and is known to have been at least 105 feet deep with about 15 feet of water. It is here that Jesus, hungry and tired, decides to rest. The stage is set, then, for a remarkable event.

<sup>7</sup>A Samaritan woman came to draw some water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink of water." (<sup>8</sup>His disciples are gone into town to buy food.)

<sup>9</sup>The woman answered, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan — so how can you ask me for a drink?" (Jews will not use the same cups and bowls that Samaritans use.)

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered, "If you only knew what God gives and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you life-giving water."

<sup>11</sup>"Sir," the woman said, "you don't have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where would you get that life-giving water? <sup>12</sup>It was our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well; he and his sons and his flocks all drank from it. You don't claim to be greater than Jacob, do you?"

<sup>13</sup>Jesus answered, "Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>but whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring which will provide him with life-giving water and give him eternal life."

<sup>15</sup>"Sir," the woman said, "give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw water."

In John 6, Jesus performs a miracle in order to feed several thousand people who had come out in the wilderness to hear him. But here his disciples must go to a nearby town to buy groceries. Perhaps this should tell us that we cannot expect God to do something for us which we are quite capable of doing

ourselves. In any event, the disciples are gone and Jesus strikes up a conversation with a Samaritan woman.

What's so unusual about that? Two things: she was a *Samaritan* and she was a *woman*. No Jewish male, and especially no Jewish teacher, would degrade himself by socializing with either! Some of the more fanatical Jews even thanked God each day that they had not been born a Gentile or a woman. But by his actions, Jesus accepts her as an individual, as a person worthy of courtesy and respect. And wherever Christianity has gone, the status of women has been lifted and social prejudices have been erased. But occasionally we need Paul's reminder that "there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

The woman was understandably surprised, therefore, when Jesus asks her to give him a drink of water (4:9). But that is nothing compared to how shocked she will be when she discovers who she is casually talking with (4:10). Wouldn't you be a little unsettled to find out that you had come face to face with the Son of God and had not even recognized him?

She hears his comment about giving her life-giving water, but she puts two and two together and decides that he must be joking. He didn't even have a bucket. And even if he did, he surely couldn't show her a better or more dependable water supply than this very well which had been in service hundreds of years.

Pointing toward the well, Jesus reminds her that its waters can only produce temporary satisfaction. A businessman who was flying on a commercial jet was asked by the stewardess if he would like to have a cocktail or some other drink. He smiled, then leaned over and whispered, "No, thanks. I've got something *better*." The stewardess grinned and asked, "What could that be?" And the businessman beamed, "Jesus!" The Samaritan woman, like that stewardess, is about to learn that there is something that will both satisfy her thirst and give eternal life. And she responds by admitting her desire for something better (4:15).

<sup>16</sup>"Go and call your husband," Jesus told her, "and come back."

<sup>17</sup>"I don't have a husband," she answered.

Jesus replied, "You are right when you say you don't have a husband. <sup>18</sup>You have been married to five men, and the man you

live with now is not really your husband. You have told me the truth."

<sup>19</sup>"I see you are a prophet, sir," the woman said. <sup>20</sup>"My Samaritan ancestors worshiped God on this mountain, but you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where we should worship God."

<sup>21</sup>Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the time will come when people will not worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup>You Samaritans do not really know whom you worship; but we Jews know whom we worship, because it is from the Jews that salvation comes. <sup>23</sup>But the time is coming and is already here, when by the power of God's Spirit people will worship the Father as he really is, offering him the true worship that he wants. <sup>24</sup>God is Spirit, and only by the power of his Spirit can people worship him as he really is."

<sup>25</sup>The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah will come, and when he comes, he will tell us everything."

<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, "I am he, I who am talking with you."

<sup>27</sup>At that moment Jesus' disciples returned, and they were greatly surprised to find him talking with a woman. But none of them said to her, "What do you want?" or asked him, "Why are you talking with her?"

<sup>28</sup>Then the woman left her water jar, went back to the town, and said to the people there, <sup>29</sup>"Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?" <sup>30</sup>So they left the town and went to Jesus.

Jesus deliberately shifts the conversation to an intensely practical and personal level as he forces her to examine her own heart. Whatever else this woman was, she was honest enough not to pretend to be something she was not (4:17). But she was a person with a fragmented family life, having been married five times previously. (We are not told, and so must not dogmatically assume, that the five marriages were terminated for sinful reasons. Perhaps each husband died. We just don't know.) But her current relationship was both unlawful and sinful.

She is flustered by the fact that Jesus has such detailed knowledge about her life and so, not wishing to linger on that subject, she draws Jesus into the hotly debated question of where people ought to worship (4:19-20). She expects Jesus to give the standard Jewish arguments in favor of Jerusalem.

However, Jesus astounds her with the announcement that — since God is spirit — very soon people would be able to worship him in any location. He touches some important principles of worship: (1) Worship should not be confined to a certain building

or location; (2) Worship is powerless without the Holy Spirit; (3) Worship must be directed toward what God wants, not toward what pleases us; (4) Worship involves preparation, knowledge, and understanding; (5) Worship results in harmony between the human spirit, the Holy Spirit, and God; and (6) the object of our worship is a spiritual being. From the writing of Genesis to the completion of the book of Revelation involved a period of hundreds of years. During this time God slowly revealed more and more of his nature to mankind. So it is that the Old Testament is filled with anthropomorphisms or figures of speech in which the writers speak of God's face, hands, arms, etc. But we are now able to understand that God is spirit.

We cannot say how much the woman understands of Jesus' words, but she rests on her belief that the Messiah will put it all in focus when he comes. Surprise! "I am he," Jesus says. And with those simple words he honors this peasant Samaritan woman by revealing his true identity. It has been said that the most valuable sermons often take place where one person is the preacher and one person is the congregation. Sometimes, as here, a simple, heart-to-heart talk is best.

The returning disciples don't really approve of the scene before them, but none of them is willing to reprimand Jesus for speaking to her. And while they stand there frowning, Jesus finishes his conversation. The woman, so happy and thrilled that she forgot why she had come to the well (4:28), goes back to town and tells them about Jesus. Her witness emptied the town (4:30)! Each Christian needs to be an enthusiastic witness like the Samaritan woman. The New Testament mentions about 40 people who were healed by Jesus, and of that number 34 were either brought to Jesus by friends or Jesus was brought to them. The same percentage probably holds true for spiritual healing, as well.

<sup>31</sup>In the meantime the disciples were begging Jesus, "Teacher, have something to eat!"

<sup>32</sup>But he answered, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

<sup>33</sup>So the disciples started asking among themselves, "Could somebody have brought him food?"

<sup>34</sup>"My food," Jesus said to them, "is to obey the will of the one who sent me and to finish the work he gave me to do. <sup>35</sup>You have a saying, 'Four more months and then the harvest.' But I tell you, take a good look at the fields; the crops are now ripe and ready to be harvested! <sup>36</sup>The man who reaps the harvest is being paid and gathers the crops for eternal life; so the man who plants and the

man who reaps will be glad together. <sup>37</sup>For the saying is true, 'One man plants, another man reaps.' <sup>38</sup>I have sent you to reap a harvest in a field where you did not work; others worked there, and you profit from their work."

The disciples show concern for Jesus' physical condition by urging him to eat with them, but he tries to teach them another spiritual lesson by explaining that his "food" is to obey God. And by his reference to the "fields" ready for harvest, it may be that Jesus simultaneously gestures toward the great numbers of people already coming toward him (4:30), most of whom wore light-colored clothing due to the high price of dyes.

<sup>39</sup>Many of the Samaritans in that town believed in Jesus because the woman had said, "He told me everything I have ever done."

<sup>40</sup>So when the Samaritans came to him, they begged him to stay with them, and Jesus stayed there two days.

<sup>41</sup>Many more believed because of his message, <sup>42</sup>and they told the woman, "We believe now, not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him, and we know that he really is the Savior of the world."

What happened at the town of Sychar illustrates what Jesus taught in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1-23). Although some did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, a great number did. And their belief was a result, initially, of the "seed" planted in their minds by this humble woman. Jesus said, "And the seeds sown in the good soil stand for those who hear the message and understand it: they bear fruit, some as much as one hundred, others sixty, and others thirty" (Matt. 13:23). That's what makes preaching and teaching so exciting!

### **Thought Stimulators on John 4:1-42**

1. Why did Jesus leave Judea?
2. Who were the Samaritans?
3. Name three events which took place in Sychar.
4. What does this story tell you about the physical needs of Jesus?
5. What social customs can you think of that keep people apart in today's world?
6. What is the "life-giving water" that Jesus offers?
7. Discuss the dangers of having a "church-building complex," i.e., the notion that worship can only be done there.
8. Define "worship" in your own words, *then* compare it with a dictionary definition.

9. Put two columns on a piece of paper (or the blackboard), with the headings of "Acts of Worship" and "Acts of Service." List as many things as you can under each, then discuss whether they overlap.
10. What does "Messiah" mean?
11. Illustrate from your own experience how "one man plants, another man reaps."
12. To whom are you indebted for helping you to be a strong Christian?
13. Share with the class how other people, particularly strangers, have tried to witness to you.
14. Just as Jesus used the opportunity to teach the Samaritan woman, be on the alert this week for an opportunity for you to tell someone about Jesus.

# Lesson Five

*(John 4:43-5:18)*

The following verses mark the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee, a period which was about 16 months long and included one trip to Jerusalem (John 5). The author of this gospel says little about this period, perhaps because Matthew, Mark, and Luke had already gone into such detail about it (Matt. 4:14; Mark 1-6; Luke 4-9).

## **Jesus Heals an Official's Son**

*(John 4:43-54)*

<sup>43</sup>After spending two days there, Jesus left and went to Galilee.

<sup>44</sup>For he himself had said, "A prophet is not respected in his own country." <sup>45</sup>When he arrived in Galilee, the people there welcomed him, because they had gone to the Passover Festival in Jerusalem and had seen everything that he had done during the festival.

<sup>46</sup>Then Jesus went back to Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. A government official was there whose son

was sick in Capernaum. <sup>47</sup>When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to go to Capernaum and heal his son, who was about to die. <sup>48</sup>Jesus said to him, "None of you will ever believe unless you see miracles and wonders."

<sup>49</sup>"Sir," replied the official, "come with me before my child dies."

<sup>50</sup>Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live!"

The man believed Jesus' words and went. <sup>51</sup>On his way home his servants met him with the news, "Your boy is going to live!"

<sup>52</sup>He asked them what time it was when his son got better, and they answered, "It was one o'clock yesterday afternoon when the fever left him." <sup>53</sup>Then the father remembered that it was at that very hour when Jesus had told him, "Your son will live." So he and all his family believed.

<sup>54</sup>This was the second miracle that Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Jesus returns to his home territory in order to avoid an untimely conflict with the Pharisees back in Judea (4:1-3). He knows the Galilean mentality well enough to believe that they would not get as heated as the authorities at Jerusalem, but he also realizes that they will not receive him as their Lord, either (4:44).

And sure enough, these "home folks" are not as interested in him as they are in his power (4:45). They welcome him, much like children might welcome a magician. They want to be entertained and dazzled, not taught. They want wonders, not principles. They want a miracle worker, not a Master.

So Jesus moves on to the scene of his first miracle (4:46), only to encounter the same sort of attitude. One of King Herod's officials approaches Jesus and asks him to make a 20-mile trip to Capernaum in order to heal the man's dying son. The Lord's statement in 4:48 is no doubt addressed both to the worried father and to the curious crowd. Perhaps shrugging his shoulders in a gesture of frustration, he says: "None of you will every believe unless you see miracles and wonders."

We must remember that Jesus performed miracles because he had compassion for the people and in order to confirm his authority. And John records this miracle for the express purpose of creating belief in Jesus as God's Son (20:30-31). Each miracle that Jesus performed was a "sign" (or symbol) which pointed beyond the immediate event to his authority over all things (Ephesians 1:21-23). And each miracle was a "wonder" which

caused amazement among the people. But these Galileans, even after witnessing several of his miracles (4:45), apparently are no closer to accepting Jesus as the Messiah than they were before.

In 4:49 the government official, a man who was used to asserting his own authority over others, humbles himself and begs for the help that he thought Jesus could provide. Perhaps this man had even heard that Jesus once said, "Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks will receive, and anyone who seeks will find, and the door will be opened to him who knocks" (Matt. 7:7-8).

In any event, the anxious father swallows his pride and asks Jesus to heal his son. And Jesus does not disappoint him. Just as a human father will not give his child a snake when he has asked for bread, neither will God. For Jesus said, "As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matt. 7:11).

Unlike Naaman, who expected Elisha to heal him with some dramatic ceremony (2 Kings 5:10-12), this man fully believes Jesus' simple statement, "Go; your son will live!" Here is an excellent example of how faith (i.e., deep trust) always results in obedient action. Jesus says for him to "go" and the man immediately heads home. It is a pattern which we are also expected to establish in our own lives:

Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to his word; instead, put it into practice. Whoever listens to the word but does not put it into practice is like a man who looks in a mirror and sees himself as he is. He takes a good look at himself and then goes away and at once forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks closely into the perfect law that sets people free, who keeps on paying attention to it and does not simply listen and then forget it, but puts it into practice — that person will be blessed by God in what he does (James 1:22-25).

And the father is certainly blessed for faithfully obeying Jesus. For even as the man is rushing toward home, his son's high fever suddenly and completely disappears. The boy's mother, unaware of the real cause for his unexpected recovery, happily orders the servants to take the marvellous news to her husband.

When the servants finally contact the father, he asks them what time it was that his son recovered and learns that it was the *same hour* that Jesus had pronounced him well. If this man had acted

like many people today, he would have said: "Say, fellows, that was quite a *conincidence*. Now that I think about it, my son probably would have gotten well anyway. After all, there is no scientifically observable evidence to connect his recovery with what Jesus said. Isn't it just amazing what the proper food and a little rest will do!"

But that is not the reaction of this man and his family. John says, "So he and all his family believed" (4:53). They believed that Jesus healed their child by the power of God. They believed that Jesus was whom he claimed to be, the Son of God.

Today's so-called "faith healers" look feeble and powerless compared to Jesus. The Lord had no secret formula (nor even a standard procedure) for healing people. And Jesus never had to hunt an excuse for failing to heal a sick person, but healers today often try to excuse their failures by saying that the sick person did not have enough faith.

Interestingly, the *only* place in the Gospels where Jesus requires faith for healing is in Matthew 9:28. Of the 30 other cases in the Gospels, there is no indication of faith in 9 or them. Faith was absolutely impossible in four of them (Luke 7:11-17; John 5:2-13; 11:1-46; Matt. 9:18-26). And the presence of faith was very unlikely in the others.

The miracles of Jesus and the apostles are in a class by themselves. No one today has the power to heal *every* person brought before them. In his book, *Psychology, Religion and Healing* (p. 488), Leslie D. Weatherhead speaks as both a psychiatrist and a minister when he warns:

Many healing works carried on today, even in the name of religion, are only spasmodic and sporadic illustrations of ill-regulated and half-understood psychological phenomena. Many Christian Science cures, healing-mission cures and claims from Lourdes and other centres; many "healings" wrought often by cranks and charlatans, illustrate the power of the mind over the body, rather than the kind of thing Christ did. . . . We know that by examining what lies behind the cures.

What lay behind the healing of this boy was the power of God. It is the second miracle which John chooses to emphasize in this gospel, not that others had not been done (2:23; 3:2; 4:45).

Paul Butler says, "Between the incidents in Cana of Galilee (chapter 4) and His return to Jerusalem for the unnamed feast of 5:1, Jesus carried on a considerable ministry in Galilee. He returned to His home town Nazareth, preached in the

synagogue, and was rejected (Lk. 4); He called the four fishermen the second time and healed many (Mt. 4; Mk. 1; Lk. 5); He made a Galilean tour among great crowds (Mt. 4; Mk. 1; Lk. 5); He healed a leper (Mt. 8); a paralytic (Mt. 9); called Matthew (Mt. 9); and ran into controversies about eating and fasting (Mt. 9; Mk. 2; Lk. 5)" (*The Gospel of John*, I, 171).

### **The Healing at the Pool**

(*John 5:1-18*)

<sup>1</sup>After this, Jesus went to Jerusalem for a religious festival. <sup>2</sup>Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool with five porches; in Hebrew it is called Bethzatha. <sup>3</sup>A large crowd of sick people were lying on the porches — the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. <sup>4</sup>A man was there who had been sick for thirty-eight years. <sup>5</sup>Jesus saw him lying there, and he knew that the man had been sick for such a long time; so he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

<sup>7</sup>The sick man answered, "Sir, I don't have anyone here to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am trying to get in, somebody else gets there first."

<sup>8</sup>Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your mat, and walk."

<sup>9</sup>Immediately the man got well; he picked up his mat and started walking.

The day this happened was a Sabbath, <sup>10</sup>so the Jewish authorities told the man who had been healed, "This is a Sabbath, and it is against our Law for you to carry your mat."

<sup>11</sup>He answered, "The man who made me well told me to pick up my mat and walk."

<sup>12</sup>They asked him, "Who is the man who told you to do this?"

<sup>13</sup>But the man who had been healed did not know who Jesus was, for there was a crowd in that place, and Jesus had slipped away.

<sup>14</sup>Afterward, Jesus found him in the Temple and said, "Listen, you are well now; so stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

<sup>15</sup>Then the man left and told the Jewish authorities that it was Jesus who had healed him. <sup>16</sup>So they began to persecute Jesus, because he had done this healing on a Sabbath. <sup>17</sup>Jesus answered them, "My Father is always working, and I too must work."

<sup>18</sup>This saying made the Jewish authorities all the more determined to kill him; not only had he broken the Sabbath Law, but he had said that God was his own Father and in this way had made himself equal with God.

The festival mentioned here was probably that of the Passover. This is a key verse in trying to establish the length of Jesus' earthly

ministry. If this reference is to a Passover then, since three others are also mentioned (2:13; 6:4; 13:1), his ministry must have spanned a period of about three and one-half years.

Please note that Jesus did not stay home from worship, as some people do today, merely because his parents made him go as a child or because there were too many hypocrites there. Instead, Jesus set the example for all those who claim to be his followers by humbly joining his imperfect brethren for worship at every opportunity.

The Greek word for "pool" (*kolumbethra*) means a body of water large enough to swim in. This may have been what today is called "The Virgin's Pool," a pool located south of where the Temple was located. It has been known to bubble over due to a natural spring nearby. Some ancient manuscripts call the pool "Bethzatha," "Bethsaida," or "Bethesda," and it just may be that all of them are correct. For the people of that day may have used all three terms to refer to this pool, just as people today often refer to New York City as "Gotham," "The Big Apple," or "Fun City."

The last half of 5:3 and all of 5:4 are not found in the best manuscripts and are, therefore, deleted from the TEV and many other recent translations. But among the sick people lying inside the colonaded areas (as partial shelter from the weather) is a man who has been sick for 38 long, miserable years (5:5). Jesus notices him and asks whether he really wants to get well, perhaps indicating that some people would live in sympathy than to be healed and have to face life like everyone else.

The man responds by complaining that he keeps trying to get down to the pool at the right time but others beat him to it. The passage leading to the Virgin's Pool is so narrow that those who were more mobile could easily force this man aside. So here is the case of a person who is about to be healed, yet his faith is still in the curative powers of the water, not in Jesus.

Jesus commands him to "Get up, pick up your mat, and walk" (5:8). And that is exactly what he does. There is no laying on of hands, no loud praying, no fainting and falling backwards. There is simply a command which, when obeyed, results in instantaneous healing. He didn't have to claim a healing and then wait six months for it to evolve!

The Jewish authorities, however, do not rejoice with their brother in his undeserved good fortune. Refusing to accept it as a miracle of God, they can only see his healing as a violation of their traditions. The original Sabbath prohibition was aimed at

restricting commercial transactions on Saturdays (Exodus 20:10; 23:12; 31:12-17), but the Jewish theologians had added numerous man-made rules to it. Jesus certainly recognized the validity of God's original Sabbath law, but he warned against substituting more rules for "the really important teachings of the Law, such as justice and mercy and honesty" (Matt. 23:23).

After the crowds disperse, Jesus searches for the man and finds him in the Temple. You see, Jesus was interested in this man's spiritual condition, as well as his physical health. Many sick people today make all sorts of promises to reform if they recover, but usually when they are healed they fall back in their old habits of life. Apparently Jesus sees a similar danger here that this man would resume his sinful living.

Jesus does not mention what sins this man is guilty of (5:14). But it is clear that sin is the source of this man's poor health, as it so often is today for those who engage in sexual immorality, smoking, gluttony, etc. It is not true that all suffering is the result of personal sin on the part of the sick person (9:3).

Was this man a coward for trying to get himself off the hook (5:15)? It is entirely possible that he believed that this man who healed him could just as easily take care of the Jewish authorities. He may have even thought his naming of Jesus was a courageous act of witnessing. But whatever his motives, this identification resulted in problems for Jesus (5:16).

The Sabbath (both the Hebrew word *sabbath* and the Greek word *sabbaton* mean cessation of activity) day was and is the *seventh* day of the week, Saturday. It was the day upon which God expected the Jews to gather together to worship him. But the observance of the Sabbath as a day of worship was voided on the day of Pentecost in 30 A.D. Since that day Christians have met for worship upon the *first* day of the week, Sunday or the Lord's Day. Nowhere in the Bible is Sunday called "the Christian Sabbath," nor are the various rules of the Jewish sabbath binding upon us.

It is strange that these prejudiced Jewish leaders understand the claims of Jesus better than many so-called Christian leaders. They properly interpreted his statement in 5:17 to mean that he is equal with God the Father. The Greek word *isos* means equal, and from it we get our phrase "isosceles triangle" which refers to a triangle with two equal sides. So it is that Christ is equal with God (1:1).

**Thought Stimulators on John 4:43-5:18**

1. How long did Jesus' Galilean ministry last?
2. Why is it that a "prophet" (or a preacher) is often unappreciated by the "home folks"?
3. Why did Jesus perform miracles?
4. Why did John record many miracles?
5. Do you ever find yourself failing to receive certain blessings from God because you simply fail to ask for them? Why?
6. Faith or deep trust in Jesus always results in what?
7. Think up and list some helpful steps to enable you to put into practice what the Bible teaches.
8. What is the end result of putting God's word into practice?
9. Compare Jesus' methods of healing with the methods of today's "faith healers".
10. Put yourself in the place of this sick boy's mother. How would you react — honestly, now — when your husband comes home and says that a fellow named Jesus healed him from a city 20 miles away.
11. How long was Jesus' entire ministry?
12. What are some of the "far out" excuses you have heard people give for not attending worship? What is their real problem?
13. Where was the sick man's faith centered when Jesus healed him?
14. How long did it take for the healings which Jesus pronounced to actually take place?
15. How is it that poor health is often (but not always) related to sin?
16. Is Jesus equal with God?

# Lesson Six

*(John 5:19-47)*

Bristling with hatred, the Jewish authorities accused Jesus of violating the Sabbath law and of claiming to be equal with God (5:1-18). So Jesus now tries to elaborate upon the relationship between the Father and the Son.

## **The Authority of the Son**

*(John 5:19-29)*

<sup>19</sup>So Jesus answered them, "I tell you the truth: the Son can do nothing on his own; he does only what he sees his Father doing. What the Father does, the Son also does. <sup>20</sup>For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. He will show him even greater things to do than this, and you will all be amazed. <sup>21</sup>Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, in the same way the Son gives life to those he wants to. <sup>22</sup>Nor does the Father himself judge anyone. He has given his Son the full right to judge, <sup>23</sup>so that all will honor the Son in the same way as they honor the

Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

<sup>24</sup>"I am telling you the truth; whoever hears my words and believes in him who sent me has eternal life. He will not be judged, but has already passed from death to life. <sup>25</sup>I am telling you the truth: the time is coming — the time has already come — when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear it will come to life. <sup>26</sup>Just as the Father is himself the source of life, in the same way he has made his Son to be the source of life. <sup>27</sup>And he has given the Son the right to judge, because he is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup>Do not be surprised at this; the time is coming when all the dead will hear his voice <sup>29</sup>and come out of their graves; those who have done good will rise and live, and those who have done evil will rise and be condemned.

Jesus points out that the Father and the Son always operate in harmony, with complete unity of purpose (5:19). Since the Father is always "on call," even on the Sabbath, it is proper for the Son to be active as well. And he says that because the Father loves the Son even greater events than the healing of a sick man will take place (5:20). This refers to the fact that in a little while God will raise many of his people (Matt. 27:52-53) and then Jesus himself from the grave.

Concerning 5:22, Frank Pack says: "God's divine judgment is exercised through the Son. The Father does not act apart from the Son in judging, and the Son makes the judgment that the Father wishes to have made. In effect, God judges all men through his Son. The New Testament teaches that God is judge of all men (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 3:6; 14:10; Heb. 12:23), but it also teaches that God judges through Christ (Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:8)" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 89).

Contrary to the opinion of some religious leaders today, Jesus was not just a courageous man and an outstanding teacher. He was the Son of God! And any refusal to love, honor, and worship him as such is a direct insult to God the Father (5:23). That is why the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, are going to be in a "heap o' trouble" at the judgment day, for they deny that Jesus was equal with God.

But the person who lovingly obeys Jesus has already begun to enjoy eternal life (5:24), although he must remain in his human body until either he dies or the Lord returns. And so long as he continues to live for Jesus he has the solid assurance that "there is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

In 5:25 Jesus uses the Greek noun *nekros*, a word which sometimes refers to an absence of life in the human body (James 2:26) but may also mean, as here, the deplorable spiritual state of unsaved people. Paul used the same idea when he wrote, "But God's mercy is so abundant, and his love for us is so great, that while we were spiritually dead in our disobedience he brought us to life with Christ. It is by God's grace that you have been saved" (Eph. 2:4-5).

In 5:27 the TEV uses the phrase "the right" to translate the Greek word *exousia*, which refers to the delegation of authority or power. This idea is also conveyed by Jesus when, after his resurrection, he says: "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). And because he endured the hardships and temptations of human existence, Jesus is uniquely qualified to judge us. We know that the time is coming when "all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11).

In 5:28-29 Jesus turns his attention to the subject of the physically dead and of the universal resurrection of both the saved and the unsaved. Paul often warns Christians of the possibility of apostacy (or falling from grace) and urges us to be ready when the Lord comes again (1 Thess. 4:25-28; 5:9-11). Those who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and have been true to him will be pronounced, "Not guilty!" While those who have rejected Jesus' offer of salvation will be judged, "Guilty!" and will be sentenced to an everlasting hell.

The word "evil" is from the Greek word *phaula*, meaning useless or unproductive. A person can get to hell without actually killing, robbing, and lying. He can get there just by doing nothing good at all. On the judgment day everyone will be there (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10) as each person is individually judged (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10) according to his own works (Rom. 2:6; Rev. 20:12-13).

### Witnesses to Jesus

(John 5:30-47)

<sup>30</sup>"I can do nothing on my own authority; I judge only as God tells me, so my judgment is right, because I am not trying to do what I want, but only what he who sent me wants.

<sup>31</sup>"If I testify on my own behalf, what I say is not to be accepted as real proof. <sup>32</sup>But there is someone else who testifies on my

behalf, and I know that what he says about me is true. <sup>33</sup>John is the one to whom you sent your messengers, and he spoke on behalf of the truth. <sup>34</sup>It is not that I must have a man's witness; I say this only in order that you may be saved. <sup>35</sup>John was like a lamp, burning and shining, and you were willing for a while to enjoy his light. <sup>36</sup>But I have a witness on my behalf which is even greater than the witness that John gave; what I do, that is, the deeds my Father gave me to do, these speak on my behalf and show that the Father has sent me. <sup>37</sup>And the Father, who sent me, also testifies on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his face, <sup>38</sup>and you do not keep his message in your hearts, for you do not believe in the one whom he sent. <sup>39</sup>You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And these very Scriptures speak about me! <sup>40</sup>Yet you are not willing to come to me in order to have life.

<sup>41</sup>"I am not looking for human praise. <sup>42</sup>But I know what kind of people you are, and I know that you have no love for God in your hearts. <sup>43</sup>I have come with my Father's authority, but you have not received me; when, however, someone comes with his own authority, you will receive him. <sup>44</sup>You like to receive praise from one another, but you do not try to win praise from the one who alone is God; how, then, can you believe me? <sup>45</sup>Do not think, however, that I am the one who will accuse you to my Father. Moses, in whom you have put your hope, is the very one who will accuse you. <sup>46</sup>If you had really believed Moses, you would have believed me, because he wrote about me. <sup>47</sup>But since you do not believe what he wrote, how can you believe what I say?"

In 5:31-39 Jesus declares that his rights (5:23-30) are substantiated by four witnesses: John the Baptist; God the Father; Jesus' own works; and the scriptures. This more than meets the requirement of the Law (Deut. 17:6; 19:5; Num. 35:30) that no testimony could be accepted without at least one other witness (5:31).

In 5:35 Jesus pays tribute to the magnificent ministry of John the Baptist. As needles are attracted to a magnet, the multitudes flocked to hear John the Baptist. He did not have as fine an education as the priests had, so his speech was void of theological jargon. But he knew how to "shuck the corn and show the cob." You might not like what he said, but it was hard to misunderstand him. So the common people related to him and his colorful, unique style of preaching. Like a lamp, John the Baptist burned brightly in order to guide the people out of spiritual darkness.

And overflow crowds followed him in the wilderness. Many of them had honest motives, but most were driven by curiosity rather than conviction. So when he began exposing their sin they left to find someone with less honesty and a lot more tact. Many years later, Paul warned Timothy (and everyone who teaches God's word) not to give in to the temptation to be popular rather than truthful:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and because he is coming to rule as King, I solemnly urge you to preach the message, to insist upon proclaiming it (whether the time is right or not), to convince, reproach, and encourage, as you teach with all patience. The time will come when people will not listen to sound doctrine, but will follow their own desires and will collect for themselves more and more teachers who will tell them what they are itching to hear. They will turn away from listening to the truth and give their attention to legends. But you must keep control of yourself in all circumstances; endure suffering, do the work of a preacher of the Good News, and perform your whole duty as a servant of God (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

But even greater than the disturbingly truthful witness of John the Baptist is the witness of the miracles which Jesus had done and would do (5:36). As Nicodemus was forced to admit, "No one could perform the miracles you are doing unless God were with him" (3:2).

And then there is the witness of God himself (5:37). Jesus delivers a series of stinging verbal blows to the arrogant Jewish authorities. He begins by saying that they do not really believe in God! One of his listeners might have objected, "That's silly. Why, we believe that God exists. What do you mean calling us atheists?" The point is, of course, that intellectual acceptance is not the kind of faith that will save anyone. They had the message of God wrapped up in their scrolls, but did not have it within their hearts. So Paul says of them, "I can assure you that they are deeply devoted to God; but their devotion is not based on true knowledge" (Rom. 10:2). Unlike the Jews, the Christians in Rome had "obeyed with all your heart the truths found in the teaching you received" (Rom. 6:17). The problem of the Jews was in the heart, not the head.

Jesus indicates that they were serious, but misdirected, students of God's word (5:39). The TEV uses "study" to translate the Greek word *ereunao*, meaning to trace or to track down, to

thoroughly examine. David Wesley Soper, in his book *Epistle to the Sceptics* (pp. 44-45), says: "It is obvious that the Bible cannot speak to men who do not take it seriously. It is equally obvious that to substitute the Bible for the God to whom it witnesses is to commit idolatry. Not the Bible, but God, sustains and creates the world. The Bible, designed as a channel of revelation, becomes the whole of revelation — and forward movement is ended. The channel becomes an obstacle. One should not worship a telescope, but look through it at the stars. One should not worship a microscope, but look through it at worlds in miniature. The purpose of the Bible is not to imprison but to release faith; it is not an end but a means."

Then Jesus charges them with having "no love for God in your hearts" (5:42). How does Jesus know that? By the fact that they would not receive him (5:43). Love for God always results in obedience to God's commands and love for God's people (1 John 2:5-6; 4:7). "Whoever does not love does not know God; for God is love" (1 John 4:8).

In 5:43 Jesus refers to the fact that during the first century (both before and after Jesus' ministry) dozens of would-be Deliverers proclaimed themselves as the longed-for Messiah. And thousands of Jews responded like blind sheep, in spite of ample warning (Mark 13:6, 21-22; Acts 5:36-37).

If they had only gone to the Bible in order to seek God's guidance, rather than searching for "proof-texts" with which to prop up their human traditions, they would have heard even the words of Moses pointing them to Jesus (5:45-47). Unfortunately, this fatal approach to the scriptures has spread throughout the ranks of those who claim to be Christians, resulting in sectarian attempts to bind "our" traditions on everyone else.

### **Thought Stimulators on John 5:19-47**

1. What "greater things" (5:20) will be done than the healing of the sick man?
2. Who will judge us and upon what basis?
3. In what ways are Jesus and God "equal"?
4. To whom do we look as our "authority"?
5. How can you tell that a person is spiritually dead?
6. What must a person do in order to be an "evil" person?
7. In what ways are God the Father and God the Son our "source of life" (5:26)?
8. How does Jesus describe John the Baptist?

9. What is the primary duty of anyone who teaches the word of God?
10. What does it mean to have the Bible in your head but not in your heart?
11. Discuss the statement that the Bible "is not an end but a means."
12. What two things always result when a person really loves God?
13. Can you think of examples in which someone has formed an opinion then gone to the Bible to find a statement to somehow back it up?
14. Ask a Christian friend to help you concentrate God's power upon an unsaved person all this week by both of you praying for him each day.

# Lesson Seven

*(John 6:1-24)*

There is actually a one-year span of time between 5:47 and 6:1. Up to this point John has dealt with the events which took place during the first year of Jesus' ministry. But he omits the details of the second year of Jesus' ministry, perhaps because the other gospel writers covered them sufficiently. It was during the second year of his ministry that Jesus encountered controversies about the Sabbath observance (Matt. 12), delivered the sermon on the mount (Matt. 5-7), raised a widow's dead son (Luke 7), sent the twelve out in pairs (Matt. 10), visited Nazareth a second time (Matt. 13), and was sought by Herod (Matt. 14). Here in 6:1, then, is beginning of the third and final year of Jesus' public ministry.

## **Jesus Feeds Five Thousand Men**

*(John 6:1-15)*

<sup>1</sup>After this, Jesus went across Lake Galilee (or, Lake Tiberias, as it is also called). <sup>2</sup>A large crowd followed him, because they had

seen his miracles of healing the sick. <sup>3</sup>Jesus went up a hill and sat down with his disciples. <sup>4</sup>The time for the Passover Festival was near. <sup>5</sup>Jesus looked around and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, so he asked Philip, "Where can we buy enough food to feed all these people?" (He said this to test Philip; actually he already knew what he would do.)

<sup>7</sup>Philip answered, "For everyone to have even a little, it would take more than two hundred silver coins to buy enough bread."

<sup>8</sup>Another one of his disciples, Andrew, who was Simon Peter's brother, said, <sup>9</sup>"There is a boy here who has five loaves of barley bread and two fish. But they will certainly not be enough for all these people."

<sup>10</sup>"Make the people sit down," Jesus told them. (There was a lot of grass there.) So all the people sat down; there were about five thousand men. <sup>11</sup>Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to God, and distributed it to the people who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, and they all had as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup>When they were all full, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces left over; let us not waste a bit." <sup>13</sup>So they gathered them all and filled twelve baskets with the pieces left over from the five barley loaves which the people had eaten.

<sup>14</sup>Seeing this miracle that Jesus had performed, the people there said, "Surely this is the Prophet who was to come into the world!" <sup>15</sup>Jesus knew that they were about to come and seize him in order to make him king by force; so he went off again to the hills by himself.

Lake Galilee (which is called "Chinnereth" in the Old Testament) is still a beautiful body of water today, surrounded by an almost tropical climate. The lake is about 13 miles long by seven miles wide, and fish are still abundant in its waters. The region was heavily populated during the time that Jesus walked its shores.

Jesus and the twelve apostles make their way up the side of one of the many sloping, grassy hills. Since the time for the Passover Festival "was near" (6:4), this episode probably took place in April of 29 A.D. Thousands of intensely curious people gathered there to see what miracle Jesus might perform (6:2).

Critics have tried to create a conflict between this account and that of Mark's, since Mark says that the crowd "went from all the towns and ran ahead by land and arrived at the place ahead of Jesus and his disciples" (Mark 6:33). However, as in most apparent contradictions in the Bible, this one can be resolved with a little common sense. R.C. Foster explains it by saying that Mark "explicitly affirms that the crowd outran the boat, and when

Jesus and the apostles disembarked they found the crowd. Such a multitude — men, women, children; young and old; sturdy, and sick or crippled — would be strung out for miles by such a race. The vigorous ones outran the boat; Jesus saw the situation and picked a natural amphitheatre on the mountain side. By the time the weak stragglers arrived and the multitudes fully assembled, Jesus was seated with His disciples prepared to teach and heal. The accounts are wonderfully *independent* and *harmonious*" (quoted by Paul Butler, in *The Gospel of John*, I, 227).

Just as a teacher has to examine his students so that he may evaluate their progress, Jesus examines Philip in order to help him and the others grow spiritually. Philip mistook an opportunity for a problem. He failed this test because he did not recognize that *God is the source of our supply* and his storehouse is never empty! That is what Paul meant when he wrote, "And with all his abundant wealth through Christ Jesus, my God will supply all your needs" (Philippians 4:19). Philip should have had the attitude displayed by the Army captain who told his soldiers, "Men, we're surrounded by the enemy. Don't let a one of them get away!" But he didn't.

Instead, Philip thinks the situation is hopeless (6:7). So it is Andrew, now labeled "Peter's brother" because of his own unassuming manner, who steps up and suggests a possible solution. He knows that Jesus has marvellous powers, so he ushers a boy into Jesus' presence. The boy has some barley bread (which was not nearly as popular as that made from wheat) and two pickled fish about the size of sardines. Little did the boy's mother know when she packed his lunch that it would wind up in the hands of the Son of God. Andrew has done all that he could, so he leaves the rest to Jesus. (Wouldn't we save ourselves a lot of misery if we would do the same?)

So Jesus begins by having the people be seated, so they can be more easily served and so everyone can see him. More than 5,000 men, not counting women and children (Matt. 14:21), were sprawled on the hillside below him.

And then Jesus does something which one seldom sees in a public place anymore. He bows his head and gives thanks to God for the food he is about to eat. Some Christians are afraid to pray at a McDonald's hamburger stand with twenty people around, but the person they claim to follow did it with well over 5,000 people looking right at him!

After praying, he passes the bread and the fish out and "they

all had as much as they wanted" (6:11). How did Jesus multiply the food? We don't know because the gospels don't say how it happened; they are primarily concerned, as we should be, with what happened and why. And the fact is that after everyone has eaten, they gather up twelve baskets of uneaten bread! No, they weren't bushel baskets, but they were the small bottle-shaped sachels in which a traveler normally carried a day's supply of goods.

This miracle later becomes the "text" which Jesus uses in order to teach the spiritual truth that he is the bread of life (6:22-59). But these people on the hillside aren't really interested in spiritual truths. They begin talking about how Jesus must be powerful enough to help them overthrow the Romans. They did not want to worship and obey him; they wanted to use him to achieve their political and social goals. This was the same temptation presented to Jesus by Satan himself (Matt. 4:8-9). So Jesus leaves them and finds a quiet place to pray (Matt. 14:23).

### **Jesus Walks on the Water**

*(John 6:16-21)*

<sup>16</sup>When evening came, Jesus' disciples went down to the lake,  
<sup>17</sup>got into a boat, and went back across the lake toward Capernaum. Night came on, and Jesus still had not come to them.  
<sup>18</sup>By then a strong wind was blowing and stirring up the water.  
<sup>19</sup>The disciples had rowed about three or four miles when they saw Jesus walking on the water, coming near the boat, and they were terrified. <sup>20</sup>"Don't be afraid," Jesus told them, "it is I!" <sup>21</sup>Then they willingly took him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached land at the place they were heading for.

The disciples waited as long as they could for Jesus to return from praying in the hills. But since it is getting late in the day, they get into a boat and head for Capernaum (6:17).

But before they can travel the seven miles across the lake, a violent wind storm changes the placid waters into a wild, churning sea. Such storms are still common, due to the temperature variations between the lake and the high surrounding mountains.

Assuming that they got into the boat at about 9:00 P.M., here it is already "between three and four o'clock in the morning" (Matt. 14:25). And their tiny boat is still "far out in the lake, tossed about by the waves" (Matt. 14:24). They have been rowing that boat, and probably praying pretty hard as they bailed water out, for

some nine hours. And they are barely half-way across the lake (6:19)!

They were quite unaware, of course, that Jesus had since finished praying and that from his vantage point he was watching their fight to stay afloat (Mark 6:47-48). He sees their problem and responds to it by walking right out across the billowing lake! But the disciples are terrified by the sight of a figure coming toward them through the thrashing waves. So Jesus reassures them by calling out, "Don't be afraid, it is I."

Matthew tells us that at this point Peter calls out, "Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you." And Jesus does so, but as Peter was walking toward Jesus he looks around at the leaping waves and instantly begins to sink. Jesus says to him, as he grabs hold of him, "What little faith you have! Why did you doubt?" (Matt. 14:31).

As Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat, the wind died down. And "the disciples in the boat worshipped Jesus. 'Truly you are the Son of God!' they exclaimed" (Matt. 14:33). And they all arrived safely at their destination (6:21).

### **The People Seek Jesus**

*(John 6:22-24)*

<sup>22</sup>Next day the crowd which had stayed on the other side of the lake realized that there had been only one boat there. They knew that Jesus had not gone in it with his disciples, but that they had left without him. <sup>23</sup>Other boats, which were from Tiberias, came to shore near the place where the crowd had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. <sup>24</sup>When the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they got into those boats and went to Capernaum, looking for him.

There is certainly something to be said for persistence. And this crowd was, if nothing else, determined to find Jesus — and they did (6:25). It may take time, energy, and trouble, but we cannot afford to ever stop searching for a better, more productive life.

F.W. Woolworth was worth \$20,000,000 when he died, and it was because he didn't panic and throw in the towel when three out of his first four stores failed. Oscar Hammerstein II wrote five shows, each of which failed on Broadway within six weeks of opening, but he didn't give up. He went on to write and produce "Oklahoma," which ran for 269 weeks and returned \$7,000,000 on his \$83,000 investment. And a writer named John Creasey received 743 rejection slips from publishers before he was able to

get one word in print. But he kept at it and became one of the world's most prolific mystery novelists, with his 560 published books having sold more than 60,000,000 copies.

Don't give up! As Paul says, "So let us not become tired of doing good; for if we do not give up, the time will come when we will reap the harvest. So then, as often as we have the chance, we should do good to everyone, and especially to those who belong to our family in the faith" (Gal. 6:9-10).

When Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, he also taught them to be persistent. He told them this story: "Suppose one of you should go to a friend's house at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, let me borrow three loaves of bread. A friend of mine who is on a trip has just come to my house, and I don't have any food for him!' And suppose your friend should answer from inside, 'Don't bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' Well, what then? I tell you that even if he will not get up and give you the bread because you are his friend, yet he will get up and give you everything you need because you are not ashamed to keep on asking. And so I say to you: Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Luke 11:5-9). Don't give up!

### **Thought Stimulators on John 6:1-24**

1. John 6:1 marks the beginning of what year in Jesus' ministry?
2. What are two other names for Lake Galilee?
3. Why did the crowds follow Jesus at this time?
4. How many people did Jesus actually feed?
5. What was wrong with the people making Jesus their king?
6. Explain the apparent contradiction between John 6:2 and Mark 6:33.
7. How can we develop the habit of seeing our problems as opportunities?
8. Who is the source of our supply?
9. Where have we met Andrew before?
10. Give a personal example of a time in your life when you did all that you could, but then refused to really leave the rest to God. What happened?
11. Discuss the place which prayer has (or doesn't have) in public today.
12. Do you have a "quiet place" (or time) when you pray alone?

13. How did Jesus know the disciples were in danger on the lake?
14. Think of a Christian who has "given up" and drifted away from Jesus. Take someone with you *this week* and go tell that person that you love him and that you want to help him.

# Lesson Eight

(John 6:25-59)

Frank Pack says, "The following discourse and dialogue occur in the synagogue (vs. 59), but it is not necessary to think that it was on a sabbath. There were other meetings of the people in synagogues on other days of the week for purposes of instruction. Remember also that this was at the time of the Passover, which involved several days of special celebration" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 130).

<sup>25</sup>When the people found Jesus on the other side of the lake, they said to him, "Teacher, when did you get here?"

<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, "I am telling you the truth: you are looking for me because you ate the bread and had all you wanted, not because you understood my miracles. <sup>27</sup>Do not work for food that spoils; instead, work for the food that lasts for eternal life. This is the food which the Son of Man will give you, because God, the Father, has put his mark of approval on him."

<sup>28</sup>So they asked him, "What can we do in order to do what God wants us to do?"

<sup>29</sup>Jesus answered, "What God wants you to do is to believe in the one he sent."

<sup>30</sup>They replied, "What miracle will you perform so that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? <sup>31</sup>Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, just as the scripture says, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' "

<sup>32</sup>"I am telling you the truth," Jesus said. "What Moses gave you was not the bread from heaven; it is my Father who gives you the real bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread that God gives is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

<sup>34</sup>"Sir," they asked him, "give us this bread always."

After the storm had passed and Jesus went ashore with the apostles, the crowd kept on looking for Jesus until they found him teaching "in the synagogue in Capernaum" (6:59). They are amazed at the presence of Jesus on "this side of the lake," and demand to know when he arrived (6:25).

But Jesus ignores their question and, instead, makes them look long and hard at their motives. He charges them with having their minds on their stomachs. That is, their materialistic thinking was preventing any appreciation of the *message* which Jesus' miracles were intended to convey. They thought of Jesus as their "meal ticket," rather than as their Master.

There is a danger that we today may develop a similar "loaves and fishes" mentality. Have you ever known a person who always prays for blessings but never for responsibilities? Did you ever meet someone who became a Christian solely in the belief that Jesus would then take care of his financial problems? Have you ever encountered a parent who admitted that the only reason he brought his children to church was to teach them basic moral principles? It is a sad day when people think of Jesus as a genie who will perform at the snap of their fingers.

So Jesus urges these people to open their eyes, instead of their mouths. He tells them to stop looking for a handout and to look for "the food that lasts for eternal life" (6:27). And just as Jesus provided them with a free lunch, he is also the distributor of this spiritual food. They may be sure of that because God has put his mark of approval on him (6:27), as evidenced by the miracles which he did.

In 6:28 they ask what it is that God wants them to do. Jesus replies that God the Father wants them "to believe in the one he

sent" (6:28). The crowd clearly understands that Jesus is speaking of himself, so they speak up and remove all doubt as to their lack of spiritual insight. If they had been at all perceptive, that one miracle feeding would have been proof enough. But feeding people was something that Moses had done, so it was "old hat" to them. They wanted something more spectacular, a Super Miracle (6:30-31).

But Jesus accuses them of not understanding how much greater the "bread" he offers is than that which their ancestors picked up from the ground (Exodus 16:1-36). The manna in the wilderness turned rotten after only one day, but the bread which Jesus offers will never grow stale. And the reason is that, in fact, the bread which Jesus offers is actually himself (6:33). But the people are still thinking in terms of whole wheat bread, so they ask for a steady supply of it (6:34).

<sup>35</sup>"I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. "He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

<sup>36</sup>Now, I told you that you have seen me but will not believe.

<sup>37</sup>Everyone whom my Father gives me will come to me. I will never turn away anyone who comes to me, <sup>38</sup>because I have come down from heaven to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup>And it is the will of him who sent me that I should not lose any of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them all to life on the last day. <sup>40</sup>For what my Father wants is that all who see the Son and believe in him should have eternal life. And I will raise them to life on the last day.

<sup>41</sup>The people started grumbling about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." <sup>42</sup>So they said, "This man is Jesus son of Joseph, isn't he? We know his father and mother. How, then, does he now say he came down from heaven?"

In 6:35 Jesus makes the first of the seven great "I Am" declarations which are recorded in the gospel of John (8:12; 10:7-9; 10:11-14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1-5). Bread is regarded in most cultures as a fundamental necessity in the human diet. So Jesus infers that he is the center of our spiritual diet, that he will completely satisfy our spiritual needs. And that has been the actual experience of millions who have accepted Jesus as Lord of their lives. Each of us has discovered the exciting truth that, "I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me" (Philippians 4:13).

Yet there are those who, like those crowded around Jesus in the synagogue (6:36), refuse to open their eyes to the evidence. Add the miracles which Jesus performed to the lives which he dramatically reformed and you have a massive amount of proof that Jesus just has to be the Son of God. But a prejudiced mind will not admit that material as evidence in the courtroom of his heart. I recall that my aged grandmother, who as a youth had moved from Texas to Oklahoma in a covered wagon, just absolutely refused to accept the idea that anyone could fly to the moon. And even the direct, live TV broadcast of an American astronaut walking on the surface of the moon did not change her mind! Well, these Jews were even more hard-headed than that when it came to accepting the teachings of Jesus.

John 6:39-40 is a favorite "proof-text" of those who believe that it is impossible for a Christian to fall from grace. It is certainly God's desire that every single person be saved; but those who reject his Son will be lost. As Paul Butler says, "God foreknows who will believe and who will reject, in the sense of foreknowing what men will do. He sees all time as present. He foreknows who will be faithful and, by grace, gives the faithful to Jesus. But these verses are far from teaching any such notions as 'once in grace, always in grace.' Quite to the contrary, the emphasis here is upon Jesus' *ability* and *willingness* to save that soul, which of its own free will continues committed to Him. The emphasis is not upon an 'irresistable grace.' Jesus is able to save to the uttermost all those that abide in Him of their own volition. There definitely is the possibility of falling from relationship with God through Jesus (cf. Jn. 17:12; Acts 8:14-24; Gal. 5:4). If there is no possibility of the elect ever falling from grace, why were *all* of the epistles of the New Testament written to warn the elect from falling from grace? Such doctrines as 'irresistable salvation' and 'eternal security' are not taught in the New Testament!" (*The Gospel of John*, I, 242-43). For a detailed treatment of this subject, I highly recommend Robert Shank's *Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance* (Springfield, Mo.: Westcott Publishers, 1960).

Apparently these people were more interested in arguing about the truth than they are in accepting it (6:41, 52, 61). As some of our own debates have shown, it is easy to mistake the love of a fight for the love of the truth. A magazine recently printed a cartoon in which a "Little League" baseball player, who had a black eye and numerous scrapes, walked inside his house and

said, "Mom, we lost the game but we won all the arguments!" That kind of approach is not very productive when one's salvation is at stake.

A preacher who was well-versed in the scriptures nevertheless refused to debate those who challenged him. When pressed for an explanation of his reluctance, he replied: "Well, debating with those fellows would be a lot like wrestling with a hog. You both get covered with mud, but the hog likes it." This group of Jews is content with being cantankerous.

<sup>43</sup>Jesus answered, "Stop grumbling among yourselves. <sup>44</sup>No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him to me; and I will raise him to life on the last day. <sup>45</sup>The prophets wrote, 'Everyone will be taught by God.' Anyone who hears the Father and learns from him comes to me. <sup>46</sup>This does not mean that anyone has seen the Father; he who is from God is the only one who has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup>I am telling you the truth: he who believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup>I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup>Your ancestors ate mana in the desert, but they died. <sup>50</sup>But the bread that comes down from heaven is of such a kind that whoever eats it will not die. <sup>51</sup>I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. The bread that I will give him is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live."

<sup>52</sup>This started an angry argument among them. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they asked.

Jesus tells this argumentative assembly to pay attention (6:43). Then he announces that God's drawing power is the gospel, the story of God's providence and love as expressed through Jesus (6:44-45). As Paul says, "By means of the so-called 'foolish' message we preach, God decided to save those who believe. Jews want miracles for proof, and Greeks look for wisdom. As for us, we proclaim the crucified Christ, a message that is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles; but for those whom God has called, both Jews and Gentiles, this message is Christ, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:21-24).

David Lipscomb wrote, "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It is the drawing power. It draws by its manifestation of the love of God, by its revelation of the crucified Saviour. If man's will consents, and he yields to the drawing power, he comes; but, if he will not, and refuses to be drawn, he does not come. God will not force him." For a detailed treatment of this subject, I highly recommend Robert Shank's *Elect in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Election* (Springfield, Mo.: Westcott Publishers, 1970).

Every person who has been born again has "eternal life" here and now (6:47). Intimate fellowship with God is not like a life insurance policy which requires you to die in order to collect. It can be enjoyed while we are still in the world.

But where does eternal life come from? Jesus provides the answer when he prays to God the Father and says, "Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your Son, so that the Son may give glory to you. For you gave him authority over all mankind, so that he might give eternal life to all those you gave him. And eternal life means to know you, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, whom you sent" (17:1-3).

In 6:47-51 Jesus returns to his metaphor about the bread of life. He reminds his audience that every male, except two, died during the wilderness wanderings — so there was nothing about the manna they ate which provided greater longevity.

Today there are those who, like this immediate audience, try to interpret 6:51 with a wooden literalness which misses Jesus' point entirely (6:52). This passage may, in fact, have no reference whatsoever to the Lord's Supper, since he never uses the word "flesh" (*sarx*) in reference to the Lord's Supper. Jesus always speaks of eating his "body" (*soma*). But there are those who use this verse to try to justify the false doctrine of transubstantiation, the idea that when the Lord's Supper is blessed the "substance" or invisible quality of the bread and wine actually become the *literal* blood and body of Jesus Christ.

Paul Butler points out another error in this connection: "According to the Sacramentalists, this passage demands unflinching observance of the Lord's supper. They make the Sacrament the means of life. According to this teaching, the Christian, by absenting himself from the Lord's Table, cuts himself off from any contact with the saving blood of Jesus Christ. Carried to its logical conclusion, this doctrine is equally as heretical as the Roman Catholic's transubstantiation. The Sacramentalist theory comes very near the Roman system of meritorious works" (*The Gospel of John*, I, 249).

When Jesus says "I am the gate" (10:7) no one really imagines that he is anchored to hinges on a post. And when he says "I am the vine" (15:5) we do not understand him to mean that his feet are rooted in the ground. Yet there continue to be those who, like these Jews in the synagogue (5:52), misinterpret Jesus' statement about eating his flesh.

<sup>53</sup>Jesus said to them, "I am telling you the truth: if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in yourselves. <sup>54</sup>Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him to life on the last day. <sup>55</sup>For my flesh is the real food; my blood is the real drink. <sup>56</sup>Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I live in him. <sup>57</sup>The living Father sent me, and because of him I live also. In the same way whoever eats me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup>This, then, is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the bread that your ancestors ate, but then later died. The one who eats this bread will live forever."

<sup>59</sup>Jesus said this as he taught in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Jesus stresses that he is the source of life and will actually live in the person who loves, trusts, and obeys him. As Burton Coffman says, "Christ is to the soul what food and drink are to the body. Without food and drink, the body dies; without Christ the soul dies" (*Commentary on John*, p. 186). A starving man will not receive nourishment by staring through a grocery store window at all the food on the shelves. Nor will we receive spiritual nourishment unless we receive Christ as Lord.

Regarding 6:54, Frank Pack says: "Those who emphasize the sacramental interpretation, referring this primarily to the Lord's Supper, face the problem that this verse promises eternal life to those who eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man. What verse 53 has stated negatively, in Johannine fashion verse 54 states positively. The believer voluntarily takes Jesus into himself and receives eternal life as a present possession. He also receives the promise of eternal life in the resurrection *at the last day*" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 113).

Jesus' statements about eating his flesh and drinking his blood are difficult for the Jews to accept, especially since they choose to ignore the symbolism in his words. No orthodox Jew dared drink the blood of animals, for that was strictly forbidden on the grounds that life is in the blood (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:10-14; Acts 15). But Jesus intends for us to understand that it is his life which we are to absorb.

### Thought Stimulators on John 6:25-59

1. Where did the discussion of the "Bread of Life" take place?
2. What is wrong with being a "loaves and fishes" disciple?
3. Compare the "bread of life" with the manna given in the wilderness.

4. In what sense is Jesus the "bread of life"?
5. How has Jesus promised to respond to anyone who sincerely comes to him?
6. Prove by the scriptures whether it is possible for a Christian to fall from grace so as to be in a lost condition.
7. Why do some people apparently like to argue?
8. How are people "drawn" to Jesus?
9. When can we have eternal life?
10. Where does eternal life come from?
11. What does "eternal life" mean?
12. Does Jesus have reference to the Lord's Supper in these passages?
13. Explain the Roman Catholic doctrine of "transubstantiation."
14. Why did the Jews refuse to drink the blood of animals?
15. Write a 100 word essay (or poem) on how Jesus is the "bread" of *your* life.

# Lesson Nine

*(John 6:60-7:24)*

No one greeted Jesus at the door of the synagogue with, "My, what a lovely sermon that was!" Instead, they were fussing and fuming about his unorthodox remarks. Jesus knew how to comfort the afflicted, but he also knew how to afflict the comfortable. As William Jennings Bryan once said, "When God tells a man to speak he cannot stop to count those who stand with him. He must speak even though he cries in the wilderness; he must stand up even if he has to stand alone."

## **The Words of Eternal Life**

*(John 6:60-71)*

<sup>60</sup>Many of his followers heard this and said, "This teaching is too hard. Who can listen to it?"

<sup>61</sup>Without being told, Jesus knew that they were grumbling about this, so he said to them, "Does this make you want to give up? <sup>62</sup>Suppose, then, that you should see the Son of Man go back up to the place where he was before? <sup>63</sup>What gives life is God's

Spirit; man's power is of no use at all. The words I have spoken to you bring God's life-giving Spirit. <sup>64</sup>Yet some of you do not believe." (Jesus knew from the very beginning who were the ones that would not believe and which one would betray him.) <sup>65</sup>And he added, "This is the very reason I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father makes it possible for him to do so."

<sup>66</sup>Because of this, many of Jesus' followers turned back and would not go with him any more. <sup>67</sup>So he asked the twelve disciples, "And you — would you also like to leave?"

<sup>68</sup>Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. <sup>69</sup>And now we believe and know that you are the Holy One who has come from God."

<sup>70</sup>Jesus replied, "I chose the twelve of you, didn't I? Yet one of you is a devil!" <sup>71</sup>He was talking about Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. For Judas, even though he was one of the twelve disciples, was going to betray him.

The crowd is convinced that Jesus' teaching about eating his flesh and drinking his blood is "too hard" (6:60). The Greek word for hard, *skleros*, means hard to accept, not necessarily hard to understand. They had to decide whether to accept or to reject his way of life. And their decision (6:66) indicates their lack of interest in spiritual matters.

A certain preacher sat down at the dinner table one Sunday and asked his wife how she liked his sermon. She said, "Honey, your sermon reminded me of the days when you were courting me. You were slow getting to the point then, too." That could not be said of Jesus, for he never hides what people need to know. Like the prophets before him, Jesus knows that the preacher who sets out to please his audience may make a hit but the one who tells the truth may get hit!

The trend in many congregations is toward a desire for twenty minute lectures which won't offend anyone. One rather timid preacher was told by one part of his congregation to preach the old-fashioned gospel. Another group let him know in no uncertain terms that he better be broadminded in his preaching. So he ended his next sermon by saying, "Unless you repent, in a measure, and are saved, so to speak, you are, I am sorry to say, in danger of hell-fire and damnation, to a certain extent."

So we should appreciate the preacher or teacher who challenges us to think for ourselves. As Phillips Brooks once said, "The timid minister is as bad as the timid surgeon. Courage is good everywhere, but it is necessary here. If you are afraid of men and a slave to their opinion, go and do something else. Go and

make shoes to fit them. Go even and paint pictures which you know are bad but which suit their bad taste. But do not keep on all your life preaching sermons which shall not say what God sent you to declare but what they hire you to say. Be courageous. Be independent."

That's the kind of boldness that characterizes Jesus. He doesn't soften his words or offer to retract them. After all, there is no need to apologize for telling the truth. But Jesus knows that these grumblers have already made up their minds, and they don't appreciate his frankness. Paul encountered the same treatment from his own brethren, so he finally asked them, "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). That is the situation Jesus finds himself in now, so he just reaffirms that "the words I have spoken to you bring God's life-giving Spirit" (6:63).

Rather than accept Jesus and his disciplined way of life, many of these people "turned back and would not go with him any more" (6:66). It is a dangerous and tragic mistake to turn away from Jesus (Hebrews 6:4-8). That's why Jesus warns, "Anyone who starts to plow and then keeps looking back is of no use for the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

Jesus pointedly asks his hand-picked men whether they intend to leave (6:67). They are no doubt disappointed at Jesus' sudden decline in popularity, but their loyalty is still in tact. So Peter confesses that even if they felt like leaving him, there was no one else to whom they could go. For it is Jesus alone who speaks "the words that have eternal life" (6:68). They are still convinced that he is the Messiah (6:69).

Then Jesus acknowledges that he personally recruited each of them, "Yet one of you is a devil" (6:70). The Greek word *diabolos*, translated as "devil," literally means an accuser or a slanderer and is one of the names of Satan. There is only one Devil, but Judas is working so closely with him to ensnare Jesus that the Lord identifies Judas with him. It is Satan (or the Devil) who tempts us to sin (Gen. 3; Eph. 4:17; 6:11; 1 Peter 5:8), but we can overcome him if we resist his efforts (James 4:7). Jesus no doubt chose Judas because of his potential for doing good. But as with each of us, that potential may be wasted by our own evil desires.

### **Jesus and His Brothers**

(John 7:1-9)

<sup>1</sup>After this, Jesus traveled in Galilee; he did not want to travel in

Judea, because the Jewish authorities there were wanting to kill him. <sup>2</sup>The time for the Festival of Shelters was near, <sup>3</sup>so Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave this place and go to Judea, so that your followers will see the things that you are doing. <sup>4</sup>No one hides what he is doing if he wants to be well known. Since you are doing these things, let the whole world know about you!" (<sup>5</sup>Not even his brothers believed in him.)

<sup>6</sup>Jesus said to them, "The right time for me has not yet come. Any time is right for you. <sup>7</sup>The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I keep telling it that its ways are bad. <sup>8</sup>You go on to the festival. I am not going to this festival, because the right time has not come for me." <sup>9</sup>He said this and then stayed on in Galilee.

Beginning in 7:1 and continuing through chapter 10, John records the traumatic events of the last six months of Jesus' ministry upon the earth. The Jewish authorities have been plotting to murder Jesus for about a year and a half at this point (5:18; 7:1). They are hopeful that they will be able to capture Jesus when he comes to worship at Jerusalem.

The Festival of Shelters (or "Feast of Tabernacles") was celebrated in Jerusalem on the 15th day of the 7th Jewish month (our September or October, depending upon the cycle of the moon). It lasted eight days, during which the people lived in temporary structures ("booths" or "tabernacles") made of the branches of palm trees. The festival commemorated the fact that their ancestors had lived in such structures after God delivered them from Egyptian bondage, and it was also a time of thanksgiving for the harvest (Exodus 23:16; Leviticus 23:33-44; Numbers 29). Every able-bodied male Jew was required to come before the Lord at the temple during this festival. And more burnt offerings were made at this festival than at any of the others.

Jesus' half-brothers are named James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Matt. 13:55). Frank Pack says, "The brothers were not among the disciples of Jesus, and their unbelief came about because, focusing upon his works, they had an imperfect understanding of his mission to the world. After his resurrection they became believers (Acts 1:14), and James became prominent in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13)" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 119).

These half-brothers apparently want Jesus to force a showdown with the Jewish authorities to get the air cleared once and for all (7:3-5). But Jesus reminds them that while they were not fugitives, he is very much a hunted and hated man. Besides,

Jesus explains, "I am not going to this festival, because the right time has not come for me" (7:8).

How are we to harmonize Jesus' statement in 7:8 with the fact that he does go to Jerusalem during this very festival (7:10)? First, Jesus uses the Greek word *kairos*, here translated "time," which means the appropriate, decisive, or right time (there is another Greek word, *chronos*, which he would have used if a simple chronological sequence was meant). This is not the appropriate time for a triumphal entry into Jerusalem (that day will come at the Passover Festival, six months from now). This is the moment for a more prudent approach than that suggested by the brothers.

Second, several ancient manuscripts — including the Bodmer Papyrus (P66) — read, "I am not *yet* going." So this variant reading may be, in fact, the most accurate text. It certainly offers the simplest answer.

A third explanation is rooted in the ancient customs of the Jewish community. To the orthodox Jew, anyone who failed to attend *every* day of the feast had, in effect, not attended it at all. Thus, if taken in this context, the words and the actions of Jesus would not contradict each other at all.

### Jesus at the Festival of Shelters

(John 7:10-24)

<sup>10</sup>After his brothers had gone to the festival, Jesus also went; however, he did not go openly, but secretly. <sup>11</sup>The Jewish authorities were looking for him at the festival. "Where is he?" they asked.

<sup>12</sup>There was much whispering about him in the crowd. "He is a good man," some people said. "No," others said, "he fools the people." <sup>13</sup>But no one talked about him openly, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities.

<sup>14</sup>The festival was nearly half over when Jesus went to the Temple and began teaching. <sup>15</sup>The Jewish authorities were greatly surprised and said, "How does this man know so much when he has never been to school?"

<sup>16</sup>Jesus answered, "What I teach is not my own teaching, but it comes from God, who sent me. <sup>17</sup>Whoever is willing to do what God wants will know whether what I teach comes from God or whether I speak on my own authority. <sup>18</sup>A person who speaks on his own authority is trying to gain glory for himself. But he who wants glory for the one who sent him is honest, and there is nothing false in him. <sup>19</sup>Moses gave you the Law, didn't he? But not one of you obeys the Law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

<sup>20</sup>"You have a demon in you!" the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?"

<sup>21</sup>Jesus answered, "I performed one miracle, and you were all surprised. <sup>22</sup>Moses ordered you to circumcise your sons (although it was not Moses but your ancestors who started it), and so you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath. <sup>23</sup>If a boy is circumcised on the Sabbath so that Moses' Law is not broken, why are you angry with me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? <sup>24</sup>Stop judging by external standards, and judge by true standards.

Frank Pack notes that 7:10 "marked Jesus' departure from Galilee, and according to John he never returned. He remained in the environs of Jerusalem until after the winter Feast of Dedication (10:22,23), then retired beyond the Jordan for a time (10:40). Then after coming back to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead he went to a town called Ephraim at the edge of the desert until the last week of his life (11:54)" (*Gospel According to John*, I, 121).

So Jesus returns to Jerusalem, the city which becomes the focal point of the rest of his ministry. It is a city which is bursting at the seams with thousands of visitors. Tension hangs over the city like the thick fog that often engulfs London. The Jewish authorities are eager to capture Jesus (7:11). And the crowds, knowing of that intense manhunt (7:13), are excited and on edge.

But the first day of the festival passes without incident. Then the second, and the third. It was not until the fourth or fifth day, when the festival "was nearly half over" (7:14), that Jesus appears at Jerusalem and begins teaching somewhere within the huge Temple complex. And even the Jewish authorities are astounded at the depth of his teachings, for they know he had never received any theological training in their rabbinical schools. The explanation given by Jesus is that his words are actually God's words and that God sent him for that purpose (7:16).

In 7:17 Jesus puts the knowledgeable Jewish leaders on the spot: "Whoever is willing to do what God wants will know whether what I teach comes from God or whether I speak on my own authority." The implications of this principle are explained by Paul Butler: "A lifetime of studying the Bible is of no avail if a man's will and desire is out of harmony with God's will. Paul said the same thing in 1 Corinthians 2:6 through 3:9. The rebellious, carnal-minded man cannot discern the things of the Spirit, because the worldly-minded man has no desire to *do* God's will. These Jewish rulers, to whom Jesus spoke, had studied the Old

Testament from their youth up — hour upon hour, year after year — but they did not comprehend that Jesus spoke God's word for they had no desire to *do* God's word" (*Gospel of John*, II, 22).

Jesus gives them a painful reminder that not even they themselves could perfectly obey the Law of Moses (7:19), and that is a theme which Paul takes up in Romans 2:17-3:20. Where do they get off, then, in trying to kill the Son of God for supposedly disobeying the Law?

Their heated response is, "You have a demon in you" (7:20). A demon (Greek, *daimon*) is an evil spiritual being who gets his power from Satan and who supports Satan in his opposition to God's plan for mankind. There is only one Satan (or Devil), but there are many demons. In the New Testament they plagued people with mental, physical, and moral problems (Mark 1:21; 1 Cor. 10:20); they claimed complete control over certain individuals (Mark 5:1-21); and they spread false doctrines through the efforts of false teachers (1 Timothy 4:1; 1 John 4:1-2).

Their accusation that Jesus has a demon is just an emotional outburst (7:23). So Jesus ignores it and goes on to remind them that his *single* act of healing a sick man on a Sabbath (almost 18 months before; 5:1-18) contrasts greatly with their *weekly* violation of the rule against working. Their practice was to circumcise a male child on the eighth day, regardless of whether that fell on a Sabbath day. The Jewish leaders taught that acts of compassion should be delayed until after the Sabbath, except in an emergency situation where life is threatened or there is acute pain. But Jesus teaches that no act of compassion needs to be delayed just because of the Sabbath.

Jesus wraps up his remarks with, "Stop judging by external standards, and judge by true standards" (7:24). In Matthew 7:1 Jesus warns against judging people unfairly, out of a hypocritical desire to destroy them. But the New Testament clearly teaches that we must humbly and honestly evaluate what people do and what they teach (Matt. 7:15-20; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 7-11). And the standard by which we judge ourselves and others can be none other than the word of God.

### **Thought Stimulators on John 6:60-7:24**

1. What gives life?
2. What is it that "brings God's life-giving Spirit"?
3. Who makes it possible for people to follow Jesus?

4. To what extent should a preacher "soften" his message to make it more attractive to his audience?
5. Relate a personal experience where you told the truth and got into undeserved trouble because you did.
6. What causes some Christians to stop following Jesus?
7. Who has the words of eternal life?
8. Which disciple did Jesus call "a devil"? Why?
9. Describe the Festival of Shelters (or "Feast of Tabernacles").
10. Name the half-brothers of Jesus.
11. What was the source of Jesus' teachings?
12. Why does it do little good to study the Bible if you really don't want to obey what you read?
13. What is a demon?
14. When is it appropriate or scriptural to perform an act of compassion?
15. In what way are Christians expected to be judges?
16. List at least two instances (from your personal experience) in which a person was wronged because someone judged him "by external standards."

# Lesson Ten

*(John 7:25-8:11)*

Not long after his arrival at the Festival of Shelters, Jesus sees the Jewish authorities turn from astonishment at his teachings to suspicions concerning his identity. And soon there is a verbal war raging among his listeners.

## **Is He the Messiah?**

*(John 7:25-31)*

<sup>25</sup>Some of the people of Jerusalem said, "Isn't this the man the authorities are trying to kill? <sup>26</sup>Look! He is talking in public, and they say nothing against him! Can it be that they really know that he is the Messiah? <sup>27</sup>But when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from. And we all know where this man comes from."

<sup>28</sup>As Jesus taught in the Temple, he said in a loud voice, "Do you really know me and know where I am from? I have not come on my own authority. He who sent me, however, is truthful. You do not

know him, <sup>29</sup>but I know him, because I come from him and he sent me."

<sup>30</sup>Then they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. <sup>31</sup>But many in the crowd believed in him and said, "When the Messiah comes, will he perform more miracles than this man has?"

Once again, the self-made barrier of prejudice prevents people from accepting Jesus as the Son of God. They think they know where he is from, since they are aware of his Galilean background (7:27). But Jesus challenges their smug certainty (7:28), and then boldly claims that God sent him and empowered him with heavenly authority. But they won't accept him because, in the final analysis, they themselves don't know God (7:29).

Reacting negatively to Jesus' profoundly truthful statements, they attempt to capture him but fail. John does not explain exactly how Jesus is able to escape their fury. He simply says, "no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come" (7:30).

Slowly but surely the number of believers increases, as people are unable to explain away the mighty wonders which Jesus performs (7:31). But their expressions of belief cause still another reaction.

### **Guards are Sent to Arrest Jesus**

*(John 7:32-36)*

<sup>32</sup>The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering these things about Jesus, so they and the chief priests sent some guards to arrest him.

<sup>33</sup>Jesus said, "I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I shall go away to him who sent me. <sup>34</sup>You will look for me, but you will not find me, because you cannot go where I will be."

<sup>35</sup>The Jewish authorities said among themselves, "Where is he about to go so that we shall not find him? Will he go to the Greek cities where our people live, and teach the Greeks? <sup>36</sup>He says that we will look for him but will not find him, and that we cannot go where he will be. What does he mean?"

The self-righteous Pharisees and the powerful high priests (most of whom were Saducees) together send the Temple police out to arrest Jesus (7:32). Since the Saducees at this time were in a comfortable period of collaboration with the Romans, the last thing they want is a Messiah who might upset their political balance of power. It is a tragic moment when religious leaders are determined to protect their pocketbooks rather than to proclaim the truth.

In 7:33-34 Jesus expresses his awareness that the end of his human existence is quickly drawing near. And, significantly, he is spending his last days doing God's will. The fact that Jesus dies at the age of just 33 should remind us that it is the quality, not the length, of one's life that is really important. Methusaleh lived 969 years, yet the Bible sums up his life in only two sentences (Genesis 5:26-27). It's how we live, not how long, that counts.

The Jewish authorities are confused about Jesus' statement that he is going where they cannot find him (7:35-36). Frank Pack says that the Greeks who are spoken of here "were not the Hellenistic Jews but the pagan Greeks. Was Jesus saying that, faced with the rejection by the Jewish religious authorities, he was going out to the Dispersion and use the Jewish synagogues scattered throughout the Diaspora as the means for reaching the Greeks? Of course, this is later what actually occurred in the history of the church. The Jews' misunderstanding ironically does convey the truth, for Jesus was not only going back to the Father who had sent him, but he was also going (through the preaching of the gospel) to the Jews in the Dispersion, and through them he would reach the pagan Greeks with the word of the gospel of Christ" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 129).

### **Streams of Life-Giving Water**

(John 7:37-44)

<sup>37</sup>On the last and most important day of the festival Jesus stood up and said in a loud voice, "Whoever is thirsty should come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup>As the scripture says, 'Whoever believes in me, streams of life-giving water will pour out from his heart.' <sup>39</sup>Jesus said this about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were going to receive. At that time the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not been raised to glory.

<sup>40</sup>Some of the people in the crowd heard him say this and said, "This man is really the Prophet!"

<sup>41</sup>Others said, "He is the Messiah!"

But others said, "The Messiah will not come from Galilee! <sup>42</sup>The scripture says that the Messiah will be a descendant of King David and will be born in Bethlehem, the town where David lived." <sup>43</sup>So there was a division in the crowd because of Jesus. <sup>44</sup>Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

On the last day of the Festival of Shelters an elaborate ceremony took place. At the pool of Siloam a golden pitcher was filled with water by a priest as the people chanted, "As fresh water brings joy to the thirsty, so God's people rejoice when he

saves them" (Isaiah 12:3). Then the entire group went up to the Temple, with each person carrying a "lulab" (a bundle of willow and myrtle twigs bound to a palm branch) in their right hand and a lemon in their left. As they encircled the altar of burnt offering, they waved their lulabs and sang their special songs of praise (Psalm 113-118). During this time the priest poured the water from the pitcher into a container on the altar. This act symbolized their prayer for rain and, more related to our context here, it also symbolized the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Jews believed that, just as Moses had brought forth water from a rock, the Messiah would cause a stream to flow "from the Temple of the Lord" (Joel 3:18).

It is no accident, then, that Jesus chooses this day on which to proclaim himself as the source of life-giving water (7:37). Since there is no single passage in the Old Testament which exactly fits this quotation in 7:38, it may be that Jesus is saying that it is a general principle which one could reasonably draw from the scriptures.

Paul Butler says, "The Christian will naturally become a source of life to others. Jesus is the Water of Life and believers become streams of life-giving water pouring forth to those thirsting for Life, the believers being ever supplied from the Source themselves. Jesus is the Light of the world and believers are also lights (Matthew 5:14). One only need review the book of Acts and especially the life of Paul to see examples of those who have drunk deeply of the Water of Life and become rivers of living water themselves" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 34).

In 7:39 John explains that in the past God had seen fit to bestow the presence of the Holy Spirit only upon a handful of individuals (such as Sampson, Samuel, and the writers of the Old Testament). And it was not until Jesus left the earth (Acts 1) that it became possible for God to give the Holy Spirit as a gift to every immersed believer (Acts 2:38; 5:32).

In 7:40-43 the crowd resumes the debate over who Jesus really is. Their actions remind us of certain Greek philosophers who spent days theorizing about how many teeth a horse has, rather than opening a horse's mouth and counting the teeth. These Jews had seen the miracles of Jesus and he tells them plainly who he is, but they are hung up on their pet theories.

The plain facts are that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, so she must have been of the lineage of David (2 Samuel 7:12; Acts 2:30; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 5:5). And, of course, the scriptures

also teach that the Messiah would be born at Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:1-4; Isaiah 11:1; Micah 5:2). But this crowd is like the hard-headed, old judge who told the lawyers standing before him, "Let's get this case over with. And don't bother me with the facts. I've got my mind made up."

### **The Unbelief of the Jewish Authorities**

*(John 7:45-52)*

<sup>45</sup>When the guards went back, the chief priests and Pharisees asked them, "Why did you not bring him?"

<sup>46</sup>The guards answered, "Nobody has ever talked the way this man does!"

<sup>47</sup>"Did he fool you, too?" The Pharisees asked them. <sup>48</sup>"Have you ever known one of the authorities or one Pharisee to believe in him? <sup>49</sup>This crowd does not know the Law of Moses, so they are under God's curse!"

<sup>50</sup>One of the Pharisees there was Nicodemus, the man who had gone to see Jesus before. He said to the others, <sup>51</sup>"According to our Law we cannot condemn a man before hearing him and finding out what he has done."

<sup>52</sup>"Well," they answered, "are you also from Galilee? Study the Scriptures and you will learn that no prophet ever comes from Galilee."

Just imagine how embarrassed the Jewish leaders must have felt as they saw the Temple police return without Jesus and, in their biased opinion, without even a good excuse (7:45). While the police were out on their evil errand, these men had tossed around ideas about how to dispose of Jesus when he was brought before them. They had no doubt made crude jokes about the fate of this troublemaker. But their plans explode at the sight of the empty-handed police.

"Why did you not bring him back?" they demanded to know. They probably expected the police to say that they encountered violent resistance from the followers of Jesus or that Jesus had seen them approaching and ran for his life. But to their dismay, the police soberly announce, "Nobody has ever talked the way this man does!" (7:46).

What was it about Jesus that so impressed the Temple police? Was it his physical presence, his calm assurance and total lack of fear in the face of persecution? Was it the fact that Jesus "wasn't like the teachers of the Law; instead, he taught with authority" (Matt. 7:29)? Or was it a combination of both elements? John does not spell it out for us. But the result of that encounter is clear: the

police were so deeply moved by Jesus that they voluntarily disobeyed the orders which had been given to them. They just couldn't bring themselves to arrest a man like this.

Like some religious leaders today, these men mistakenly equate intellectualism with godliness (7:49). Even with their theological training, these men are blind to the evidence which proves that Jesus is the Messiah. So they reprimand the policemen by reminding them that none of the chief priests, nor even a single Pharisee, has yet accepted the claims of Jesus.

But they are wrong, dead wrong. For up steps one of their own leaders, a respected Pharisee named Nicodemus, to ask that Jesus be given the normal rights under Jewish law. This believer reminds them that the Law of Moses (which they had just accused others of not knowing) requires that every person be given a fair trial and that any charge must be verified by at least two witnesses (Exodus 23:1-2; Leviticus 19:15-18; Deut. 1:16; 19:15-18). This mild rebuke is similar to Paul's condemnation of hypocritical dual standards (Romans 2:1-3, 17-24).

In 7:52 the Jews direct their verbal venom toward Nicodemus, and he apparently stops his testimony at this point. If he is afraid or ashamed of acknowledging Jesus as his Lord, then he is in much more trouble than he realizes (Matt. 10:32-33). But since John only tells us what happened, not why, we must be careful about judging his motives.

### **Notes on John 7:53-8:11**

These verses are not found in the oldest manuscripts. Many of the newer translations, in a valid attempt to make the text as accurate as possible, either delete these verses or place them in brackets. The earliest manuscripts which do contain these passages were written in the 9th century! The best and oldest manuscript that we have of the Gospel of John, the Bodmer II Papyrus (P66), does not contain these verses.

### **Thought Stimulators on John 7:25-8:11**

1. Discuss the meaning of "prejudice", and how it can hurt us.
2. Who sent Jesus here and gave him authority?
3. Why did Jesus perform miracles?
4. What did Jesus mean by saying, "You cannot go where I shall be"?
5. In what specific ways are Christians today tempted to hide their beliefs in order to protect their own interests?

6. Give some examples of how the quality of one's life is more important than its length.
7. Describe the ceremony which took place on the last day of the Festival of Shelters.
8. Who may receive the Holy Spirit and when does that take place?
9. What was it about Jesus that impressed the police so much that they refused to arrest him?
10. The Pharisees were guilty of: (a) intellectual snobbery; (b) prejudice; (c) blind hatred; (d) all of the above.
11. Put yourself in the place of Nicodemus as a member of the Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin. You ask for fair treatment of Jesus, but the other 70 members of the court begin to ridicule you. How would *you* have reacted? (choose one)
  - (a) Let Jesus fight his own battle.
  - (b) Work behind the scenes to help him.
  - (c) Continue to debate the issue openly.
  - (d) Wait and see what happens.

# Lesson Eleven

(John 8:12-30)

The Greek word *phos*, meaning a light or radiance, is used 21 times in the gospel of John. And each time it refers to Jesus, the Son of God, who is the true Light of the world.

## Jesus the Light of the World

(John 8:12-20)

<sup>12</sup>Jesus spoke to the Pharisees again. "I am the light of the world," he said. "Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness."

<sup>13</sup>The Pharisees said to him, "Now you are testifying on your own behalf; what you say proves nothing."

<sup>14</sup>"No," Jesus answered, "even though I do testify on my own behalf, what I say is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going. You do not know where I came from or where I am going. <sup>15</sup>You make judgments in a purely human way; I pass judgment on no one. <sup>16</sup>But if I were to do so, my judgment would be true, because I am not alone in this; the Father who sent me is

with me. <sup>17</sup>It is written in your Law that when two witnesses agree, what they say is true. <sup>18</sup>I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me also testifies on my behalf."

<sup>19</sup>"Where is your father?" they asked him.

"You know neither me nor my Father," Jesus answered. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also."

<sup>20</sup>Jesus said all this as he taught in the Temple, in the room where the offering boxes were placed. And no one arrested him, because his hour had not come.

From 3100 to 2600 B.C. the Egyptians had stressed their belief that each of their pharaohs was actually a divine son of the sun-god Horus and was, therefore, a mediator between the people and the gods. After 2600 A.D. each pharaoh also received the title, "the son of Re (or Ra)" after the sun-god which became more popular than Horus. The common people continued to accept the pharaoh as the embodiment of the sun-god. So the pharaohs used this superstition to their own advantage by centralizing the government and unifying the people.

By 1500 A.D. the Egyptians worshiped not only the chief sun-god, Re, but also Kheprer (god of the rising sun) and Atum (god of the sunset). John B. Noss states that "the sun was also a bird and, again, a beetle. As bird he was Horus, the high-flying falcon swiftly spanning the sky. (Indeed, the symbol most often used in all Egypt was simply the widespread wings of the mounting falcon, clearest sign of the rising sun.) More usual was the identification of the sun-god with the scarab or sacred dung-beetle. Here the Egyptian peasant with nimble imagination transferred to the sky his observation of the diligent scarab rolling along the ground the ball of dung in which it was placing its eggs; he thought of the sun as a huge ball rolled along by a mighty sky-beetle, whose name was Kheprer (or Khopri). It was common in later days for the figure of the scarab to be incised on seals, shown in amulets, or placed on the foreheads of the statues of kings; there was life and protection in it, and by it the power of death and darkness was held at bay" (*Man's Religions*, 5th ed., N.Y.: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974, p. 39).

The ancient Hebrews, surrounded by such sun worshipers, nevertheless avoided those superstitions. But the concept of light remained important, for "in the beginning when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the power of God was moving over the water. Then God

commanded, 'Let there be light' — and light appeared. God was pleased with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness, and he named the light 'Day' and the darkness 'Night.' Evening passed and morning came — that was the first day" (Genesis 1:1-5). Physical light, then, is a gift of God. "You are the source of all life and because of your light we see the light" (Psalm 36:9).

Similarly, spiritual light is a gift from God. "No longer will the sun be your light by day or the moon be your light by night; I, the Lord, will be your eternal light; the light of my glory will shine on you" (Isaiah 60:19-20). That prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus became a human and lived among men. Jesus further clarifies his statements here in 8:12-16 when he later says, "I have come into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. If anyone hears my message and does not obey it, I will not judge him. I came, not to judge the world, but to save it. Whoever rejects me and does not accept my message has one who will judge him. The words I have spoken will be his judge on the last day!" (12:46-48).

Instead of asking "Where is your father?" the Jews might just as well ask, "Who is your father?" For Jesus leaves no doubt that they do not really know God, although they appear to be worshiping and serving him in their ceremonies. But any ritual is meaningless unless one understands its symbolism and unless one is in tune with God himself.

In 8:20 John mentions where this discussion takes place. We know that the offering boxes were located in the Court of the Women (between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Priests). The thirteen large offering boxes were called "The Trumpets," because they looked somewhat like the ancient trumpets (narrow at the top and spreading out at the bottom). The temple tax went into the first two boxes. An offering related to purification went into the third and fourth boxes. Offerings for the cost of wood for the altar fire went into the fifth box. Donations for the cost of the incense went into the sixth box. Offerings to help with the upkeep of the golden vessels were placed in the seventh box. And they placed any remaining donations into any of the other six collection boxes.

There are a few churches today in evangelical circles which have an offering box in the foyer or at some other convenient spot. This eliminates the time, noise, and bother of passing collection plates among the congregation.

## Many Believe in Him

(John 8:21-30)

<sup>21</sup>Again Jesus said to them, "I will go away; you will look for me, but you will die in your sins. You cannot go where I am going."

<sup>22</sup>So the Jewish authorities said, "He says that we cannot go where he is going. Does this mean that he will kill himself?"

<sup>23</sup>Jesus answered, "You belong to this world here below, but I come from above. You are from this world, but I am not from this world. <sup>24</sup>That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. And you will die in your sins if you do not believe that 'I Am Who I Am'."

<sup>25</sup>"Who are you?" they asked him.

Jesus answered, "What I have told you from the very beginning. <sup>26</sup>I have much to say about you, much to condemn you for. The one who sent me, however, is truthful, and I tell the world only what I have heard from him."

<sup>27</sup>They did not understand that Jesus was talking to them about the Father. <sup>28</sup>So he said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, you will know that I do nothing on my own authority, but I say only what the Father has instructed me to say. <sup>29</sup>And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, because I always do what pleases him."

<sup>30</sup>Many who heard Jesus say these things believed in him.

Paul Butler says, "In verse 21 the Lord looks forward to His 'exodus' from this world and His return to the right hand of the Father. There will come a time when many of the Jews now standing about Him will cry out in the hour of their death for the Messiah and the prophesied deliverance of the Messiah. Such a time actually came in 70 A.D. at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman legions. Millions of Jews were besieged within the walls of that city at Passover-time and suffered indescribable torments. Josephus, a Jewish general then captive of the Roman army, wrote a history of this terrible conflict, and said the lamentations of the people within the city exceeded even the noise of the battle! He also relates that there were many false Christs in the city at that time. People followed them in desperation, hoping until the terrible end for a Messiah to deliver them from the Romans. But many thousands died 'in their sin.' His words would be applicable, of course, to any of these Jews who, having come by any manner or at any time to their hour of death seeking the Messiah, had rejected Jesus as the Christ. Christ's warning here is for all mankind. There is only one end for

men who deny Christ. They shall die in their sin" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 49).

The Jewish authorities mistakenly guess that Jesus is speaking of committing suicide (8:21-22). Those who are intent on taking their own lives will probably not allow the scriptures to stand in their way, but we should realize that there is no "approved example" anywhere in the New Testament of any apostle or any disciple taking his own life. Judas committed suicide, but the Bible paints that as a tragic climax to an evil man. There is not the slightest hint in the New Testament that we have the right to end our own earthly life, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

In 8:23-24 Jesus informs them of his heavenly origin. Jesus only lived upon our planet about 33 years. Prior to his miraculous birth to Mary at Bethlehem, he "already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him. The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out" (1:1-5).

Jesus' listeners are still in a mental fog. "Who are you?" they ask (8:25). And the Lord, who knows the motives of every heart and the deeds of every life, tells them that he has been telling them who he is right from the start of his ministry. And because of their continual rejection of him, they are in deep spiritual trouble (8:26).

In the latter part of 8:26, Jesus states a principle which needs to be branded upon the minds of every preacher and every Bible teacher. "The one who sent me . . . is truthful, and I tell the world only what I have heard from him." We must see ourselves as faithful messengers of the written Word, not as inventors or creators of some new message. We must repeat the message without changing it (Ga. 1:6-9; 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

That, however, is not always the case. Someone has defined a "text" as that which a minister preaches from, and often very far from! Too many are like the verbose, self-centered young preacher who came home from seminary and tried to impress the home folks. He later asked one of the elders what he thought of his message. The elder said, "Well, sir, I'll put it in sort of a parable. I remember my first deer hunt, back when I was a boy. I followed the deer all right, but I followed it all day in the wrong direction."

In a time-conscious society like our own, there is no excuse for spending ten minutes telling jokes to warm up an audience and fifteen minutes telling them stories from "Dear Abby" or *Psychology Today*, with a few scriptures thrown in to make it sound "sermonish". Lots of preachers have lost the "thread" of the gospel by looking for "pearls of speech" to put on it. But we want to be like Jesus, who was a faithful messenger.

8:28 reminds us that a crude cross, erected in a spot where such deaths were common, became both a symbol of man's deepest shame and of man's greatest hope. "God has shown us how much he loves us — it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us!" (Romans 5:8).

So many of the people in this audience believe in Jesus. But what is the depth of that belief? If we are saved, as some assert, by "faith only" then these people are headed for heaven in spite of the fact that they shortly accuse Jesus of having a demon (8:48) and try to stone him to death (8:59). Jesus says, "If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples . . ." (8:31).

### **Thought Stimulators on John 8:12-30**

1. What does Jesus mean by saying that his followers "will never walk in darkness"?
2. What was different enough about Jesus' own testimony to make it acceptable?
3. What is meant by making judgments "in a purely human way" (8:15-18)?
4. When and by whom was physical light created?
5. What was the primary reason for Jesus coming to earth?
6. What elements are necessary for any ritual to be meaningful?
7. Describe the offering boxes and where they were located.
8. What does it mean to "die in your sins" (8:21)?
9. Is suicide a valid option for a Christian? Why?
10. What is the fundamental responsibility of a preacher or Bible teacher?
11. What was the date of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans?
12. Where was Jesus before his birth to Mary?
13. What does the symbol of the cross mean to you?
14. What is the true test of whether a person is saved?

# Lesson Twelve

*(John 8:31-59)*

“Faith,” as Andrew Blackwood, Jr. once wrote, “is more than accurate information about God. Faith is a personal relationship with him.” The problem with the people gathered around Jesus is that they believe in him the way people believe in Santa Claus.

## **Faith: Love and Obedience**

*(John 8:31-47)*

<sup>31</sup>So Jesus said to those who believed in him, “If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples; <sup>32</sup>you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

<sup>33</sup>“We are the descendants of Abraham,” they answered, “and we have never been anybody’s slaves. What do you mean, then, by saying, ‘You will be free?’”

<sup>34</sup>Jesus said to them, “I am telling you the truth: everyone who sins is a slave of sin. <sup>35</sup>A slave does not belong to a family permanently, but a son belongs there forever. <sup>36</sup>If the Son sets you free, then you will be really free. <sup>37</sup>I know you are Abraham’s

descendants. Yet you are trying to kill me, because you will not accept my teaching. <sup>38</sup>I talk about what my Father has shown me, but you do what your father has told you."

<sup>39</sup>They answered him, "Our father is Abraham."

"If you really were Abraham's children," Jesus replied, "you would do the same things that he did. <sup>40</sup>All I have ever done is to tell you the truth I heard from God, yet you are trying to kill me. Abraham did nothing like this! <sup>41</sup>You are doing what your father did."

"God himself is the only Father we have," they answered, "and we are his true sons."

<sup>42</sup>Jesus said to them, "If God really were your Father, you would love me, because I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own authority, but he sent me. <sup>43</sup>Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to listen to my message. <sup>44</sup>You are the children of your father, the Devil, and you want to follow your father's desires. From the very beginning he was a murderer and has never been on the side of truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he is only doing what is natural to him, because he is a liar and the father of all lies. <sup>45</sup>But I tell the truth, and that is why you do not believe me. <sup>46</sup>Which one of you can prove that I am guilty of sin? If I tell the truth, then why do you not believe me? <sup>47</sup>He who comes from God listens to God's words. You, however, are not from God, and that is why you will not listen."

The principle which Jesus states in 8:32 is applicable in every area of life, whether it's chemistry or cooking, psychology or physical education. Truth is the great liberating force in the progress of mankind. And 8:36 makes it clear that the "truth" which Jesus refers to is intimately connected with his own personality. So he later says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me" (14:6).

Paul Butler says, "The man who depends entirely upon human wisdom certainly cannot be free for he is imprisoned by the very limitations of human reason! That the mind of the flesh cannot possibly plumb the depths of wisdom is evident from Romans, the first chapter, and from 1 Corinthians, chapters one through three. The truth that is found in Christ gives men freedom in at least three ways: (A) Freedom from the habits and enslavements of the flesh can come only through knowledge and obedience of the truth; (B) freedom from spiritual lies, falsehoods, deceptions and prejudices which evil men use to enslave the minds and souls of men and women through their perversions of the truth; (C) freedom from sin and all its consequences — guilt, fear of death,

penalty and sentence of sin which is eternal death" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 55).

In 8:33 the crowd objects to the idea that they are in any way less than free men. So Jesus explains his remark by laying down another fundamental spiritual principle: "Everyone who sins is a slave of sin" (8:34). In other words, anyone who makes a habit of sinning is in bondage to sin. Paul tried to engrave the same principle upon the minds of the Christians at Rome, Italy: "Surely you know that when you surrender yourselves as slaves to obey someone, you are in fact the slaves of the master you obey — either of sin, which results in death, or of obedience, which results in being put right with God. But thanks be to God! For though at one time you were slaves to sin, you have obeyed with all your heart the truths found in the teaching you received. You were set free from sin and became the slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:16-18).

Does this mean that when a person becomes a Christian he will never sin? When Jesus said "everyone who sins," he used a Greek present participle (*ho poion*) which indicates an established and continuing life of sin, not just an occasional mistake. Yes, a person will sin after becoming a Christian (1 John 1:8); but he doesn't make a habit of it. The Christian is one who is continually walking in the light (1 John 1:7), with his face pointed toward heaven. And although he sometimes stumbles as he walks toward that goal, he has established a definite, spiritual pattern for his life. So John says, "We know that no child of God keeps on sinning, for the Son of God keeps him safe, and the Evil One cannot harm him" (1 John 5:18).

In 8:35 Jesus begins to talk about the family of God. He boldly confronts them with the fact that he is the Son of God while they are actually the children of the Devil (8:44). That is why they refuse his teachings and reject him as the Messiah, even to the point of trying to kill him (8:37). They claimed to be spiritual heirs of Abraham, but their actions clearly betrayed their hypocrisy. For Abraham was a man who loved, trusted, and obeyed God. When God's messengers came to him, he gladly welcomed them (Genesis 18:1-8). But these people display none of the qualities which marked Abraham as a child of God. Simply being a physical descendant of Abraham is not enough (Rom. 2:28-29).

Jesus' strong denunciation of these "believing" Jews in 8:42-47 is a bitter pill for "faith only" advocates to swallow. If a person is saved at the moment he believes in Jesus, without any other

response, then he is saved without obeying Jesus' command to repent, without obeying Jesus' command to be immersed, and without loving him (8:42). The false doctrine of "faith only" would acknowledge demons as Christians (James 2:19) and accept the cowardly Jewish rulers mentioned in 12:42-43 as brothers in Christ! But Jesus himself says, "If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples . . ."

### Jesus and Abraham

(John 8:48-59)

<sup>48</sup>They asked Jesus, "Were we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon in you?"

<sup>49</sup>"I have no demon," Jesus answered. "I honor my Father, but you dishonor me. <sup>50</sup>I am not seeking honor for myself. But there is one who is seeking it and who judges in my favor. <sup>51</sup>I am telling you the truth: whoever obeys my teaching will never die."

<sup>52</sup>They said to him, "Now we know for sure that you have a demon! Abraham died, and the prophets died, yet you say that whoever obeys your teaching will never die. <sup>53</sup>Our father Abraham died; you do not claim to be greater than Abraham, do you? And the prophets also died. Who do you think you are?"

<sup>54</sup>Jesus answered, "If I were to honor myself, that honor would be worth nothing. The one who honors me is my Father — the very one you say is your God. <sup>55</sup>You have never known him, but I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him, and I obey his word. <sup>56</sup>Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see the time of my coming; he saw it and was glad."

<sup>57</sup>They said to him, "You are not even fifty years old — and you have seen Abraham?"

<sup>58</sup>"I am telling you the truth," Jesus replied. "Before Abraham was born, 'I Am'."

<sup>59</sup>Then they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and left the Temple.

People often try to hide their own guilt by attacking others. And that is the tactic which these "believing" Jews use here, as they accuse Jesus of being one of those heretical Samaritans and of having an evil spirit! It is difficult for us to understand how these people could be so arrogant and foolish as to accuse the Son of God of being possessed by a demon. But we know that Satan is able to blind the eyes of those who want to continue living in sin.

Jesus quickly denies their evil accusation and says, "I honor my Father, but you dishonor me" (8:49). What infamous blasphemy it is to attribute the miracles of Jesus to the power of a demon!

They commit an outrageous affront to both Jesus and God. For just as no man could insult my son without hurting my feelings, no one can reject Jesus without simultaneously insulting God the Father. Jesus said, "Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (5:23).

Elsewhere Jesus warns, "If anyone declares publicly that he belongs to me, I will do the same for him before my Father in heaven" (Matt. 10:32-33).

So these hot-headed, hypocritical people actually judge themselves unworthy of heaven by their unwarranted rejection of Jesus. That sad scene is reenacted every day in our society, as men and women choose to become disciples of the Devil rather than disciples of the Lord Jesus. Each person has the freedom to either accept or reject Jesus, and each of us will be held personally accountable for that decision.

In 8:51 Jesus speaks a truth which offers hope to the human heart: "Whoever obeys my teaching will never die." This does not mean, of course, that a Christian will never have his soul separated from his body in physical death. But Jesus does promise that those who love and obey him will not have to face the second death, that punishment of total separation from God's presence which is the destiny of those who reject Jesus and end their earthly lives out of harmony with him.

Praise God that Christians are set free from the fear of both the first and second deaths! A former Bible professor of mine, Batsell Barrett Baxter, tells about how the A.R. Holton family faced up to death: "Brother Holton preached the gospel of Christ in a most effective way for more than half a century and on several continents. His wife was his equal in every way, teaching thousands of women and young people the meaning of Christianity over a period of more than five decades. Shortly after his seventieth birthday Brother Holton spent the last day of his life in the usual way. He had taken a walk earlier in the day, had enjoyed visiting with friends and had done some reading. It was then that death came. Neighbors and friends soon arrived and found the beloved wife in complete control of her emotions. Someone spoke in an effort to offer sympathy and encouragement. Sister Holton responded, 'I am not grieved for Daddy. This is the finest day of his life — the day for which he had been preparing through all these years.' Truly, for the Christian, the hour of death is an hour of triumph."

But these Jews who are crowded around Jesus get off on the

wrong track, as usual. They scornfully remind him that even their greatest leaders — Abraham and the prophets — all died (8:52-53), so “Who do you think you are?”

Perhaps tiring of such fruitless arguments, Jesus forcefully and clearly states that God is his Father (8:55). He then climaxes his speech by saying that Abraham saw the time of his coming and “was glad” (8:56), and “Before Abraham was born, ‘I Am’ ” (8:58).

Paul Butler writes, “Jesus is contrasting the *faith* of Abraham with the *lack of faith* of these Jews who claim Abraham as their spiritual father. Here the Messiah stood before them and had done many mighty works in their very presence and they could not accept Him, yet their father Abraham had, by faith, seen the day of the Messiah. There were others, both before and after Abraham, who through eyes of faith beheld the day of Christ. Moses, it is written, “accounted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt . . . for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible’ (cf. Heb. 11:26-27). The prophets also saw His day (cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12)” (*The Gospel of John*, II, 69).

In 8:57 the Jews try to discredit Jesus by saying that there was no way he could have seen Abraham since he is not even middle-aged yet. (The Levites were required to retire at 50 years of age, according to Numbers 4:3. And since Jesus began his ministry at about 30 years of age, he was about 33 at this time).

Not understanding who Jesus really is, the Jews react violently to his use of God’s words in Exodus 3:14. But by them Jesus affirms that he has always existed and always will (1:1-2). And he escapes from them.

### Thought Stimulators on John 8:31-59

1. How can we know if we are really disciples of Jesus?
2. In what ways has Jesus set you free?
3. What is truth?
4. Give two examples of how a person can become a “slave of sin.”
5. Why wouldn’t these people listen to Jesus?
6. Who is the father of all lies?
7. Explain John’s statement that “no child of God keeps on sinning” (1 John 5:18).
8. In what ways do people dishonor Jesus today?
9. Explain the statement: “Whoever obeys my teaching will never die.”

10. Who else do we insult when we insult Jesus?
11. What will happen to those who publicly accept Jesus?
12. What will happen to those who reject Jesus?
13. Who, besides Abraham, also saw the day of Jesus approaching?
14. Write a definition of "faith" which includes the elements of love and obedience.
15. Write a brief essay or poem on the theme, "Jesus Means Freedom."

# Lesson Thirteen

*(John 9:1-34)*

This lesson contains some important insights regarding why people suffer ill health, whether God hears the prayers of all people, and how people reacted in such diverse ways to the miracles of Jesus.

## **Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind**

*(John 9:1-12)*

<sup>1</sup>As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been born blind. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, "Teacher, whose sin caused him to be born blind? Was it his own or his parents' sin?"

<sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, "His blindness has nothing to do with his sins or his parents' sins. He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him. <sup>4</sup>As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>While I am in the world, I am the light for the world."

<sup>6</sup>After he said this, Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud on the man's eyes <sup>7</sup>and told him, "Go and wash your face in

the Pool of Siloam." (This name means "Sent.") So the man went, washed his face, and came back seeing.

<sup>8</sup>His neighbors, then, and the people who had seen him begging before this, asked, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?"

<sup>9</sup>Some said, "He is the one," but others said, "No he isn't; he just looks like him."

So the man himself said, "I am the man."

<sup>10</sup>"How is it that you can now see?" they asked him.

<sup>11</sup>He answered, "The man called Jesus made some mud, rubbed it on my eyes, and told me to go to Siloam and wash my face. So I went, and as soon as I washed, I could see."

<sup>12</sup>"Where is he?" they asked.

"I don't know," he answered.

Here is a man suffering from congenital blindness. He has never seen his mother's face, never watched a bird soar high in the sky, never witnessed a crimson sunset. So his escape from darkness to light is a thrilling moment. And it dramatically contrasts with the stubbornness of the Jewish authorities who refuse to see the Light although they have 20-20 vision.

What was there about this blind man that catches the attention of Jesus? Was he begging for money? Was he sitting still, lonely and helpless? Or was he courageously groping his way toward the Temple in order to worship God on this Sabbath Day? John doesn't give us an answer to that. But Jesus chooses to give this man a new start in life.

In 9:2 we see that the apostles, like many people today, hold to the mistaken notion that every sufferer of disease is somehow personally responsible for it and somehow deserves that malady. Just as the "friends" of Job believed that he was afflicted because of his own sinfulness (Job 4:5-8), the Jewish rabbis had taught that there is a strong connection between sin and suffering.

It is true, of course, as Paul Butler says, "All of man's infirmities are attributable in the final analysis to sin — Adam's sin brought about physical disease and death (cf. Rom 5:12-21; also Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 8:20-23). Furthermore, the sins of parents may be visited upon their children in physical calamities even to the fourth generation (cf. Ex. 20:5; 34:7; Num. 14-18; Deut. 5:9, 28:32; Jer. 31:29; Ezek. 18:2). And it is also true that much of a man's suffering is brought by his own sin and dissipation" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 82).

However, Jesus declares that neither this man nor his parents are to blame for his handicap (9:3). It is not that they have never

sinned; it is just that none of their sins was a factor in this man's blindness. "He is blind," Jesus says, "so that God's power might be seen at work in him." Hundreds of years before this time Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would "open the eyes of the blind" (Isaiah 42:7), so this humble blind man is a part of God's divine plan.

All of us face deadlines in our lives. There are those doors of opportunity which slam shut after a given time, never to be opened again. A few years ago a group of Christians went to Montreal (Quebec), Canada, to conduct a crusade for Christ. The workers fanned out into the city to encourage people to attend the nightly meetings. A Christian named Edward Aikin walked up to an elderly gentleman who was sitting on a bench in a small park. He handed the Canadian a brochure and invited the man to attend the evangelistic series. After briefly reading the brochure, the man replied in a heavy French accent, "I be there. I be there." Aikin expressed delight at the old man's decision and went on to the other side of the park to hand out more brochures. A short time later he heard an ambulance approaching and saw it stop on the other side of the park, right where he had been earlier. He rushed over just in time to see the attendants loading that same elderly man into the ambulance for a trip to the morgue. For he had died of a massive heart attack. There would be no more opportunities for him.

But there are for you and for me. Write a letter of encouragement. Speak a word of cheer. Give some food to a needy family. Lead someone to Jesus. Do whatever you can, and do it today. Remember that God's work had better be *done*. Be aware that God's work had better be done *right*. And keep in mind that God's work had better be done *right now!* For the "night is coming when no one can work."

Jesus is "the light for the world" (9:5). Burton Coffman says, "This light obligates all who see it. Men may be pardoned for stumbling in darkness; but those who close their eyes against the light commit a sin against nature as well as against God. The obligation imposed by the presence of light may not be assumed or rejected by men, for the very existence of light carries the inherent requirement that men shall walk in it" (*Commentary on John*, p. 234). And Jesus himself says, "I have come into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness" (12:46).

In 9:6-7 Jesus applies a mud pack to the man's eyes and tells

him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. There is no mention of this man's faith, but he was at least willing to give the Great Physician a try. And he is given the precious gift of sight!

Why does Jesus use such a technique here? Perhaps this was the best way, under the circumstances, to show that this healing came from him. But it was not the only method he used to heal the blind.

Imagine that you are attending the "First Annual Convention of Ex-Blind People." The first speaker explains that all in the world a person has to do to be healed is to sit at the feet of Jesus (Matt. 15:29-31). The second speaker says, "Aw, that's dumb. It's not what position you're in, it's *where* you are. You've gotta be in the Temple before you can get your sight restored" (Matt. 21:14).

The third speaker clears his throat and says, "Listen up, good buddies, and I'll tell you what the approved example is. Jesus takes you by the hand, spits in your eyes, places his hands on your eyes and asks what you can see so far, then he places his hands on your eyes again. And presto, you can see. And I wasn't anywhere near the Temple, either!" (Mark 8:22-26).

Bartimaeus, a former blind beggar who is not even on the program, stands up and shouts, "Why do we have to ritualize everything? I'm here to tell ya that you can be healed without any of those things! Jesus doesn't even have to touch your eyes in order to heal them" (Mark 10:46-52).

The fourth speaker restores order and says, "It is evident that, in the midst of the excitement of the healing, all of you guys forgot exactly what took place. First, Jesus makes a kind of mud pie and rubs it in your eyes. Then he tells you to go wash your face in the pool of Siloam. That's all there is to it. And that's the gospel truth."

Well, the point of this little story is this: Jesus, as the Son of God, had the power to heal as he wished, anywhere and anytime, even on a Sabbath day and right in the Temple.

This incident in 9:1-12 points out the importance of doing whatever Jesus instructs you to do. Suppose that the blind man had said to Jesus, "Listen, my friend, we both know you can heal me without me having to stumble down to the pool and wash my face. There's nothing in that water that will heal my eyes. So, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll claim my vision right now, then at a more convenient time I'll go down and wash just to show that I trust you." That man would have died the same way he was born: blind! He was healed because he believed enough to obey.

The same principle applies in regard to our salvation. Jesus said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). That command is just as clear as "Go and wash your face in the Pool of Siloam." Yet some object by saying, "Water can't wash away your sins," as though anybody today teaches that it can. It can't. But *obedience* to Jesus' command will wash away your sins, just as obedience to Jesus' command gave this man his sight. Praise the Lord!

### **The Pharisees Investigate the Healing**

(John 9:13-34)

<sup>13</sup>Then they took to the Pharisees the man who had been blind.

<sup>14</sup>The day that Jesus made the mud and cured him of his blindness was a Sabbath. <sup>15</sup>The Pharisees, then, asked the man again how he had received his sight. He told them, "He put some mud on my eyes; I washed my face, and now I can see."

<sup>16</sup>Some of the Pharisees said, "The man who did this cannot be from God, for he does not obey the Sabbath law."

Others, however, said, "How could a man who is a sinner perform such miracles as these?" And there was a division among them.

<sup>17</sup>So the Pharisees asked the man once more, "You say he cured you of your blindness — well, what do you say about him?"

"He is a prophet," the man answered.

<sup>18</sup>The Jewish authorities, however, were not willing to believe that he had been blind and could now see, until they called his parents <sup>19</sup>and asked them, "Is this your son? You say that he was born blind; how is it, then, that he can now see?"

<sup>20</sup>His parents answered, "We know that he is our son, and we know that he was born blind. <sup>21</sup>But we do not know how it is that he is now able to see, nor do we know who cured him of his blindness. Ask him; he is old enough, and he can answer for himself!" <sup>22</sup>His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, who had already agreed that anyone who said he believed that Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. <sup>23</sup>That is why his parents said, "He is old enough; ask him."

<sup>24</sup>A second time they called back the man who had been born blind, and said to him, "Promise before God that you will tell the truth! We know that this man who cured you is a sinner."

<sup>25</sup>"I do not know if he is a sinner or not," the man replied. "One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I see."

<sup>26</sup>"What did he do to you?" they asked. "How did he cure you of your blindness?"

<sup>27</sup>"I have already told you," he answered, "and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Maybe you, too, would like to be his disciples?"

<sup>28</sup>They insulted him and said, "You are that fellow's disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. <sup>29</sup>We know that God spoke to Moses; as for that fellow, however, we do not even know where he comes from!"

<sup>30</sup>The man answered, "What a strange thing that is! You do not know where he comes from, but he cured me of my blindness! <sup>31</sup>We know that God does not listen to sinners; he does listen to people who respect him and do what he wants them to do. <sup>32</sup>Since the beginning of the world nobody has ever heard of anyone giving sight to a blind person. <sup>33</sup>Unless this man came from God, he would not be able to do a thing."

<sup>34</sup>They answered, "You were born and brought up in sin — and you are trying to teach us?" And they expelled him from the synagogue.

What a sad ending to what should have been a thrilling and happy story. Instead of rejoicing with the healed man, they put him on trial and finally kick him out of their fellowship. Something is obviously wrong when a man who has been blind since birth, who has never read a single page of scripture, is able to refute the learned religious leaders!

Frank Pack says, "Those Pharisees who rejected the miracle and therefore rejected Jesus as a man from God felt they were following the teaching, or at least the spirit of Deuteronomy 13:1-5 that one must not believe a miracle worker if he teaches people to follow idols. So because Jesus was breaking their tradition concerning the sabbath, they felt that he could not be from God" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 159).

The fundamental principle of prayer is that God will hear and answer any request which is in keeping with his will and which is properly motivated (Matt. 7:7; James 1:5-8; 4:3). So we have the case of a non-Christian named Cornelius, who was an honest and good man, whose prayers were heard and answered by God (Acts 10).

But it is equally true that God will not heed the prayers of those who are committed to a life of sin. Isaiah told the wicked people of his day, "Don't think that the Lord is too weak to save you or too deaf to hear your call for help! It is because of your sins that he doesn't hear you. It is your sins that separate you from God when you try to worship him" (Isaiah 59:1-2).

So in the context of 9:31, the blind man is simply arguing that God would not give a blatant sinner the power to heal the blind. Unfortunately, 9:31 has often been used to infer that God will not hear the prayers of anyone except those in our own little group or those who believe as we do on all doctrinal matters. That is not what this passage teaches.

### **Thought Stimulators on John 9:1-34**

1. Whose sin caused this man to be born blind?
2. Why is there a sense of urgency about God's work?
3. Are those who are sick sometimes personally responsible for it?
4. Are those who are sick always personally responsible for it?
5. How did death and disease come into the world?
6. Discuss an important spiritual opportunity which you failed to grasp.
7. Take seven sheets of paper and write down how your time is spent on a typical Sunday, Monday, etc. Then rework your schedule to include more time for Bible study, prayer, your family, service to others, etc.
8. Why did Jesus "come into the world as light"?
9. Explain this statement: "The faith that saves is the faith that obeys."
10. Why did the blind man's parent's tell the Jewish authorities they would let their son speak for himself?
11. We may have to suffer insults and persecution, as the blind man did after he was healed, when we witness for Jesus. But since spiritual healing is even greater news than physical healing, tell *someone* this week why you love Jesus.
12. Explain whose prayers God will hear and why.

# Lesson Fourteen

*(John 9:35-10:21)*

Upon receiving his sight, the former blind man boldly witnessed concerning the miracle which he had experienced. He still did not know a great deal about Jesus and his teachings. He just knew that no one could have done such a wonderful thing unless he had come from God.

But the Jewish authorities, looking at this case from the viewpoint of a broken tradition (healing on the Sabbath) rather than an act of mercy and power, were angered by the man's testimony. And since they could not convince him he was wrong, they "expelled him from the synagogue" (9:34).

## **Spiritual Blindness**

*(John 9:35-41)*

<sup>35</sup>When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

<sup>36</sup>The man answered, "Tell me who he is, sir, so that I can believe in him!"

<sup>37</sup>Jesus said to him, "You have already seen him, and he is the one who is talking with you now."

<sup>38</sup>"I believe, Lord!" the man said, and knelt down before Jesus.

<sup>39</sup>Jesus said, "I came to this world to judge, so that the blind should see and those who see should become blind."

<sup>40</sup>Some Pharisees who were there with him heard him say this and asked him, "Surely you don't mean that we are blind, too?"

<sup>41</sup>Jesus answered, "If you were blind, then you would not be guilty; but since you claim that you can see, this means that you are still guilty."

It wasn't long before one of Jesus' disciples brought the news of how the man who had been healed was being persecuted for praising Jesus. So the Lord, once again, takes the initiative and goes looking for the man.

And when he finds him, he leads him to a deeper and more knowledgeable faith. Frank Pack writes, "Jesus used the title *Son of man*, according to all four Gospels, to refer to himself in his public ministry, in the suffering he would endure, and in his future glorification, and his coming again finally to judge all men. The expression *Son of man* means more than his being a human being, and is to be understood in view of Daniel 7:13 (cf. Mark 14:62). As used in this context, the *Son of man* refers to the one sent from God who has powerfully demonstrated God's love and power" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 164).

The man no longer thinks of Jesus as only a miracle worker, for he now understands that Jesus is the Lord (9:38)! That is also the message which Peter preached on the day of Pentecost: "All the people of Israel, then, are to know for sure that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is the one that God has made Lord and Messiah!" (Acts 2:36). And the phrase quickly became a standard testimony of Christians everywhere, as Paul indicates: "I want you to know that no one who is led by God's Spirit can say 'A curse on Jesus!' and no one can confess 'Jesus is Lord,' unless he is guided by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3).

Notice that in the TEV the man's statement contains an exclamation mark to indicate, as the Greek text does (*aphiemi*, "said"), that this man spoke with intensity of conviction and loudness of voice. How thrilling it is to really know Jesus as your Lord!

And his first response, after becoming aware of the true identity of Jesus is to worship him. The Greek verb *proskuneo* means to do reverence, to worship, to pay homage. The same

word was used when the wise men from the East came to see the baby Jesus at Bethlehem and presented him with precious gifts (Matt. 2:1-11). It was also used to describe the attitudes and actions of the apostles when Jesus calmed the stormy sea (Matt. 14:33). And it was used when the apostles humbly prostrated themselves at the feet of their resurrected Lord (Matt. 28:9). If we are to worship Jesus as this man and the other disciples did, we must begin by humbling ourselves before him and by giving him the best we have to offer.

In 9:39-41 Jesus exposes these Pharisees for what they really are. They are like an alcoholic who refuses to admit he has a drinking problem, although his drinking has resulted in his being divorced by his wife, fired from his job, and being put into jail for driving under the influence. The proof is as plain as a circus clown's big, red nose. But so long as the alcoholic can shut his eyes to the truth, he will ignore the facts and continue to drunkenly shout his innocence. That kind of person cannot be rescued until he realizes he just can't make it on his own. And the Pharisees, who remained arrogantly addicted to their man-made religious rules, refuse to admit their guilt and so cannot be forgiven.

As Burton Coffman says, "Those who would receive life and salvation of Christ must come in meekness and humility, confessing their sins, denying themselves, and crying, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner." The entrenched pride and conceit of the religious leaders were utterly repugnant to the Lord; and, as long as men were wrapped up in such a cloak of self-righteousness, there was absolutely no hope for them" (*Commentary on John*, p. 247).

## **The Parable of the Shepherd**

(John 10:1-21)

<sup>1</sup>Jesus said, "I am telling you the truth: the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup>The man who goes in through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him; the sheep hear his voice as he calls his own sheep by name, and he leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought them out, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>They will not follow someone else; instead, they will run away from such a person, because they do not know his voice."

<sup>6</sup>Jesus told them this parable, but they did not understand what he meant.

<sup>7</sup>So Jesus said again, "I am telling you the truth: I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All others who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate. Whoever comes in by me will be saved; he will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life — life in all its fullness.

<sup>11</sup>"I am the good shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>When the hired man, who is not a shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees a wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away; so the wolf snatches the sheep and scatters them. <sup>13</sup>The hired man runs away because he is only a hired man and does not care about the sheep. <sup>14-15</sup>I am the good shepherd. As the Father knows me and I know the Father, in the same way I know my sheep and they know me. And I am willing to die for them. <sup>16</sup>There are other sheep which belong to me that are not in this sheep pen. I must bring them, too; they will listen to my voice, and they will become one flock with one shepherd.

<sup>17</sup>"The Father loves me because I am willing to give up my life, in order that I may receive it back again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes my life away from me. I give it up of my own free will. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it back. This is what my Father has commanded me to do."

<sup>19</sup>Again there was a division among the people because of these words: <sup>20</sup>Many of them were saying, "He has a demon! He is crazy! Why do you listen to him?"

<sup>21</sup>But others were saying, "A man with a demon could not talk like this! How could a demon give sight to blind people?"

The task of every messenger of God's word is to present it in such a manner that the people can easily understand. Here Jesus places his gems of truth in a pastoral setting. And nothing was more commonplace in Jesus' day than to see shepherds guiding their flocks over the rough Palestinian hills.

In addition, the people of Israel were accustomed to the idea that they were the flock and God was their shepherd. "He is our God; we are the people he cares for, the flock for which he provides" (Psalm 95:7). And they, like we today, loved these words: "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need" (Psalm 23:1).

The shepherd in Palestine did not drive his sheep as ranchers drive cattle. He walked in front of his flock, leading them both by his example and by the sound of his voice. And at the end of the day he placed them inside one of the many sheep pens which were scattered among the hills. The walls of the sheep pens were

usually made of rocks. And whenever a wooden gate was unavailable, the shepherd simply blocked the entrance with his own body as he slept upon the ground.

Keep in mind that Jesus is telling this story to the same Pharisees whom he had just accused of being blind and guilt-ridden (9:41). And when he tells it the first time, they don't get the point (10:1-6). So Jesus elaborates upon it to make it even clearer to those who really want to understand.

Beginning with 10:7, Jesus identifies himself as the gate of the sheep. Now the purpose of any door is to limit the access to those things which are inside, thus protecting and preserving them. Similarly, Jesus came to this earth to lead us into a close relationship with God where, protected by his power, Satan can no longer harm us. As Paul wrote, "It is through Christ that all of us, Jews and Gentiles, are able to come in the one Spirit into the presence of the Father" (Eph. 2:18).

But there are others, Jesus warns, who are "thieves and robbers" (10:8) and have come for destructive purposes. They are determined "to steal, kill, and destroy" (10:9). Jesus' reference is to all those who in any way lead people away from him. Down through history there have been innumerable "saviors" who promised people "the good life" if they would fall in line. And today we are being assaulted by Hugh Hefner's hedonism, by "Reverend" Ike's crass materialism, by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's thinly veiled Hindu gospel of transcendental meditation, by the flagrantly anti-Christ demagoguery of Sun Myung Moon, and by the large number of preachers who say that Jesus was a good man but nothing more. Then there are the evangelistic disciples of Joseph Smith (Mormons), Gardner Ted Armstrong (Worldwide Church of God), and Charles T. Russell (Jehovah's Witnesses). Satan is alive and well in our generation!

In 10:12-13 Jesus warns against putting our trust in false shepherds. This is a theme drawn from the Old Testament prophets. Ezekiel, for example, uses the Hebrew term for shepherd or pastor (*raah*, "to feed") when he gives this rebuke from God: "Now, you shepherds, listen to what I, the Lord, am telling you. As surely as I am the living God, you had better listen to me. My sheep have been attacked by wild animals that killed and ate them because there was no shepherd. My shepherds did not try to find the sheep. They were taking care of themselves and not the sheep" (Ezekiel 34:7-8; read the entire chapter).

That kind of hireling-shepherd would kill the sheep to get the

wool or to provide himself with a midnight snack! Today there are some "hireling" preachers who are more concerned about their salary than they are about souls. There are some elders (presbyters, bishops, or pastors) who lead long prayers on Sunday morning for "those not able to be here"; but they never go out to check on the missing members of their flock during the week. To them Peter says, "I appeal to you to be shepherds of the flock that God gave you and to take care of it willingly, as God wants you to, and not unwillingly. Do your work, not for mere pay, but from a real desire to serve" (1 Peter 1-2). And every elder should read Paul's instructions to the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:25-31).

In 10:16 Jesus refers to the Gentiles as his "other sheep". Frank Pack says, "After his resurrection the great commission specifically commanded that the gospel should be proclaimed unto all men (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 14:46; John 20:21). While the early church had difficulty overcoming Jewish prejudice against the Gentiles and taking seriously Jesus' worldwide commission to them, the Gospels all make clear Jesus' teachings in this regard. His limited mission was directed to Israel, but his purpose was to create a new race of men, both Jews and Gentiles" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 171).

John 10:19-21 marks a sad turning point in the ministry of our Lord. During the remainder of Jesus' stay in Jerusalem, the so-called believers no longer witness for him. Instead, the unbelievers become the vocal group. Perhaps many of the disciples sense the end is near. If so, they bear mute testimony that silence is not always golden; sometimes it is yellow.

### Thought Stimulators on John 9:35-10:21

1. There is a song which says, "There are none so blind as those who will not see." Discuss this principle in relation to the Pharisees.
2. What does the expression "Jesus is Lord" mean to you?
3. Define "worship" and give two examples of it.
4. In what sense is Jesus the "gate of the sheep"?
5. In what sense are false teachers "thieves and robbers"?
6. For what purpose did Jesus come?
7. How did Jesus prove that he was "the good shepherd"?
8. What is a "hireling"?
9. What, specifically, are the duties of elders?
10. How can you make the elders' job easier?

11. Who took Jesus' life?
12. What should be done when those who are responsible for feeding the flock are not doing it?

# Lesson Fifteen

*(John 10:22-42)*

The Festival of Shelters (i.e., Tabernacles) was held in October of each year, and John records Jesus' visit to that Festival in 7:2 to 10:21. A period of two months passes between the events ending with 10:21 and those beginning with 10:22. Now it is December and time for the annual Festival of Dedication.

## **Jesus is Rejected**

*(John 10:22-42)*

<sup>22</sup>It was winter, and the Festival of the Dedication of the Temple was being celebrated in Jerusalem. <sup>23</sup>Jesus was walking in Solomon's Porch in the Temple, <sup>24</sup>when the people gathered around him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? Tell us the plain truth: are you the Messiah?"

<sup>25</sup>Jesus answered, "I have already told you, but you would not believe me. The deeds I do by my Father's authority speak on my behalf; <sup>26</sup>but you will not believe, for you are not my sheep. <sup>27</sup>My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give

them eternal life, and they shall never die. No one can snatch them away from me. <sup>29</sup>What my Father has given me is greater than everything, and no one can snatch them away from the Father's care. <sup>30</sup>The Father and I are one."

<sup>31</sup>Then the people again picked up stones to throw at him. <sup>32</sup>Jesus said to them, "I have done many good deeds in your presence which the Father gave me to do; for which one of these do you want to stone me?"

<sup>33</sup>They answered, "We do not want to stone you because of any good deeds, but because of your blasphemy! You are only a man, but you are trying to make yourself God!"

<sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, "It is written in your own Law that God said, 'You are gods.' <sup>35</sup>We know that what the scripture says is true forever; and God called those people gods, the people to whom his message was given. <sup>36</sup>As for me, the Father chose me and sent me into the world. How, then, can you say that I am the Son of God? <sup>37</sup>Do not believe me, then, if I am not doing the things my Father wants me to do. <sup>38</sup>But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, you should at least believe my deeds, in order that you may know once and for all that the Father is in me and that I am in the Father."

<sup>39</sup>Once more they tried to seize Jesus, but he slipped out of their hands.

<sup>40</sup>Jesus then went back again across the Jordan River to the place where John had been baptizing, and he stayed there. <sup>41</sup>Many people came to him. "John performed no miracles," they said, "but everything he said about this man was true." <sup>42</sup>And many people there believed in him.

The Festival of Dedication (later called the Festival of Lights) celebrated the cleansing of the Temple and the rebuilding of the altar in 165 B.C., after Judas Maccabeus had driven out the Syrian invaders (1 Maccabees 4:52-59). Here in 10:22 is the only time it is mentioned in the New Testament, so it is appropriate that we examine it in detail at this point.

The story of this Festival begins with Antiochus IV of Syria, a pagan ruler who proclaimed himself to be "The Divine" ("Epiphanes") but who was often called "The Mad Man" ("Epimanes"). Antiochus, whose ruthless ambition was unlimited, used his large army to subdue many of the nations around him. And when the Jewish people resisted his onslaught, he took personal command of his troops and cracked down hard.

To begin with, Antiochus made it a capital offense to worship on the Sabbath, to circumcise, or to give any kind of religious instruction. Then he deliberately desecrated the Temple in

Jerusalem (after killing perhaps as many as 80,000 Jews). He had an idol made of the pagan god Zeus and placed it in the Holy of Holies. And, in another act which horrified and angered the Jews, he had the blood of *swine* offered upon the Jewish altar in the Temple.

Antiochus also directed his soldiers to build pagan altars throughout Palestine. And he decreed that everyone had to worship those idols and everyone had to eat the meat of swine! Some of the Jews cooperated out of fear for their lives, but thousands of them refused to engage in such activities and were killed.

As time went on, however, more Jews gave in to the brutal demands of Antiochus. They began to accept the priests which he had appointed. Some of them exchanged their Jewish names for Greek names. Others forsook the study of the scriptures for the study of Greek literature. More and more Jews took upon themselves the speech, dress, and customs of the occupation forces.

Just when it seemed that all was lost, a priest named Mattathias and his five sons led a successful rebellion against the Syrian intruders in their hometown of Modin (just north of Jerusalem). The family, which came to be known as "the Maccabees," rallied others to their cause and directed a campaign of guerilla warfare from their improvised headquarters in the hills of Judea.

At last they recaptured Jerusalem and rededicated the Temple, exactly three years to the day after Antiochus had desecrated it. The jubilant Jewish people celebrated the victory for eight days, during which they kindled lights and sang praises to God. Then Judas Maccabeus decreed that the Jews should celebrate this victory every year as a memorial to the light of freedom which must shine for all nations.

The Festival of Dedication begins early in December on the 25th day of the Jewish month Chisleu (or Kislev), the anniversary date of the rededication of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus. It lasts eight days. Each night the Jew lights the Menorah (the eight-branched candelabrum), beginning with one candle on the first night, two on the second, etc. The lighting of all eight candles on the eighth night symbolizes the victory of the forces of light over the powers of darkness, as well as the right to live as free people.

Since this Festival (now called Chanukah or Hanukah) is a minor festival, the people may carry out their normal work

activities. And in modern times the Jews in Israel have come to celebrate it as a children's festival in honor of the great heroes of Jewish history. Large outdoor menorahs burn throughout the land, and special torchlight parades are held. Many Jews also exchange gifts during this festival.

According to 10:23, "Jesus was walking in Solomon's Porch in the Temple" during the time that the Festival of the Dedication was going on. When a visitor came to the complex of Temple buildings and grounds, the first area he entered was the Court of the Gentiles. On the east side of that court was a row of pillars, about 40 feet high and roofed, called "Solomon's Porch". The pillars are thought to have been originally a part of Solomon's palace, a place where he received guests and conducted the ordinary business of his kingdom. In Jesus' time, it was a place where rabbis sometimes walked and talked with their students, and where the common people could pray and meditate.

Suddenly Jesus is surrounded by a group of people who are bound and determined to force Jesus to publicly commit himself. They want him to label himself as the Messiah who, the Jews believed, would assume the role of their political and military leader. (Of course, if he had done so, they would have taken him before the Roman authorities and accuse him of sedition.) Of, if that were not to be, they at least want to scare him into quitting his hard-line preaching against their hypocrisy. We are not told who identified Jesus and rallied this antagonistic crowd around him, but they are deadly serious.

Knowing full-well their evil intentions, Jesus courageously confronts them with the fact that he has tried to tell them "the plain truth" many times, without success (10:25). He had already revealed his true identity to the Samaritan woman (4:26) and to the man whom he healed of blindness (9:37). But what he has primary reference to are the many miracles which conclusively convinced such men as Nicodemus (3:2) and to his speeches in which he told how he and the Father are one (5:17-47; 8:16-58; 10:11-18). The evidence had been clear enough, for Jesus never subscribed to the "if you can't convince them, confuse them" philosophy of some politicians (and some preachers!). They saw the facts with their own eyes and heard them with their own ears.

But they would not believe because they are not Jesus' sheep (10:26). Here the Lord makes it clear that their unbelief is not caused by a lack of evidence; it is caused by their immoral nature. It is not a case of Jesus being the wrong Shepherd to follow; it is

that they are the wrong sheep! Jesus says, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (10:27).

In 10:28-29 we have another of the favorite "proof-texts" of those who believe that a child of God can never fall from grace so as to ever be lost. The wonderful truth in these words is that no one — not even Satan himself — can overpower God and take Christians away from him (see also, Rom. 8:38-39). We believe it! We rejoice in our security!

Yet we cannot ignore the other side of the coin, the equally true doctrine that Christians may *voluntarily* reject God's promised protection by going back to their old life of sin.

But let's see what else the Bible says about this. We want our beliefs to be more than wishful thinking or some theologian's opinion. We want to know what *the Bible* teaches!

The Bible teaches that the lost can be saved and that the saved can be lost (Col. 1:21-23). Those who hear the gospel have to do two things if they are to reach heaven: (1) They must accept the conditions or terms of salvation; and (2) they must demonstrate by their actions the consequences of salvation.

The plain truth is that God's promises are always conditional. The promise to Abraham depended upon his own faithfulness (Genesis 17:1-14; 22:1-19). The promises given to the Israelites in the wilderness were conditioned upon their faithfulness (Exodus 15:25-26; 19:1-8). Similarly, the promise of salvation through Christ is conditioned upon our *continued* faithfulness to him.

For example, the apostle Paul warned: "I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control, to keep myself from being disqualified after having called others to the contest" (1 Cor. 9:27). And in that same letter he wrote: "You are saved by the gospel if you hold firmly to it — unless it was for nothing that you believed" (1 Cor. 15:2). Notice that big *IF* . . . "if you hold firmly to it . . ."

In the parable of forgiveness (Matt. 18:21-25), Jesus shows that whether the king continued to show mercy on that particular servant depended entirely upon whether the servant showed the *consequences* of having received mercy from the king. The servant would not forgive others, so the king punished him. That is also how God deals with unfaithful Christians.

In the parable of the vine and the branches (15:1-6), Jesus teaches that the relationship between himself and his disciples is dependent upon the will of the disciples. If we choose to "remain

united" with him, then we will "bear much fruit." However, if we choose to separate ourselves from him then we will be unproductive and will be punished. If that isn't falling from grace, what is?

Numerous other scriptures testify to the same idea (Luke 12:42-46; 8:11-15; 1 Cor. 10:12-13; 2 Peter 2:20-21; Hebrews 3:12-15; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 1 John 2:24; James 5:19-20; Rev. 2:4-5). And we have at least five specific examples in the New Testament of people who had once accepted Jesus but fell from his grace. There was Judas (Matt. 10:1-8; Acts 1:26), the legalistic brethren at Galatia (Gal. 1:6; 5:4), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), Simon the magician (Acts 8:13-24), and some of the angels in heaven (Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4)!

That's awfully clear, isn't it? Yet there are lots of people who, like the Jews surrounding Jesus, accuse us of "blasphemy" for believing and teaching exactly what the Bible plainly states! They sometimes become as upset at us as the Jews do with Jesus (10:31, 33, 39).

Well, in 10:34-38 Jesus once again tries to get them to open their prejudiced minds to the plain facts. But when they try to capture him (10:39), he goes back to the countryside. He doesn't go there to sulk or to give up, but to teach and preach. The result is that he finds some of his sheep there (10:42).

### **Thought Stimulators on John 10:22-42**

1. In what month was the Festival of Shelters held?
2. In what month was the Festival of Dedication held?
3. Who was Antiochus?
4. Who started the Festival of Dedication and what was it intended to memorialize?
5. Describe the area known as "Solomon's porch".
6. Why did the Jews want Jesus to identify himself as the Messiah?
7. What reason did Jesus give for their unbelief?
8. Why can the faithful (not perfect, but trying to be) Christian feel that his salvation is secure?
9. Upon what did God's promise to Abraham depend?
10. Upon what does God's promise of salvation to us depend?
11. Give two specific examples from the New Testament of believers who fell from grace.

12. Based upon the example of Jesus, what should we do when a certain group of people just won't listen to our teaching?
13. What was the ultimate testimony to which Jesus pointed as proof of his position as the Son of God.
14. Ask a Jewish person to explain how he observes the Feast of Dedication and what it means to him (Note: Try to emphasize the common heritage which you both have as people who respect the Old Testament as the Word of God.)

# Lesson Sixteen

*(John 11:1-44)*

Jesus and the apostles received a warm welcome from the disciples of John the Baptist. And another evidence of the success of John's ministry is the crowd's statement that "everything he said about this man was true" (10:41). So many of them readily accepted Jesus as he taught for an unspecified period of time in the Jordan River area.

Meanwhile, back in the village of Bethany, a tense drama is taking place. And it involves some people who are very dear to Jesus.

## **The Death of Lazarus**

*(John 11:1-16)*

<sup>1</sup>A man named Lazarus, who lived in Bethany, became sick. Bethany was the town where Mary and her sister Martha lived. (<sup>2</sup>This Mary was the one who poured the perfume on the Lord's feet and wiped them with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who

was sick.) <sup>3</sup>The sisters sent Jesus a message: "Lord, your dear friend is sick."

<sup>4</sup>When Jesus heard it, he said, "The final result of this sickness will not be the death of Lazarus; this has happened in order to bring glory to God, and it will be the means by which the Son of God will receive glory."

<sup>5</sup>Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup>Yet when he received the news that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days. <sup>7</sup>Then he said to the disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

<sup>8</sup>"Teacher," the disciples answered, "just a short time ago the people there wanted to stone you; and are you planning to go back?"

<sup>9</sup>Jesus said, "A day has twelve hours, doesn't it? So whoever walks in broad daylight does not stumble, for he sees the light of this world. <sup>10</sup>But if he walks during the night he stumbles, because he has no light." <sup>11</sup>Jesus said this and then added, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I will go and wake him up."

<sup>12</sup>The disciples answered, "If he is asleep, Lord, he will get well."

<sup>13</sup>Jesus meant that Lazarus had died, but they thought he meant natural sleep. <sup>14</sup>So Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, <sup>15</sup>but for your sake I am glad that I was not with him, so that you will believe. Let us go to him."

<sup>16</sup>Thomas (called the Twin) said to his fellow disciples, "Let us all go along with the Teacher, so that we may die with him!"

Bethany was a small village located about 1.6 miles from Jerusalem. It was nestled on the Mount of Olives, right on the heavily traveled road leading from Jerusalem to Jericho. Bethany was the place where Jesus lodged during the final week of his earthly ministry, and it was the place from which he left the earth and went back to heaven (Luke 24:50-51).

There are five prominent women named Mary in the New Testament: the mother of Jesus, the sister of Lazarus, the one from Magdala, the wife of Clopas, and the mother of Mark. So here in 11:2 John pauses to distinguish her from the others by reminding his readers that she is the one who later becomes famous for her gracious act in anointing Jesus with her own expensive perfume (see 12:1-8).

So it is this particular Mary who, along with her sister Martha, sends an urgent message to Jesus: "Lord, your dear friend is sick" (11:3). They had probably already secured traditional medical treatment for Lazarus. But his health continued to decline to its

present critical condition. Then it dawned on them that their only hope was to try to get Jesus to come to heal their dying brother.

We are not told who delivered the sisters' message. But John makes it clear that Jesus does not react as one might expect. Instead of breaking camp and hurrying to Bethany, he calmly informs all of them that "the final result" of Lazarus' illness will not be death; rather, "this has happened in order to bring glory to God, and it will be the means by which the Son of God will receive glory" (11:4).

So the apostles, as well as the family and friends of Lazarus, are about to learn a tremendously important lesson: "In all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). The life of Joseph is a good example of this principle. From a purely human viewpoint, his life was just one disaster after another. He had been hated by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused of attempted rape, and thrown into prison. But there came a time when he could look back and see God's providence at work in his life, even during those difficult times. So to his brothers he said, "Now do not be upset or blame yourselves because you sold me here. It was really God who sent me ahead of you to save people's lives" (Genesis 45:5). Let's try to develop an awareness of God's guidance in our lives, just as he was with people like Joseph and Lazarus.

After two more days (11:6), Jesus instructs his disciples to get ready to go to Bethany. They remind him of the great danger involved (11:8); but he reminds them that when the right time comes to do God's work there is never a reason to delay (10:9-10).

Jesus certainly does not teach the fanciful doctrine of "soul-sleeping" in 11:11, nor is it taught anywhere else in the Bible. When a person dies, he is cut off from participation in the affairs of this world; but he is an active participant in the affairs of the place to which he goes — either to heaven or hell (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21-23; Rev. 7:15-17; 20:4). All that Jesus is saying is that Lazarus has died (11:14), but that he will not remain in that condition.

However, the apostles are so upset at the idea of once again facing the hostile Jewish authorities that they don't pay much attention to Jesus' words. They believe the end is near for Jesus (11:16).

## Jesus: The Resurrection and the Life

(John 11:17-27)

<sup>17</sup>When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had been buried four days before. <sup>18</sup>Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup>and many Judeans had come to see Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother's death.

<sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died! <sup>22</sup>But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask him for."

<sup>23</sup>"Your brother will rise to life," Jesus told her.

<sup>24</sup>"I know," she replied, "that he will rise to life on the last day."

<sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies; <sup>26</sup>and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

<sup>27</sup>"Yes, Lord!" she answered. "I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

The Jewish custom during Jesus' time was to have seven days of public mourning followed by 30 days of private mourning (at least in the case of a close relative). The first three days were called "days of weeping," and according to some rabbis the soul hovered above the body until the body began to decompose after the third day. That may be why John particularly notes that Lazarus had been dead for four days (11:17).

In this brief conversation between Martha and Jesus, she expresses her deep disappointment that he had not come in time to keep Lazarus from dying (11:20-22). Then Jesus gently but firmly leads her from an attitude of self-pity to one of deeper trust in him as the Messiah, the Son of God (11:25-27). And his words continue to bring hope and comfort to all of us who have seen loved ones pass from this life.

## Jesus Weeps

(John 11:28-37)

<sup>28</sup>After Martha said this, she went back and called her sister Mary privately. "The Teacher is here," she told her, "and is asking for you." <sup>29</sup>When Mary heard this, she got up and hurried out to meet him. (<sup>30</sup>Jesus had not yet arrived in the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.) <sup>31</sup>The people who were in the house with Mary comforting her followed her when they saw her get up and hurry out. They thought that she was going to the grave to weep there.

<sup>32</sup>Mary arrived where Jesus was, and as soon as she saw him, she fell at his feet. "Lord," she said, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died!"

<sup>33</sup>Jesus saw her weeping, and he saw how the people with her were weeping also; his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved. <sup>43</sup>"Where have you buried him?" he asked them.

"Come and see, Lord," they answered.

<sup>35</sup>Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup>"See how much he loved him!" the people said.

<sup>37</sup>But some of them said, "He gave sight to the blind man, didn't he? Could he not have kept Lazarus from dying?"

After Martha had personally received encouragement, she rushes home to share it with Mary and, if possible, to get her to go up the road and meet Jesus. A large group of friends — probably mostly women — are gathered there in the family home, as was the ancient custom. So Martha enters and takes her aside to explain the good news.

And Mary, without bothering to explain where she was going, hurried out the door to find Jesus (11:29). Assuming that she is headed for her brother's tomb to mourn, the crowd follows right behind her. But to their dismay, she doesn't walk toward the tomb at all. However, they soon see the reason for her puzzling action: Jesus.

What a touching scene then takes place! Mary, with hot tears streaming down her cheeks, expresses her own regret that he hadn't come soon enough to keep Lazarus from dying (11:32). It quickly becomes evident to Jesus and his disciples that these sisters, and in fact the whole community, had loved and respected Lazarus very much.

And at this moment great emotional forces are at work in Jesus, for he is "deeply moved." He is moved to see such deep and genuine expressions of heartache. He is vividly reminded of the fact that very shortly he himself will be lying in a dark tomb awaiting his own resurrection. He is moved by the trauma which death often brings to those left behind. And he is moved by the thought of displaying God's might and power by raising Lazarus from the dead.

And so there is a volcano-like eruption of emotions from the depth of Jesus' being. John describes it so simply: "Jesus wept" (11:35). And, yet, what a wonderfully profound truth. Jesus, the divine Son of God, *wept!* Unlike the Greek gods who were unconcerned and unmoved by human problems, Jesus shows us

that God's heart is broken when we are in sorrow. Jesus wept! Praise God!

If we paid more attention to what the Bible teaches about emotional releases we would pay less money to psychiatrists. Crying, contrary to what most of us (particularly men) learn in our society, is not a crime. Crying, that is the release of emotional tensions, is often a healthy and helpful thing. It can be a sign of strength rather than weakness. When Jimmy Carter won his two-year fight for the presidency of the United States, he returned to his home in Plains, Georgia on Nov. 3, 1976. There, surrounded by his relatives and life-long neighbors, he openly wept as he thanked them for their support. The writer of Genesis records seven different times that Joseph, governor of Egypt, wept and for different reasons (Genesis 42-50). More people need to experience the emotional release of weeping (Acts 20:36-38; Rom. 12:15; Luke 19:41-44; Heb. 4:15; 5:7).

### **Lazarus is Brought to Life**

*(John 11:38-44)*

<sup>38</sup>Deeply moved once more, Jesus went to the tomb, which was a cave with a stone placed at the entrance. <sup>39</sup>"Take the stone away!" Jesus ordered.

Martha, the dead man's sister, answered, "There will be a bad smell, Lord. He has been buried four days!"

<sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believed?" <sup>41</sup>They took the stone away. Jesus looked up and said, "I thank you, Father, that you listen to me. <sup>42</sup>I know that you always listen to me, but I say this for the sake of the people here, so that they will believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup>After he had said this, he called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup>He came out, his hands and feet wrapped in grave cloths, and with a cloth around his face. "Untie him," Jesus told them, "and let him go."

The prayer of Jesus shows the harmony which exists between God the Father and God the Son. And he speaks aloud in order to impress upon the mourners that what is about to happen right before their eyes is a miracle worked by God through the Son.

And then, in a loud voice, Jesus shouts, "Lazarus, come out!" And he did! The crowd no doubt gasps and steps back in awe and fear as Lazarus somehow leaves the tomb. Why does Jesus specifically call out Lazarus' name? Perhaps the answer is, as someone had said, that if Jesus had not specified which person

was to be raised, then the words "Come out!" would have raised the dead from every grave throughout the whole world!

This is another victory for Jesus and another defeat for Satan. Death is not the "final result" of my life or yours. Death is only a comma — not a period — in the story of our eternal soul.

### **Thought Stimulators on John 11:1-44**

1. Where is Bethany and what events took place there?
2. Why did the disciples try to keep Jesus from going to Bethany?
3. How did Martha describe Jesus (11:27)?
4. Why did Jesus weep?
5. Why do some people (particularly men) try to suppress their emotions?
6. Why did Martha object to opening the tomb?
7. Discuss some difficulty that you have experienced which you now can see was definitely a part of God's plan for you.
8. Discuss the meaning of (and possible applications) Romans 8:28 for us.
9. What should be the Christian's response to the death of a loved one?
10. What does the term "Messiah" mean?
11. What real difference does belief in the resurrection of the dead make in your own life?
12. Few people really have their "house in order" when death comes, and that puts undue pressure upon their family. So take time this week to do the following: (1) Make an appointment with a lawyer in order to draw up a will; and (2) plan out your own funeral arrangements (songs, scriptures, pallbearers, etc.). Then let your family read your plan, or at least let them know where they can find it if something happens to you.

# Lesson Seventeen

*(John 11:45-12:19)*

You would think that seeing a dead man raised to life would be enough to cause any intelligent person to want to worship Jesus as the Son of God. Right? Wrong. Soon after Lazarus' grave cloths are removed and the excitement dies down, some of the mourners slip away to tell the authorities about it. There is an awful truth, then, in the proverb which states that the same sun which melts the wax also hardens the clay.

## **The Plot Against Jesus**

*(John 11:45-57)*

<sup>45</sup>Many of the people who had come to visit Mary saw what Jesus did, and they believed in him. <sup>46</sup>But some of them returned to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. <sup>47</sup>So the Pharisees and the chief priests met with the Council and said, "What shall we do? Look at all the miracles this man is performing!" <sup>48</sup>If we let him go on in this way, everyone will believe in him, and

the Roman authorities will take action and destroy our Temple and our nation!"

<sup>49</sup>One of them, named Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year, said, "What fools you are! <sup>50</sup>Don't you realize that it is better for you to have one man die for the people, instead of having the whole nation destroyed?" <sup>51</sup>Actually, he did not say this of his own accord; rather, as he was High Priest that year, he was prophesying that Jesus was going to die for the Jewish people, <sup>52</sup>and not only for them, but also to bring together into one body all the scattered people of God.

<sup>53</sup>From that day on the Jewish authorities made plans to kill Jesus. <sup>54</sup>So Jesus did not travel openly in Judea, but left and went to a place near the desert, to a town named Ephraim, where he stayed with the disciples.

<sup>55</sup>The time for the Passover Festival was near, and many people went up from the country to Jerusalem to perform the ritual of purification before the festival. <sup>56</sup>They were looking for Jesus, and as they gathered in the Temple, they asked one another, "What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?" <sup>57</sup>The chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where Jesus was, he must report it, so that they could arrest him.

It was the Lord's stated intention to raise Lazarus from the dead so that both he and his Father would "receive glory" (11:4) and so that the people would have solid evidence upon which to believe that the Father had sent him (11:42). And that is the result of this miracle, for many of these mourners "believed in him" (11:45).

It is well for us to keep in mind exactly why John records this event. For it is not just a heart-warming story to show us how much Jesus loves people. Neither is it just a thrilling, suspenseful account of Jesus' extraordinary power. Nor is it told merely to instill hope of eternal life in us. Jesus' primary reason for performing the miracle, as well as John's reason for recording it, is to cause each person who sees (or, in our case today, reads) it to believe in and trust Jesus enough to obey him and be saved.

That is why John says, near the end of this Gospel, "In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life" (20:30-31).

The Jewish authorities may have been prejudiced, but they are

not dummies. They are upset when the news is brought to their council chambers that Jesus actually raised Lazarus from the grave. They understand perfectly what the result of such miracles would be — “everyone will believe in him” (11:47). And they tack on, for good measure, the speculation that Jesus might cause such an uproar that the Romans would squash the Jewish nation under their dictatorial heel.

When he could not keep quiet any longer, Caiaphas chides them for their fearful words (11:49). This man Caiaphas served as high priest of the Jews from 18 to 36 A.D. He seems to have been little more than a puppet in the hands of his father-in-law, Annas, who had previously held the office from 7 to 14 A.D.

Then Caiaphas takes control of the situation and leaves no doubt that he intends to have Jesus killed. All their anxiety about how the Romans might react to Jesus’ miracles is, in his view, wasted effort. Because, if he had his diabolical way, Jesus is not going to be around that long.

There is great irony in the way that Caiaphas states his plan: “Don’t you realize that it is better for you to have one man die for the people, instead of having the whole nation destroyed?” For while he is simply predicting that the death of Jesus would save the Jewish nation from any persecution from the Romans, he is also prophesying — although he doesn’t realize it — that Jesus is going to make spiritual salvation available to the Jews and to all other people (Matt. 28:19-20; Rom. 1:16). Jesus also warned that their rejection of him would actually result in the kind of persecution the council feared (Luke 19:41-44; 21:10-28; Matt. 23:27-39). And in 70 A.D. the entire city of Jerusalem, including the magnificent Temple, was destroyed by the Romans!

From that very moment, Jesus becomes a fugitive from the Jewish authorities (11:53). The script has been written, the stage set. But Jesus does not allow the council to direct this drama. For Jesus is not about to allow himself to be captured until he is finished teaching his disciples and doing the other things which his Father sent him to do. So he withdraws to a tiny village named Ephraim (thought to be the modern village of Et-Taiyibeh), located about 14 miles north of Jerusalem.

Then, as the time for the Passover Festival approaches, the entire city of Jerusalem is filled with rumors and questions about whether the man named Jesus will dare attend (11:55-56). Not taking any chances, the chief priests and the Pharisees have their trap set for Jesus (11:57).

## Jesus is Anointed at Bethany

(John 12:1-8)

<sup>1</sup>Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, the man he had raised from death. <sup>2</sup>They prepared a dinner for him there, which Martha helped serve; Lazarus was one of those who were sitting at the table with Jesus. <sup>3</sup>Then Mary took a whole pint of a very expensive perfume made of pure nard, poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The sweet smell of the perfume filled the whole house. <sup>4</sup>One of Jesus' disciples, Judas Iscariot — the one who was going to betray him — said, <sup>5</sup>"Why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor?" <sup>6</sup>He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would help himself from it.

<sup>7</sup>But Jesus said, "Leave her alone! Let her keep what she has for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup>You will always have poor people with you, but you will not always have me."

John does not mention it, but between the time that Jesus leaves Ephraim (11:54ff.) and the time he arrives in Bethany (12:1), a period of about one month passes. And that month is spent in touring the areas of Samaria, Galilee, and Perea.

After that brief tour, Jesus returns to Bethany just six days before time for the Passover Festival to begin. His arrival was probably on Friday afternoon, March 31st, in 30 A.D. (Some Bible students believe that this is the same supper mentioned in Matt. 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9, which was held at the home of a former leper, Simon.)

His host (Simon the leper?) prepares an evening meal for him, a meal at which Martha helps serve the food and her brother, the resurrected Lazarus, is seated at the table with Jesus (12:2). There, among his friends and disciples, Jesus could relax and enjoy the fine food and warm fellowship.

Then, probably after the meal was finished, Mary steps into the room and anoints Jesus with a blask of expensive perfume. This particular perfume, made of "pure nard," was imported to Israel all the way from the Himalaya Mountains of India, where it was made from the stem of a certain plant.

Mary's generous and thoughtful act shows what it means to really worship Jesus. First, she is not ashamed to humble herself in his presence, even to using her hair to wipe the excess perfume off his feet (12:3). Second, she is eager to sacrifice in order to give the very best to Jesus (12:3). She may have been saving that

expensive perfume as a dowry for her marriage or even for use at her own funeral. But she would not pass up an opportunity to bless the Lord with it. Third, she encountered unjust criticism for her great expression of worship (12:4-6). Anyone who would sell his Savior for only 30 pieces of silver could certainly complain about "wasting" the equivalent of 300 pieces of silver! Like Judas, there are people today who resent spending money "just" to honor Jesus. Fourth, she discovered that those who freely give to Jesus also freely receive (12:3). As she poured the perfume over the head (Mark 14:3) and feet of Jesus, that powerful fragrance covered her, too. And wherever she went that night, she would bear that distinct likeness to the Son of God.

### **The Plot Against Lazarus**

(John 12:9-11)

<sup>9</sup>A large number of people heard that Jesus was in Bethany, so they went there, not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from death. <sup>10</sup>So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus too, <sup>11</sup>because on his account many Jews were rejecting them and believing in Jesus.

The chief priests were probably all of the Sadducee sect and were, therefore, people who refused to believe that the dead could be resurrected. And, as these verses plainly and sadly show, they are not about to allow the facts to influence their theology. They can't explain how Lazarus could be alive; but they can't afford to ignore him, either. So they decide to kill both Jesus and Lazarus.

### **The Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem**

(John 12:12-19)

<sup>12</sup>The next day the large crowd that had come to the Passover Festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Praise God! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the King of Israel!"

<sup>14</sup>Jesus found a donkey and rode on it, just as the scripture says, <sup>15</sup>"Do not be afraid, city of Zion! Here comes your king, riding on a young donkey."

<sup>16</sup>His disciples did not understand this at the time; but when Jesus had been raised to glory, they remembered that the scripture said this about him and that they had done this for him.

<sup>17</sup>The people who had been with Jesus when he called Lazarus out of the grave and raised him from death had reported what had

happened. <sup>18</sup>That was why the crowd met him — because they heard that he had performed this miracle. <sup>19</sup>The Pharisees then said to one another, "You see, we are not succeeding at all! Look, the whole world is following him!"

This triumphal entry into Jerusalem takes place on a Sunday and is mentioned by all of the gospel writers (Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40). The Pharisees prefer not to kill Jesus during the Passover Festival, lest they cause a riot (Matt. 26:1-5); but the warm reception which the people give to Jesus gives them additional concern.

Verse 15 is a free translation of Zechariah 9:9. In those days a king riding a horse was a symbol of the raw power that he intended to use in conquering his enemies. But when a king entered a city riding upon a donkey it was a symbol that he had peaceful aims. In this way Jesus tries to get across to the shouting crowds that he is not going to fulfill their expectations of leading them in a rebellion against the Romans.

Verse 19 strikes an ominous note, as the Pharisees realize that their efforts have failed so far. But they will try again. And very soon.

### Thought Stimulators on John 11:45-12:19

1. Why did many of the mourners believe in Jesus?
2. Why did some of the mourners not believe in Jesus?
3. What argument do the Pharisees and chief priests present to the Council to encourage them to take action against Jesus?
4. Who was Caiaphas?
5. Why did Jesus go to Ephraim?
6. Why did John record the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection?
7. When did Jesus return to Bethany?
8. Why was Mary's anointing of Jesus so meaningful?
9. Why did Judas object to Mary's actions?
10. Does Jesus mean, in verse 8, that we should not be concerned about the poor? Explain.
11. Why did the chief priests want to kill Lazarus?
12. What significance was there in Jesus riding upon a donkey?
13. Why did this great crowd come out to meet Jesus?
14. What was the reaction of the Pharisees to the welcome which the people gave to Jesus?

# Lesson Eighteen

*(John 12:20-50)*

As the time for the Passover Festival draws near, Jesus spends each night at Bethany and each day at Jerusalem. And it is at Jerusalem (probably in the area of the Temple complex known as the Court of the Gentiles) that a truly remarkable event takes place.

## **Some Greeks Seek Jesus**

*(John 12:20-26)*

<sup>20</sup>Some Greeks were among those who had gone to Jerusalem to worship during the festival. <sup>21</sup>They went to Philip (he was from Bethsaida in Galilee) and said, "Sir, we want to see Jesus."

<sup>22</sup>Philip went and told Andrew, and the two of them went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup>Jesus answered them, "The hour has now come for the Son of Man to receive great glory. <sup>24</sup>I am telling you the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces

many grains. <sup>25</sup>Whoever loves his own life will lose it; whoever hates his own life in the world will keep it for life eternal. <sup>26</sup>Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servant will be with me where I am. And my Father will honor anyone who serves me.

These Greeks are converts to the Jewish religion. Paul Butler says of them, "Out of despair and hopelessness brought on by their lifelong association with Greek philosophy and religion they were probably attracted to the Jewish religion because of its reasonableness and high moral standards. The idealism of Plato was cold, unfeeling and hopeless; the materialism of Aristotle was unreasonable and contrary to man's higher nature; the determinism and sensuality of Epicurus led to chaos and despair. The Hebrew religion of One True God, Creator, loving Father, . . . offered a more reasonable explanation of the cosmos than their mythical, polytheistic religion" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 185).

Apparently these men had heard Jesus teaching somewhere before, or at least someone had told them about him. So their thirst for truth leads them to ask Philip to bring Jesus out from one of the inner courts so that they may talk with him (they probably could not go beyond the Court of the Gentiles.).

Why does Philip consult with Andrew before conveying this request to Jesus? John does not say. However, it may very well be that Philip was afraid that the Jewish authorities might somehow distort the meaning of such a meeting and use it as an excuse for persecuting Jesus. (This tactic is used quite effectively a few years from this time when the Jews falsely accuse Paul of bringing Gentiles into the Temple. Acts 21:27-36) But after talking with Andrew, they decide to take the request to Jesus (12:22).

Like the other gospel writers, John does not say much about Andrew. Yet it is Andrew who always seems to be at the right place at the right time. And it is Andrew who repeatedly plays a part in helping people see Jesus (1:40-42; 6:8-9).

And how *unlike* Andrew we have become! As Doug Kostowski says, "We have too much secret discipleship. So many seem to have a missing ingredient, a void. Is not the Lord himself absent? When he chose the band of the Twelve to train for the world-wide mission, he called them clearly defining two ambitions for each apostle — (1) to be with him, and (2) to be sent out to preach (Mark 3:14). The latter explains that our mission is dependent on the former: his presence in our lives. To be with Jesus is to share Jesus." That is the principle which Andrew practiced so well.

When Philip and Andrew tell Jesus that some Greeks want to see him, Jesus recognizes this unusual situation as a sign that his suffering and death are near. But Jesus also looks beyond the agony to the ecstasy, that moment when he will be resurrected from the grave. That final victory over Satan will bring glory and honor to both the Father and the Son (12:23). (John does not make it clear whether Jesus delivers these words, and those that follow, directly to the Greeks or whether he sends the message to them by Andrew and Philip.)

Then Jesus explains in very simple terms the fact that he is destined to become the substitute sacrifice for the sins of mankind: "A grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains." It is no accident, then, that the number of his followers grows by leaps and bounds after his death and resurrection.

Next, Jesus says that, while he himself is the only sacrifice for sins, there is something which anyone who wants to be saved must do. Each of us must sacrifice our lives for him (11:25; Rom. 12:1-2; Gal. 2:20). Each of us must "follow him" by imitating his life of love and service (11:26). And we are promised that those who do so will be rewarded with honor from the Father himself (Luke 18:28-30; Rev. 2:10; 3:21).

### **Jesus Speaks About His Death**

*(John 12:27-36)*

<sup>27</sup>"Now my heart is troubled — and what shall I say? Shall I say, 'Father, do not let this hour come upon me'? But that is why I came — so that I might go through this hour of suffering. <sup>28</sup>Father, bring glory to your name!"

Then a voice spoke from heaven, "I have brought glory to it, and I will do so again."

<sup>29</sup>The crowd standing there heard the voice, and some of them said it was thunder, while others said, "An angel spoke to Him!"

<sup>30</sup>But Jesus said to them, "It was not for my sake that this voice spoke, but for yours. <sup>31</sup>Now is the time for this world to be judged; now the ruler of this world will be overthrown. <sup>32</sup>When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me." (<sup>33</sup>In saying this he indicated the kind of death he was going to suffer.)

<sup>34</sup>The crowd answered, "Our Law tells us that the Messiah will live forever. How, then, can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?"

<sup>35</sup>Jesus answered, "The light will be among you a little longer. Continue on your way while you have the light, so that the darkness will not come upon you; for the one who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. <sup>36</sup>Believe in the light, then, while you have it, so that you will be the people of the light."

The thought of the impending crisis sends a chill through Jesus (12:27). He abhors the idea of being nailed to a cross, but more than that he is troubled by the fact that he will be killed by the very people whom he wants to help. It is an ugly picture which crosses his mind, a scene in which the dark and sinful nature of man stands in stark contrast to his own purity and sinlessness. But he will not turn back now, for he is committed to doing the Father's will so that the Father's name may be honored (12:28).

Suddenly, the voice of God announces, "I have brought glory to it and I will do so again" (12:28). Only three times does God speak during the ministry of Jesus: at his baptism (Mark 1:11), at his transfiguration (Mark 9:7), and here. The voice no doubt alludes to the victory which Jesus will win over death and to the rapid spread of his kingdom throughout the world. But the voice, which the crowd could not clearly interpret, was not just for Jesus' benefit (12:30). This great phenomena was a testimony to the closeness between Jesus and his Father.

And in 12:31-33 Jesus indicates that Satan's time has come, too. It is said that one day, while wasting away in exile, the dejected Napoleon pointed at a red dot on a map which marked "Waterloo." He turned to a friend and said, "If it had not been for that small, red dot on the map, I would have conquered the world." Jesus lets us know that after his resurrection Satan will look back at the blood-stained but empty tomb and say, "If it had not been for that empty tomb, I would have conquered the world."

In 12:34-36 the multitudes reveal their ignorance about the true nature and mission of the Messiah, and Jesus again uses the figure of "light" to try to get them to see him as their only hope. Time is running out, not only for Jesus but also for them.

## **The Unbelief of the People**

*(John 12:37-43)*

After Jesus said this, he went off and hid himself from them.

<sup>37</sup>Even though he had performed all these miracles in their presence, they did not believe in him, <sup>38</sup>so that what the prophet Isaiah had said might come true:

"Lord, who believed the message we told? To whom did the Lord reveal his power?"

<sup>39</sup>And so they were not able to believe, because Isaiah also said, <sup>40</sup>"God has blinded their eyes and closed their minds, so that their eyes would not see, and their minds would not understand, and they would not turn to me, says God, for me to heal them."

<sup>41</sup>Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

<sup>42</sup>Even then, many Jewish authorities believed in Jesus; but because of the Pharisees they did not talk about it openly, so as not to be expelled from the synagogue. <sup>43</sup>They loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.

The latter part of 12:36 marks the end of Jesus' public ministry. The rest of his time will be spent in private discussions with his closest and most trusted disciples. The public phase of his work is now history, and soon even his earthly life will be over.

In 12:37 John explains how prejudiced and sin-hardened the multitudes really are. Miracle after miracle had only caused them to close their eyes more tightly, lest they see and obey Jesus as their Lord.

In 12:38-40 John quotes from Isaiah 53:1 and 6:9-10 to explain their rejection of Jesus: "God has blinded their eyes . . ." But John certainly does not teach the Calvinistic doctrine that God long ago predestined certain individuals to reject Jesus and there is nothing such people can do to change their status. It is not God's fault, nor is it his desire, that these people (or anyone today) should disbelieve in his Son. But since they choose to reject him, God uses their unbelief to work out his plan of redemption (just as he used Judas' unbelief). Just as the preaching of Isaiah "caused" the Israelites to shut their eyes to the truth, the preaching of Jesus results in people rejecting him. But it is their fault, not God's.

Just as Adam and Eve could choose between obeying and disobeying God, these Jews (and everyone of us today) are free to choose God's way or Satan's way. After awhile, however, God will abandon to their own destructive lusts those who harden their hearts against him. God wants to save everyone, but not everyone will cooperate with that desire.

There are few scenes in the Bible more disgusting than the one John mentions in 12:42-43. Here are men with training in the scriptures, leadership responsibilities, and personal integrity to uphold. But even though they know Jesus is the Messiah, they

don't want to take a chance on him. It is a terribly tragic situation when any religious leaders love "the approval of men rather than the approval of God" (12:43).

### **Judgment by Jesus' Words**

*(John 12:44-50)*

<sup>44</sup>Jesus said in a loud voice, "Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in him who sent me. <sup>45</sup>Whoever sees me sees also him who sent me. <sup>46</sup>I have come into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. <sup>47</sup>If anyone hears my message and does not obey it, I will not judge him. I came, not to judge the world, but to save it. <sup>48</sup>Whoever rejects me and does not accept my message has one who will judge him. The words I have spoken will be his judge on the last day! <sup>49</sup>This is true, because I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has commanded me what I must say and speak. <sup>50</sup>And I know that his command brings eternal life. What I say, then, is what the Father has told me to say."

In these closing remarks, Jesus shows that he is equal with God the Father (12:44-45), that he came to rescue people from spiritual darkness (12:46), that his primary reason for coming was to save, not to judge (12:47), that his words will judge the disobedient on the last day (12:48), that his words are the words of the Father (12:49-50), and that obedience to God's command brings eternal life (12:49). These words are a compact summary of the gospel story, and should be the focus of our preaching and teaching today.

### **Thought Stimulators on John 12:20-50**

1. Why had the Greeks gone to Jerusalem?
2. Which of Jesus' disciples did the Greeks talk with?
3. Explain Jesus' teaching about the "grain of wheat" in 12:24.
4. What did Jesus mean by asking us to "hate" our lives?
5. What does it mean to "follow" Jesus?
6. In what way(s) should we be like Andrew?
7. Those who lovingly obey Jesus will receive honor from whom?
8. Why was Jesus troubled?
9. What did Jesus say would happen to "the ruler of this world"?
10. How did Jesus "draw everyone" to himself?

11. What were the three occasions during Jesus' earthly ministry when God spoke from heaven?
12. How is it that people could witness Jesus performing miracles and still reject him as Lord?
13. In 12:42-43 Jesus mentions certain Jewish authorities who "believed" in him, but wouldn't admit it publicly. Were they saved by this "faith only" stance, or did they need to do something else to be saved?
14. Whose fault is it when a person rejects Jesus?
15. Whose words will judge people on the last day?

# Lesson Nineteen

*(John 13:1-38)*

The other gospels discuss many events which John does not. And between chapter 12 and chapter 13 several important things happen, among them these: Judas makes a secret agreement with the Jewish authorities to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3-6). Jesus gives the disciples directions on where to prepare the Passover meal or Paschal supper (Luke 22:7-13). And as they assemble in an upstairs room of a home at Jerusalem, Jesus eats the Passover meal with the apostles and institutes what we lovingly call, "The Lord's Supper" (Luke 22:14-23). There is an argument among the apostles over which of them would be the greatest in Jesus' kingdom, so the Lord reprimands them both by word (Luke 22:24-30) and by example (13:1-20).

## **Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet**

*(John 13:1-20)*

<sup>1</sup>It was now the day before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the

Father. He had always loved those in the world who were his own, and he loved them to the very end.

<sup>2</sup>Jesus and his disciples were at supper. The Devil had already put the thought of betraying Jesus into the heart of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. <sup>3</sup>Jesus knew that the Father had given him complete power; he knew that he had come from God and was going to God. <sup>4</sup>So he rose from the table, took off his outer garment, and tied a towel around his waist. <sup>5</sup>Then he poured some water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. <sup>6</sup>He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Are you going to wash my feet, Lord?"

Jesus answered him, "You do not understand now what I am doing, but you will understand later."

<sup>8</sup>Peter declared, "Never at any time will you wash my feet!"

"If I do not wash your feet," Jesus answered, "you will no longer be my disciple."

<sup>9</sup>Simon Peter answered, "Lord, do not wash only my feet, then! Wash my hands and head, too!"

<sup>10</sup>Jesus said, "Anyone who has taken a bath is completely clean and does not have to wash himself, except for his feet. All of you are clean — all except one." (<sup>11</sup>Jesus already knew who was going to betray him; that is why he said, "All of you, except one, are clean.")

<sup>12</sup>After Jesus had washed their feet, he put his outer garment back on and returned to his place at the table. "Do you understand what I have just done to you?" he asked. <sup>13</sup>"You call me Teacher and Lord, and it is right that you do so, because that is what I am. <sup>14</sup>I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you. <sup>16</sup>I am telling you the truth: no slave is greater than his master, and no messenger is greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup>Now that you know this truth, how happy you will be if you put it into practice!

<sup>18</sup>"I am not talking about all of you; I know those I have chosen. But the scripture must come true that says, "The man who shared my food turned against me." <sup>19</sup>I tell you this now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe that I Am Who I Am." <sup>20</sup>I am telling you the truth: whoever receives anyone I send receives me also; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

The time is probably a Thursday evening, the place a home in Jerusalem. After the disciples engage in a prideful debate about their individual places of authority in Jesus' kingdom (Luke 22:24-30), the Lord decides to show his deep humility and love by washing their feet.

This act is even more meaningful because Jesus knows his time with the apostles is very short, "and he loved them to the very end" (13:1). We are also told that the Devil has a solid grip on the heart of Judas Iscariot, so no time can be wasted. Each moment must be used to the maximum, each opportunity for teaching spiritual truths must be used or lost. So Jesus rises from where he had been reclining, and begins to wash the disciples' feet.

Now, foot washing is not exactly a job for a King or a Messiah. Since people wore only sandals and walked long distances in those days, their feet would be caked with sweat and dirt. A thoughtful host would, of course, see that a slave washed the feet of his guests or, at the least, that water and towels were available to them (1 Tim. 5:10; Luke 7:44; 1 Sam. 25:41). But here is Jesus, the Son of God, humbly and lovingly waiting upon his disciples. It is a dirty, smelly task. And the irony of the situation could not possibly be ignored by the self-centered apostles.

The fact is that each of the apostles has no doubt noticed the waterbowl and the towel placed conveniently near the doorway by the owner of the home. But it was beneath their dignity to volunteer to wash anyone's feet. Besides, that might be interpreted by one of the other men as a "personality weakness" or as an act done by an inferior to a superior.

Unfortunately, that same smug attitude is still alive and well among today's disciples. A man who wants to be an elder is not appointed, so he becomes bitter and works against those leaders. A woman, who helped serve food at a church dinner, sees that the church bulletin leaves her name out and she is offended. A deacon does not get public credit for a particular act of service, so he vows never to do it again. When we are tempted to think of our dignity, we need to visualize our Lord kneeling before the apostles' feet.

As Ralph Sockman wrote, "Pride of spirit is like the light inside our motor cars. When we turn the light on at night, it transforms the windows of the car into mirrors. We can see our reflection, but we cannot see well to drive. We have to turn off the interior light if we wish to get a clear view of the road ahead" (*The Higher Happiness*, p. 28).

As so often happened, it is Peter who learns the hard way what Jesus is teaching. Paul Butler says, regarding Peter's initial refusal to let Jesus wash his feet and Jesus' statement that Peter would later understand, "Peter was in the dangerous position of disobeying Him and distrusting His demands because he did not

understand and therefore letting his own fallible reason be his guide when Jesus had expressed His will in the matter" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 215). So Jesus lets Peter know that he had better learn to think less of himself or he will be on the outside looking in! And Peter, with his characteristic enthusiasm, quickly decides that Jesus is right (13:9).

13:10-11 makes it clear that Jesus has known from the beginning which way Judas was leaning (6:60-71). But Jesus goes ahead and washes his betrayer's feet as a last minute effort to encourage him to change his mind and let the betrayal be accomplished by someone else.

In 13:12-16 Jesus again reclines in the place where he was before. Then he speaks, and you can be sure the disciples are listening! He says, "Men, I'm your Teacher but I have humbly served all of you. Now let that be an example of the attitude you must have." Nothing could be farther from the spirit of what Jesus does here than for us today to make an elaborate *display* of our "humility" by performing this act for a few people in front of a large crowd. There is not the slightest indication that Jesus intends for this act of service to man to be perpetuated as an act of worship to God.

Next, Jesus reveals that one of them is a traitor to the cause (13:18). The reason he informs them is so that they will be even more confident that he is who he claims to be, the divine and unique Son of God (13:19). And they may also be sure that anyone who rejects their gospel message also rejects both the Son and the Father (13:20).

### **Jesus Predicts His Betrayal**

(*John 13:21-30*)

<sup>21</sup>After Jesus had said this, he was deeply troubled and declared openly, "I am telling you the truth: one of you is going to betray me."

<sup>22</sup>The disciples looked at one another, completely puzzled about whom he meant. <sup>23</sup>One of the disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was sitting next to Jesus. <sup>24</sup>Simon Peter motioned to him and said, "Ask him whom he is talking about."

<sup>25</sup>So that disciple moved closer to Jesus' side and asked, "Who is it, Lord?"

<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, "I will dip some bread in the sauce and give it to him; he is the man." So he took a piece of bread, dipped it, and gave it to Judas, the Son of Simon Iscariot. <sup>27</sup>As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Hurry and

do what you must!" <sup>28</sup>None of the others at the table understood why Jesus said this to him. <sup>29</sup>Since Judas was in charge of the money bag, some of the disciples thought that Jesus had told him to go and buy what they needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor.

<sup>30</sup>Judas accepted the bread and went out at once. It was night.

Paul Butler rightly observes that "Judas was a master at deception. Outwardly no one could tell the difference between him and the other eleven disciples of Jesus. He was an excellent play-actor (hypocrite). He had even faked a concern for the poor (12:4-5) with such finesse that he prompted the others to criticize Jesus at one time. He had fooled the other eleven completely. When Jesus uttered His solemn warning (v. 21) it fell like a bombshell in the midst of that festive evening. The disciples were startled, incredulous, perplexed and began looking round about at one another in silent suspicion. Judas joined in, skillfully portraying one who was innocently dumbfounded" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 226).

The line drawing in the TEV gives an inaccurate concept of the physical details of this supper. The artist seems to have been influenced more by Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting of "The Last Supper" than by the Greek text and historical accuracy.

For it was customary in those days for people to use a "table" which would roughly correspond in height to our modern "coffee tables" (although they sometimes just placed a quilt-like pad on the floor). The diners then stretched out on pads or couches on the floor, with their heads toward the "table" and their feet toward the wall. Each person lay on his left side or elbow and ate with his right hand. In *The Gospel of John*, II, 226, Paul Butler has the following chart and explanation of the seating arrangements that night:

## The New Commandment

(John 13:31-35)

<sup>31</sup>After Judas had left, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man's glory is revealed through him. <sup>32</sup>And if God's glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once. <sup>33</sup>My children, I shall not be with you very much longer. You will look for me; but I tell you now what I told the Jewish authorities, 'You cannot go where I am going.' <sup>34</sup>And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup>If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."

The Old Testament told God's people to "love your neighbor as you love yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). But Jesus adds a new dimension to the command as he tells his disciples to love one another "as I have loved you" (13:34). Merely loving those who love us is not enough. Rather, our love must extend to all people everywhere.

It is love which keeps a husband and wife together in a meaningful relationship, but a lack of love creates strife and division. And the same thing is true in regard to God's family, the church. Love for God and for each other is the adhesive which keeps us together (1 John 3:11-18; 4:7-21). As a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), love is to control our actions, "just as Christ loved us and gave his life for us as a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice that pleases God" (Eph. 5:2).

And as Reuel Lemmons reminds us, "Love is to the life of the body of Christ what air is to the life of man. Without it the body of Christ cannot long endure. When love famishes the frigid winds soon chill and kill. While there may still exist the outward appearance of unity and spiritual health, when love is gone the body is dead." Love, then, is the identification badge of the true follower of Jesus (13:35).

## Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

(John 13:36-38)

<sup>36</sup>"Where are you going, Lord?" Simon Peter asked him.

"You cannot follow me now where I am going," answered Jesus; "but later you will follow me."

<sup>37</sup>"Lord, why can't I follow you now?" asked Peter. "I am ready to die for you!"

<sup>38</sup> Jesus answered, "Are you really ready to die for me? I am

telling you the truth: before the rooster crows you will say three times that you do not know me."

Peter never suffered from a lack of confidence. He had given up his fishing career to follow Jesus he believed so strongly in Him. And now Peter says that he is willing to make the supreme sacrifice: he is willing to go down fighting. Later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter will use his sword to defend Jesus (18:10-11). But he will become confused by Jesus' insistence upon non-violence. And the time will come when, bewildered and alone, Peter tries to hide his discipleship (18:15-18, 25-27).

### Thought Stimulators on John 13:1-38

1. What was the attitude of Jesus toward his followers?
2. Who provided the temptation for Judas to betray Jesus?
3. Why did Peter object to Jesus washing his feet, and why did Peter change his mind so quickly?
4. In what way did Jesus prove his love and his humility?
5. When and where did Jesus wash the apostles' feet?
6. How does pride often get in the way of our service to others?
7. Must we always understand the "why" of God's commands before obeying them?
8. How does this practical service of foot washing by Jesus compare with the ceremonial footwashing done by the Pope and by some Protestant churches?
9. Describe the actual seating arrangements during the Passover Meal.
10. How was Jesus able to talk with Judas without the others hearing?
11. What function did Judas perform among the apostles?
12. In what sense is "Love one another" a "new" commandment?
13. What did Jesus say would be the characteristic which would mark people as his disciples?
14. Was Peter really ready to die for Jesus?
15. Discuss how you have been tempted to hide your own discipleship.

# Lesson Twenty

*(John 14:1-31)*

The Passover meal is finished. Judas is walking through the darkened streets on his evil mission. And the disciples are astounded at Jesus' announcement that Peter would betray him by daybreak. Doubt and fear are in their eyes. So Jesus responds to their need for encouragement.

## **Jesus: The Way to the Father**

*(John 14:1-14)*

<sup>1</sup>"Do not be worried and upset," Jesus told them. "Believe in God and believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. <sup>3</sup>And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am. <sup>4</sup>You know the way that leads to the place where I am going."

<sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way to get there?"

<sup>6</sup>Jesus answered him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me. <sup>7</sup>Now that you have known me," he said to them, "you will know my Father also, and from now on you do know him and you have seen him."

<sup>8</sup>Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father; that is all we need."

<sup>9</sup>Jesus answered, "For a long time I have been with you all; yet you do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Why, then, do you say, 'Show us the Father'? <sup>10</sup>Do you not believe, Philip, that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I have spoken to you," Jesus said to his disciples, "do not come from me. The father, who remains in me, does his own work. <sup>11</sup>Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. If not, believe because of the things I do. <sup>12</sup>I am telling you the truth: whoever believes in me will do what I do — yes, he will do even greater things, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup>And I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father's glory will be shown through the Son. <sup>14</sup>If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it."

The 14th chapter of John is a wonderful treasury of truth concerning the relationship between God the Son, God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit. And the promises which Jesus makes here are based upon his divine nature. If he is not the one he claims to be — the Son of God — then he has no right to make such promises and has no way to fulfill them. But we believe, on the basis of the evidence presented in the Bible, that Jesus really is the Christ (or Messiah), the divine Son of God.

So we believe that Jesus is preparing a place in heaven for those who love and obey him (14:2). And we also are convinced that someday he will return from heaven to take the saved back with him (14:3). There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that he will return in order to set up an earthly kingdom. Nor will he at that time offer to unbelievers another chance for salvation, for "everyone must die once, and after that be judged by God" (Hebrews 9:27).

Instead, the second coming of Christ will be for the purpose of raising the dead to life (5:24-29). He will send those who have never obeyed him "off to eternal punishment, but the righteous will go to eternal life" (Matt. 25:46). And then he will present his followers — those who have loved and served him to the best of their ability — to God the Father. As Paul says, after God's people

are raised from the dead "then the end will come; Christ will overcome all spiritual rulers, authorities, and powers, and will hand over the Kingdom to God the Father" (1 Cor. 15:24).

In 14:4 the "place" where Jesus says he is going is, of course, heaven. No extended treatment can be given here, but we should note that heaven is a prepared place (14:2) for a prepared people (14:23-24). The fact is that there is a literal place somewhere beyond our own universe (or at least beyond our human perception) which is the home of God (Psalm 80:14; Matt. 5:45). Jesus left heaven to come to earth (1:1; 3:13) and went back there after his resurrection (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9). Heaven is the home of God's angels (Matt. 22:30), a place of joy and peace (Luke 15:7; 19:38). But as John also explains, there will one day be a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21), where God will be in close fellowship with the saved. "God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared" (Rev. 21:3-4).

In response to Thomas' question in 14:5, Jesus makes this magnificent statement: "I am the way, the truth, the life" (14:6). Jesus is the only *way* of escape from the punishment which awaits the unsaved. Contrary to the misconception that "all religious roads lead to heaven," the fact is that salvation is only in Jesus (Rom. 1:16; 3:22; Acts 2:38). The Hindu people are lost. Moslems are lost. Jews are lost. Nature worshippers are lost. Anyone today who looks for salvation from any person except Jesus is lost. Peter said of Jesus: "Salvation is to be found through him alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us" (Acts 4:12). It is interesting to note that the followers of Jesus became known, collectively, as "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22).

Jesus is also the *truth*. Teachers can say, "We try to teach the truth." Philosophers and scientists can say, "We search for the truth." But only Jesus could say, "I am the truth." In his unique life we see the truth about God: "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life" (3:16). And, through his death upon the cross, we see the truth about ourselves: "Everyone has sinned and is far away from God's saving presence. But by the free gift of God's grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free" (Romans 3:23-24).

And Jesus is also the *life*. Man's greatest fear is death, and few

people are willing to talk about it. Instead of saying "John died," we say "John passed away." We pay hundreds of dollars to have makeup applied to the corpse so as to make it look "natural"; but all the cosmetics in the world will not change the fact of death. So Jesus came to offer us life eternal, a promise that the grave will not be the final resting place for those who love him. Because Jesus was resurrected from the grave, we have assurance that as Christians we, too, may overcome death. We know that "when the trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised, never to die again, and we shall all be changed. For what is mortal must be changed into what is immortal; what will die must be changed into what cannot die. So when this takes place, and the mortal has been changed into the immortal, then the scripture will come true: 'Death is destroyed; victory is complete!' " (1 Cor. 15:51-54).

Philip's request of Jesus to "show us the Father" (14:8) brings forth a fundamental fact about the relationship between God the Father and God the Son: they are one (14:9-11). We cannot fully grasp the mystery of the Trinity, of how there can be three personalities in the Godhead yet only one God. But by faith we accept it.

In 14:12 Jesus says that his followers would do "greater things" than he did. J.W. McGarvey and W.K. Pendleton wrote, "By this the Lord does not mean that the disciples shall perform greater miracles, but that they shall produce moral and spiritual revolutions which are intrinsically more divinely wonderful than miracles. For instance, at his death Jesus had converted about five hundred disciples, but at Pentecost the apostles converted three thousand in one day. The converts of Paul also greatly out-numbered those of Christ's own ministry" (*The Fourfold Gospel*, p. 622).

In 14:13-14 Jesus speaks of the divine power which is available to those who pray for it. Just as cables are essential to the operation of an elevator, prayer is an essential communication link between us and God. But just as an elevator's power is not in the cables but in the motor or engine, the power Jesus speaks about is not in prayer itself but in God.

### **The Promise of the Holy Spirit**

(John 14:14-31)

<sup>15</sup>"If you love me, you will obey my commandments. <sup>16</sup>I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. <sup>17</sup>He is the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God.

The world cannot receive him, because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him, because he remains with you and is in you.

<sup>18</sup>“When I go, you will not be left all alone; I will come back to you. <sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will see me no more, but you will see me; and because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>When that day comes, you will know that I am in my Father and that you are in me, just as I am in you.

<sup>21</sup>“Whoever accepts my commandments and obeys them is the one who loves me. My father will love whoever loves me; I too will love him and reveal myself to him.”

<sup>22</sup>Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “Lord, how can it be that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?”

<sup>23</sup>Jesus answered him, “Whoever loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and my Father and I will come to him and live with him. <sup>24</sup>Whoever does not love me does not obey my teaching. And the teaching you have heard is not mine, but comes from the Father, who sent me.

<sup>25</sup>“I have told you this while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup>The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.

<sup>27</sup>“Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid. <sup>28</sup>You heard me say to you, ‘I am leaving, but I will come back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father; for he is greater than I. <sup>29</sup>I have told you this now before it all happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe. <sup>30</sup>I cannot talk with you much longer, because the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me, <sup>31</sup>but the world must know that I love the Father; that is why I do everything as he commands me.

“Come, let us go from this place.”

Jesus promises the apostles that God will send them a “Helper” (14:16). The Greek word *parakleton* is sometimes transliterated as “Paraclete.” It literally suggests one who is called alongside in order to assist, as a nurse might stand near a physician in readiness to help with the care of a patient. The Old Testament shows that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, was the source of both physical and spiritual life (Genesis 6:3; Psalm 104:30; Isaiah 42:5), and that he instructed certain people in a direct way (Nehemiah 9:20; Numbers 24:2; Hosea 9:7). The New Testament gives even more insight as to the Holy Spirit’s personality and function. The Holy Spirit personally instructed the apostles (16:13; 1 Cor. 2:10-13; 2 Peter 1:19-21; Luke

12:11-12), and gave them the power to work miracles (Acts 6:8; 8:6; 8:12). Today the Holy Spirit is active in convicting the world in regard to sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8). He lives in the heart of every immersed believer (3:5; Acts 2:38; 5:32; 1 Cor. 6:19), enabling us to live godly lives (Gal. 5:22-23). And he also intercedes for us before the Father (Romans 8:26-27).

Jesus teaches that *loving obedience* is what God expects of us before he will shower us with blessings (14:15,21, 23-24). That kind of heart is the only kind in which the Holy Spirit will dwell. As Paul Butler states, "There are no requirements of mystical rites to be performed to place one in a mood to receive the Holy Spirit. There are no promises here of any ecstatic trances or emotional fits that one may know he has the Holy Spirit dwelling within him. The very simple and plain promise is that the one who believes, trusts, loves and obeys Christ will be indwelt by the Spirit of God" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 255).

The promise given in 14:26 was specifically for the apostles and for the express purpose of reminding them, in an infallible way, of all that Jesus had taught them during his three year ministry. With that divine assistance the apostles went on to write the various documents of the New Testament.

But today there are many people who assume that the Holy Spirit bestows new teachings upon Christians today. Such people soon find themselves adrift on a sea of hallucinations, mysticism, dreams, and lies which invariably begin with someone announcing, "The Holy Spirit spoke to me and said . . ." Let's listen, instead, to Paul's wise words: "We have said it before, and now I say it again: if anyone preaches to you a gospel that is different from the one you accepted, may he be condemned to hell!" (Gal. 1:9).

In 14:28 Jesus does not suggest that he is actually inferior to God the Father. He simply reminds them that he voluntarily left the glory of heaven and became a lowly human in order to save them (Phil. 2:5-8; Hebrews 2:9-18). While here he did not receive the praise he deserved; but when he returns to heaven that honor will be given to him (12:28; 2 Cor. 8:9; Heb. 12:2). In the meantime, he will continue to obey God's commands — no matter what the cost (14:31).

### Thought Stimulators on John 14:1-31

1. Explain the saying, "Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people."

2. What was the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles?
3. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives today?
4. How does the peace which Jesus gives differ from the peace which the world gives?
5. How do we prove our faith in and love for Jesus?
6. In what sense is Jesus "the way"?
7. In what sense is Jesus "the truth"?
8. In what sense is Jesus "the life"?
9. Why will Jesus return a second time?
10. Where is heaven and what is it like?
11. What "greater things" would Jesus' disciples do than he did?
12. How was the Father "greater" than the Son at the time Jesus spoke?

# Lesson Twenty-One

(John 15:1-16:24)

In this section Jesus continues his late night teaching session with the eleven apostles. Every sentence is packed with divine truths which they will need when Jesus leaves them.

## **The Real Vine: Jesus**

(John 15:1-17)

<sup>1</sup>"I am the real vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup>He breaks off every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it will be clean and bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You have been made clean already by the teaching I have given you. <sup>4</sup>Remain united to me, and I will remain united to you. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine. In the same way you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me.

<sup>5</sup>"I am the vine, and you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me. <sup>6</sup>Whoever does not remain in me is thrown out like a

branch and dries up; such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, where they are burned. <sup>7</sup>If you remain in me and my words remain in you, then you will ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it. <sup>8</sup>My Father's glory is shown by your bearing much fruit; and in this way you become my disciples. <sup>9</sup>I love you just as the Father loves me; remain in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

<sup>11</sup>"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup>My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you. <sup>13</sup>The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them. <sup>14</sup>And you are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because I have told you everything I heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures. And so the Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name. <sup>17</sup>This, then, is what I command you: love one another."

Jesus here stresses that he himself is the true vine (15:1). Back in Jeremiah's day God rebuked the nation of Israel with these words: "I planted you like a choice vine from the very best seed. But look what you have become! You are like a rotten, worthless vine" (Jeremiah 2:21). Jesus means, therefore, that he "is the true Israel of God, the seed of Abraham through whom all the prophecies were to be fulfilled" (Burton Coffman, *Commentary on John*, p. 343).

And it is God the Father who will prune every branch which does not bear fruit (15:2). My grandfather was very proud of his beautiful grapevines. I was only about ten years old the day that I found a pair of shears and gave those vines the closest trim they ever received! I can still see the stunned look on my grandfather's face when he saw what was left of his grapevines. There were no grapes at all that summer, but the next year brought a bumper crop. So it is in the spiritual realm that God will prune away and reject the unproductive vines, people who are not living for him.

The only way we can bear the kind of "fruit" or good works that Jesus expects is to become united with Jesus through faith and immersion (Mark 16:15-16; Rom. 6:3; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27) and to stay close to him (15:4-10). If we fail to remain in Jesus then we will become unproductive and we will finally be condemned

to spend eternity in hell (15:6; Matt. 3:8-12; 25:41). Jesus plainly teaches that a backsliding, unproductive Christian is in danger of losing his salvation. And it actually happened to Judas, a person whom Jesus himself picked to be an apostle! Not only must a person *become* a Christian to be saved, but he must *stay* a Christian or he will lose that salvation.

According to 15:16, Jesus personally selected each of the apostles; they did not seek him out and elect him to be their leader. He chose them, just as he continues to choose each of his disciples. As Paul Butler says, "We were divinely elected, but that was made eons ago potentially 'in Christ' (Eph. 1:3-14). Potentially all men are elected to be saved, but only 'in Christ.' Man then must exercise his freedom to choose whether he desires this election or not by coming 'into Christ' or remaining out of Him by obedience to His commandments (1 Jn. 2:3-6, 2:27, 5:1-4, etc.). Even among these first disciples they were chosen by election but they themselves had to choose whether or not they wished that election. One (Judas Iscariot) refused the divine election. Even here they must go and bear fruit if they desire to 'make their calling and election sure' (cf. 2 Peter 1:2-22)" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 280).

### The World's Hatred

(John 15:18-16:4)

<sup>18</sup>"If the world hates you, just remember that it has hated me first. <sup>19</sup>If you belonged to the world, then the world would love you as its own. But I chose you from this world, and you do not belong to it; that is why the world hates you. <sup>20</sup>Remember what I told you: 'No slave is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours too. <sup>21</sup>But they will do all this to you because you are mine; for they do not know the one who sent me. <sup>22</sup>They would not have been guilty of sin if I had not come and spoken to them; as it is, they no longer have any excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup>Whoever hates me hates my Father also. <sup>24</sup>They would not have been guilty of sin if I had not done among them the things that no one else ever did; as it is, they have seen what I did, and they hate both me and my Father. <sup>25</sup>This, however, was bound to happen so that what is written in their Law may come true: 'They hated me for no reason at all.'

<sup>26</sup>"The Helper will come — the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father. I will send him to you from the Father, and he will speak about me. <sup>27</sup>And you, too, will

16. speak about me, because you have been with me from the very beginning.

<sup>16.1</sup>“I have told you this, so that you will not give up your faith. <sup>2</sup>You will be expelled from the synagogues, and the time will come when anyone who kills you will think that by doing this he is serving God. <sup>3</sup>People will do these things to you because they have not known either the Father or me. <sup>4</sup>But I have told you this, so that when the time comes for them to do these things, you will remember what I told you.”

Jesus doesn't try to conceal the difficulties facing the apostles. Since the vast majority of the people hated and rejected the Son of God, the apostles are told that they face an identical reception. They are in the world, but not a part of it (15:19). A ship does not sink just because it is in the water; a ship sinks only when too much water gets into the ship! Similarly, the Christian does not fall from grace just by being in the world; but he will fall if too much of the world gets into him!

What an unusual recruiting procedure! Jesus promises the apostles that if they remain loyal to him they can be sure that they will be hated (15:18) and persecuted (15:20), and that their preaching will be largely rejected (15:20). Not many people would volunteer for a mission like that.

But there is another promise which brings it all into perspective: “The Helper will come” (15:26). The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, would be given to the apostles to help them through the trials which lay in store for them. Burton Coffman says that 15:27 “has reference to a primary requirement for the office of an apostle (Acts 1:21,22); and the introduction of this clause by the word ‘because’ shows that these teachings about the Holy Spirit have reference to apostles, and not to all Christians. It is true, of course, that Christians receive an earnest of the Holy Spirit; but it is simply not true, nor do the scriptures teach it, that the Holy Spirit will guide Christians into all truth. The proof of this is apparent in the fact that ‘all truth’ is something that cannot be accurately associated with *any* Christian!” (*Commentary on John*, p. 355).

Jesus provides this information about the coming of the Holy Spirit so as to strengthen the faith of the apostles (16:2). They are going to need all the help they can get, for Jesus told them: “Everyone will hate you because of me. But whoever holds out to the end will be saved” (Mark 13:13). In the meantime, they are going to be persecuted by people who think they are doing God a

favor by hurting the apostles (just as Saul of Tarsus felt he was being obedient to God by persecuting Christians; see Acts 22:3-5; 26:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:12-16). Many of God's people have experienced exactly what Jesus warns of here. When William Tyndale translated the Greek New Testament into English and published it so the common person could read God's Word, the Roman Catholic authorities were deeply angered. So in 1536 A.D. they had him strangled and burned at the stake. To his tormentors, Tyndale said: "I never expected anything else." Praise the Lord that there are still those who are willing to stand by their convictions, no matter what!

### **The Work of the Holy Spirit**

*(John 16:4-15)*

<sup>4</sup>"I did not tell you these things at the beginning, for I was with you. <sup>5</sup>But now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me where I am going. <sup>6</sup>And now that I have told you, your hearts are full of sadness. <sup>7</sup>But I am telling you the truth: it is better for you that I go away, because if I do not go, the Helper will not come to you. But if I do go away, then I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup>And when he comes, he will prove to the people of the world that they are wrong about sin and about what is right and about God's judgment. <sup>9</sup>They are wrong about sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup>they are wrong about what is right, because I am going to the Father and you will not see me any more; <sup>11</sup>and they are wrong about judgment, because the ruler of this world has already been judged.

<sup>12</sup>"I have much more to tell you, but now it would be too much for you to bear. <sup>13</sup>When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears and will tell you of things to come. <sup>14</sup>He will give me glory, because he will take what I say and tell it to you. <sup>15</sup>All that my Father has is mine; that is why I said that the Spirit will take what I give him and tell it to you."

In 16:7 Jesus reaffirms his intention to send the Holy Spirit to the apostles after he himself returns to heaven. He says that the Holy Spirit will do three things. First, the Holy Spirit "will prove to the people of the world that they are wrong about sin" (16:8) . . . "because they do not believe in me" (16:9). Second, the Holy Spirit will show that they are wrong about "what is right" (16:8) . . . "because I am going to the Father and you will not see me any more" (16:10). Third, the Holy Spirit will prove that the people of

the world are wrong about "God's judgment" (16:11). Any effort to get right with God, without accepting Jesus as the divine Son of God, is an empty and futile exercise.

In 16:12 Jesus shows himself to be the perfect teacher, for he does not overwhelm his disciples with concepts which would only confuse them at this point in their spiritual development. We want to learn all that we can about the Word of God, but that quest is much like trying to walk over a range of mountains only to find other challenging peaks rising behind the first. The apostles are simply not ready for everything that Jesus wants to reveal to them, so that job will be left for the Holy Spirit.

John 16:13 is one of the most abused passages in the entire Bible. There are those who, without regard to the context here, apply Jesus' promise to the eleven apostles to every Christian. They teach that it means that the Holy Spirit is still revealing new truths to people today. (That's what Joseph Smith claimed, and the result was his blasphemous *Book of Mormon*.) If 16:13-15 applies to every Christian, then so should 16:16 — but it doesn't. The fact is that this entire section is directed exclusively toward the apostles. And when the last apostle wrote his last letter or spoke his last message, the Holy Spirit's revelation of spiritual truth stopped completely and forever (Jude 3-4; 2 Tim. 3:14-4:5).

Finally, we should note the Trinitarian implications of 16:15. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit, to God the Father, and to himself. These are the three members of the Godhead. Yet these three interact in such a harmonious way that there can be no other conclusion but that, while each is in some ways distinguishable from the others, they are still the *one God*.

### Sadness and Gladness

(John 16:16-24)

<sup>16</sup>"In a little while you will not see me any more, and then a little while later you will see me."

<sup>17</sup>"Some of his disciples asked among themselves, "What does this mean? He tells us that in a little while we will not see him, and then a little while later we will see him; and he also says, 'It is because I am going to the Father.' <sup>18</sup>What does this 'a little while' mean? We don't know what he is talking about!"

<sup>19</sup>Jesus knew that they wanted to question him, so he said to them, "I said, 'In a little while you will not see me, and then a little while later you will see me.' Is this what you are asking about among yourselves? <sup>20</sup>I am telling you the truth: you will cry and weep, but the world will be glad; you will be sad, but your sadness

will turn into gladness. <sup>21</sup>When a woman is about to give birth, she is sad because her hour of suffering has come; but when the baby is born, she forgets her suffering, because she is happy that a baby has been born into the world. <sup>22</sup>That is how it is with you: now you are sad, but I will see you again, and your hearts will be filled with gladness, the kind of gladness that no one can take away from you.

<sup>23</sup>"When that day comes, you will not ask me for anything. I am telling you the truth: the Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name. <sup>24</sup>Until now you have not asked for anything in my name; ask and you will receive, so that your happiness may be complete."

In 16:16-22 Jesus startles the apostles with his statement that "In a little while you will not see me any more." And he tells them that their reaction to the loss of his presence will be just the opposite to how the crowds will respond: "You will cry and weep, but the world will be glad" (16:20). But there is hope on the horizon, for Jesus also says, "I will see you again, and your hearts will be filled with gladness" (16:22). There was never a more despondent group of men than these apostles were when Jesus was murdered; and never a happier group than the apostles were when they realized that Jesus had risen from the tomb!

Concerning 16:23-24, Burton Coffman says: "In all petitions to the Father, the name of Jesus Christ should be mentioned as the ground of the petitioner's right to be heard. High-sounding prayers offered in no other name, and upon no other grounds, than those of the petitioner, or even ambiguously, 'in thy name,' can be nothing other than an affront to Almighty God. Ignoring or by-passing the name of the One Mediator between God and man is presumptuously sinful. Particularly reprehensible is the custom of closing prayers with a mere 'Amen,' for fear that some unbeliever might be offended by the name of Christ. Loving the praise of men more than the praise of God was fatal to believers in Jesus' day (12:42); and it is beyond question fatal to fall into the same error today" (*Commentary on John*, p. 368).

### Thought Stimulators on John 15:1-16:24

1. What happens to the unfruitful "branches"?
2. What is the only way by which we may bear fruit for Christ?
3. How is the Father's glory shown?
4. What must we do to remain in Jesus' love?
5. What is the greatest love a person can have for his friends?
6. Why should "the world" hate the apostles?

7. Who was the "Helper" that Jesus promised to give to the apostles?
8. What kind of reception did Jesus tell the apostles to expect?
9. Name some modern-day Christians who, like the apostles, have been persecuted because of their love for Jesus.
10. What had to happen before the apostles could receive the Holy Spirit?
11. The Holy Spirit would prove to the world that they were wrong about what three things?
12. Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit would reveal "all the truth" was given to whom?
13. Why were the apostles sad?
14. In whose name should we pray?

# Lesson Twenty-Two

(John 16:25-17:26)

John 17:26 marks the end of Jesus' remarks which began back in chapter 13. In this concluding section, Jesus encourages the apostles to be brave. And he asks God's blessings upon himself, upon the apostles, and upon "those who believe in me through their message" (17:21).

## **Victory Over the World**

(John 16:25-33)

<sup>25</sup>"I have used figures of speech to tell you these things. But the time will come when I will not use figures of speech, but will speak to you plainly about the Father. <sup>26</sup>When that day comes, you will ask him in my name; and I do not say that I will ask him on your behalf, <sup>27</sup>for the Father himself loves you. He loves you because you love me and have believed that I came from God. <sup>28</sup>I did come from the Father, and I came into the world; and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."

<sup>29</sup>Then his disciples said to him, "Now you are speaking plainly, without using figures of speech. <sup>30</sup>We know now that you know everything; you do not need to have someone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God."

<sup>31</sup>Jesus answered them, "Do you believe now? <sup>32</sup>The time is coming, and is already here, when all of you will be scattered, each one to his own home, and I will be left all alone. But I am not really alone, because the Father is with me. <sup>33</sup>I have told you this so that you will have peace by being united to me. The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world!"

Throughout much of his public ministry Jesus had spoken in parables (*paroimia*) which had the effect of temporarily concealing the truths which he taught. He did so because many of the Jews had already hardened their hearts toward him (Matt. 13:10-17) and because his own disciples were not yet spiritually mature enough to comprehend everything (Matt. 11:25-30).

In 16:26-27 Jesus encourages the apostles to pray boldly and directly to God, through Jesus' name or by his authority, because the Father loves them just as he loves his Son. The Father will listen to them because they love Jesus, and because they believe in him enough to obey his commands (14:15).

Then, in an amazingly concise way, Jesus speaks of his pre-existence, his incarnation, his death, and his ascension (16:28). These are the basic elements of that good news which is "God's power to save all who believe . . ." (Rom. 1:16; see also, Phil. 2:5-11).

The hearts of the apostles are filled with the knowledge that Jesus really does know everything, even to the extent of knowing their questions before they ask them (16:29-30)! So they are quick to confess their belief in his divinity. But this admirable zeal and profession, Jesus warns them, is in for a few bruises in just a little while (16:31-32). Over-confidence can be just as destructive as lack of confidence, and each of the apostles will learn that lesson well during the next few hours.

Concerning 16:33, Paul Butler says: "There are two sides to the peace which the believer has in Jesus. First there is the judicial peace which Jesus accomplishes on behalf of man between God and man. This judicial peace is accomplished at the cross where in His body He suffered the sentence and penalty of sin and took out of the way all the commandments that were against man (cf. Eph. 2:11-22; Col. 2:8-15) which we appropriate by being buried with Him by baptism. Having been united with His death by faith

and obedience (Rom. 6:1-11; Gal. 3:26-27) and having appropriated that judicial peace to our souls, we find and realize that subjective peace of heart and soul which passes understanding (cf. Phil. 4:7)" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 314).

When Jesus says, "I have defeated the world!", he is not only thinking of his past victories but also of the supreme victory which will soon be his. Jesus had already defeated Satan by rejecting every temptation which confronted him. Time and time again he was able to save people from being possessed by demons. And here he also shows his confidence that he will win the ultimate victory, that he will do the Father's will in giving his life to make salvation available to everyone and that the Father will raise him from the dead.

### Jesus Prays for Himself

(John 17:1-8)

<sup>1</sup>After Jesus finished saying this, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your Son, so that the Son may give glory to you. <sup>2</sup>For you gave him authority over all mankind, so that he might give eternal life to all those you gave him. <sup>3</sup>And eternal life means to know you, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, whom you sent. <sup>4</sup>I have shown your glory on earth; I have finished the work you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>Father! Give me glory in your presence now, the same glory I had with you before the world was made.

<sup>6</sup>"I have made you known to those you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me. They have obeyed your word, <sup>7</sup>and now they know that everything you gave me comes from you. <sup>8</sup>I gave them the message that you gave me, and they received it; they know that it is true that I came from you, and they believe that you sent me."

Chapter seventeen contains the longest prayer ever recorded in the New Testament. Jesus' words are on the conversational level that can only exist when two people are in deep harmony with one another.

"The hour has come" (17:1), Jesus says, for the Lamb of God to be sacrificed for the sins of the people. The time has come for the fulfillment of scores of Old Testament prophecies (Isaiah 53, for example). Since that first prophecy in Genesis 3:15, all history has been moving toward this climactic moment.

17:2 is a favorite "proof-text" for those who hold to the Calvinistic brand of predestination. But as Paul Butler says, "It ought to be plain to every reader here from verse three that God

gives to the Son for eternal life all men who are willing to *know* (intellectually and experientially) God the Father as He is revealed in God the Son. It seems to us that the N.T. teaching on election is clear enough in one respect. All men have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. God has not recompensed man with divine justice but has, from divine love, chosen to have mercy and save all who will be saved by grace. God has arbitrarily *electd* to save 'whosoever will' in Christ whose body is the church. We are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). We have access into the grace of God through faith (Rom. 5:2). We are all sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus and as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:26-27). The *election* is provided in Christ. God has provided His divinely inspired revelation, the Bible, to invite and instruct men into His election. But men, created with self-sovereign wills, must respond and surrender their will to His will in order to appropriate this election. Faith which issues in obedience to revealed truth is the response God demands of man" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 325).

The word "know" (Greek, *ginosko*) means to be familiar with, to appreciate fully, to understand completely. According to Jesus, when a person has obtained eternal life he knows God (17:3). Such a person understands God's love for him, God's mission for his life, God's plan for the world. And it also means that he has an intimate relationship with God, like a Father and his children (1 John 3:1). All of this was involved in Jesus' work to help the apostles know God in a deeply personal way (17:3-8).

The apostles, then, were specially chosen or destined for discipleship. However, each one had to make the choice whether to obey God's call and whether to continue in it. A successful doctor might, for example, dream of the day when his own son would follow in his footsteps. He may even make elaborate, long-range plans to set his son up in medical practice with him. But the son may still refuse to accept his father's generosity, thus thwarting the father's plans and dreams. The same principle holds true regarding our heavenly Father. He has the highest and greatest of plans for *every person* who will follow him, but we may frustrate those plans and miss out on those blessings because of our personal, voluntary decision.

### **Jesus Prays for the Apostles**

(John 17:9-19)

<sup>9</sup>"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those you

gave me, for they belong to you. <sup>10</sup>All I have is yours, and all you have is mine; and my glory is shown through them. <sup>11</sup>And now I am coming to you; I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, Holy Father! Keep them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one just as you and I are one. <sup>12</sup>While I was with them, I kept them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me. I protected them, and not one of them was lost, except the man who was bound to be lost — so that the scripture might come true. <sup>13</sup>And now I am coming to you, and I say these things in the world so that they might have my joy in their hearts in all its fullness. <sup>14</sup>I gave them your message, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>15</sup>I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but I do ask you to keep them safe from the Evil One. <sup>16</sup>Just as I do not belong to the world, they do not belong to the world. <sup>17</sup>Dedicate them to yourself by means of the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>I sent them into the world just as you sent me into the world. <sup>19</sup>And for their sake I dedicate myself to you, in order that they, too, may be truly dedicated to you."

Having sought strength for himself (17:1-8), Jesus now turns the attention of the Father toward the apostles (17:9). The apostles may have been a little surprised by Jesus' statement that "my glory is shown through them" (17:10). After all, they were prone to fussing among themselves and could not understand a lot of what Jesus told them. But just as the successful athlete brings honor to his coach, the apostles will eventually prove themselves to be great servants of God. And their dedicated, disciplined lives will lead many to honor Jesus as Lord.

In 17:11-12 Jesus asks that God continue to protect the apostles and keep them working together as one united force. Nothing pleases Satan more than for God's children to waste their energy feuding and fighting among themselves. Jesus' prayer was answered as on the Day of Pentecost these men stood united as they preached the complete gospel message for the first time (Acts 2).

Jesus realizes, of course, that the apostles must be in contact with worldly people in order to influence them (17:15). If the apostles had retreated from the world, to live as hermits in a cave or as monks in a monastery, Christianity would have suffocated and died. We certainly must protect ourselves against dangerous alliances with worldly people, but we must proclaim the message of Jesus in every arena of life (1 Cor. 5:9-13; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 3:1-17).

Where the TEV uses "dedicate" the King James version uses "sanctify" in 17:17-19. "Sanctification" (Greek, *hagiasmos*) means not only to be separated from the sinfulness in the world, but also to be ordained and equipped for the work which God wants done. It is not some mysterious experience available to only a few Christians. Anyone who loves Jesus may be sanctified or dedicated by obeying the word of God as revealed in the New Testament (17:17; 1 Thess. 4:1-8; 2 Thess. 2:13-15; Rom. 1:16; 10:17).

### Jesus Prays for All Christians

(John 17:20-26)

<sup>20</sup>"I pray not only for them, but also for those who believe in me because of their message. <sup>21</sup>I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me. <sup>22</sup>I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one: <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me, so that they may be completely one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you love me.

<sup>24</sup>"Father! You have given them to me, and I want them to be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory, the glory you gave me; for you loved me before the world was made. <sup>25</sup>Righteous Father! The world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you sent me. <sup>26</sup>I made you known to them, and I will continue to do so, in order that the love you have for me may be in them, and so that I also may be in them."

As a Christian, isn't it a heart-warming thought that one night nearly two-thousand years ago the Son of God prayed for *you*? We who have believed in Jesus because of the testimony of the apostles (17:20) owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to them.

And isn't it sadly ironic that we often seem to do everything in our power (or perhaps more accurately, Satan's power) to destroy the oneness for which Jesus prayed (17:21). We have divided and sub-divided over just about any and everything we can think of: personality conflicts, personal opinions about minor doctrinal issues, and conflicts over what methods we should use to carry out God's commands. The world is literally going to hell while we argue about how to put out the fire!

The unity for which Jesus prayed was not merely a union of organizations. It was a prayer for the melting of individual hearts into one burning fire of fellowship, teaching, and service. And it was not a call for unity simply for unity's sake. Unity among

God's people (those who are in the world-wide family of God) is a *means* to an end: "that the world may know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me" (17:23). The price that we are paying for division among born-again believers is an increasingly pagan world.

Of course, there is just no way for a man to be one with other Christians if there is chaos and sin in his own life. The way to get right with others is to first get right with God. Vance Havner hit the nail on the head when he wrote: "We are busy these days with union and unification, trying to get the saints together, but what is needed is unity, and that we find only in heart-fellowship with Jesus Christ. Tuning one piano to another is a tedious procedure, but tune each to the pitch of the tuning fork, and when they are in tune with that they will be in tune with each other. Attuned to Christ we have harmony with each other" (*Hearts Afire*, p. 42).

#### **Thought Stimulators on John 16:24-17:26**

1. Why did God love the apostles?
2. Where did Jesus come from and where was he going?
3. How were the apostles to have peace?
4. Explain Jesus' statement: "I have defeated the world!"
5. Over whom does Jesus have authority?
6. What happens when a person obtains eternal life?
7. What is the first thing Jesus asks God to do for the apostles?
8. Who was "the man who was bound to be lost"?
9. Why did the world hate the apostles?
10. Jesus asks the Father to keep the apostles safe from whom?
11. By what means were the apostles to be dedicated or sanctified?
12. What is the word of God?
13. How may a person today who loves Jesus be sanctified or dedicated?
14. Why does Jesus want his followers to be one?
15. Make a list of *specific* steps that you, as an individual, may take to help remove the many unnecessary divisions among Christians.

# Lesson Twenty-Three

*(John 18:1-40)*

The calm seminar-type teaching atmosphere in the upper room is about to be shattered by a rapid succession of momentous events. The apostles are about to see their beloved leader arrested, falsely accused, and condemned to death. The hours between this moment (very early on Friday morning) and Sunday morning will be agonizing ones, both for Jesus and for the disciples. No wonder Jesus asked the Father to "keep them safe from the Evil One" (17:15).

## **The Arrest of Jesus**

*(John 18:1-11)*

<sup>1</sup>After Jesus had said this prayer, he left with his disciples and went across Kidron Brook. There was a garden in that place, and Jesus and his disciples went in. <sup>2</sup>Judas, the traitor, knew where it was, because many times Jesus had met there with his disciples.

<sup>3</sup>So Judas went to the garden, taking with him a group of Roman

soldiers, and some temple guards sent by the chief priests and the Pharisees; they were armed and carried lanterns and torches. <sup>4</sup>Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward and asked them, "Who is it you are looking for?"

<sup>5</sup>"Jesus of Nazareth," they answered.

"I am he," he said.

Judas, the traitor, was standing there with them. <sup>6</sup>When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they moved back and fell to the ground.

<sup>7</sup>Again Jesus asked them, "Who is it you are looking for?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they said.

<sup>8</sup>"I have already told you that I am he," Jesus said. "If, then, you are looking for me, let these others go." (<sup>9</sup>He said this so that what he had said might come true: "Father, I have not lost even one of those you gave me.")

<sup>10</sup>Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the High Priest's slave, cutting off his right ear. The name of the slave was Malchus. <sup>11</sup>Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back in its place! Do you think that I will not drink the cup of suffering which my Father has given me?"

On their way to the garden, Jesus and his apostles crossed the Kidron Brook, a tiny stream no larger than seven or eight feet wide even in the rainy season. But it was the ravine into which the blood of the temple sacrifices ran. No doubt Jesus was reminded of his own role as the sacrificial Lamb of God as he stepped across the brook, its water tinted red by the blood of hundreds of lambs.

We know from the other gospel accounts that Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane, near the Mount of Olives, and spent some time there (Matt. 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-50; Luke 22:47-50). The disciples, "worn out by their grief," went to sleep while Jesus kneeled nearby and fervently prayed that God's will would be done.

Since Judas Iscariot knew that Jesus often came to this particular garden, he was fairly certain that he could lead the large group of captors right to him. However, the men he had teamed up with were not taking any chances. They were armed and, although there was a full moon (as there always is during the Passover), the men carried lanterns and torches so they could search the areas darkened by the trees and bushes.

The other gospel accounts all mention the fact that Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, the customary Eastern greeting. But John is content to mention that Judas led them to Jesus (18:3).

Why was it that the soldiers and temple police "fell to the

ground" (18:6)? It may well be that these men had heard about the extraordinary powers which Jesus possessed and they just naturally assumed that they would have a battle on their hands when they finally chased him down. But to their surprise, they didn't have to chase him through the hills. Instead, he boldly stepped out of the shadows to confront them. When they realized who he was, he was already too close for comfort, so they fall over themselves trying to retreat a few steps.

Jesus has no intention of endangering the lives of his apostles (18:8-9), but leave it to Peter to almost foul up that plan. The big fisherman could not bear the thought of Jesus being taken away without a fight, so he pulls a sword and tries to make a "split personality" out of the nearest guard. But, being a fisherman and not a professional soldier, he only manages to slice off the ear of a man whom John identifies as Malchus, a slave of the High Priest. And no sooner had Peter's victim cried out in pain than Jesus reached over and "touched the man's ear and healed him" (Luke 22:51). Then he rebukes Peter for interfering with God's great plan.

### **Jesus Before Annas**

*(John 18:12-14)*

<sup>12</sup>Then the Roman soldiers with their commanding officer and the Jewish guards arrested Jesus, tied him up, <sup>13</sup>and took him first to Annas. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year. <sup>14</sup>It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jewish authorities that it was better that one man should die for all the people.

Annas had been appointed High Priest (Acts 4:6; Luke 3:2) by Quirinius in about 6 A.D., but he was removed from that office in 14 A.D. It was in about 25 A.D. that his son-in-law, Joseph Caiaphas, became the High Priest and remained in the office until 35 A.D. The Jews at this time, however, still looked to Annas as the real High Priest. That's why Jesus was taken to him first.

### **Peter's First Denial of Jesus**

*(John 18:15-18)*

<sup>15</sup>Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. That other disciple was well known to the High Priest, so he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the High Priest's house, <sup>16</sup>while Peter stayed outside by the gate. Then the other disciple went back out, spoke to the girl at the gate, and brought Peter inside. <sup>17</sup>The girl at the

gate said to Peter, "Aren't you also one of the disciples of that man?"

"No, I am not," answered Peter.

<sup>18</sup>It was cold, so the servants and guards had built a charcoal fire and were standing around it, warming themselves. So Peter went over and stood with them, warming himself.

Some critics have charged that there is a conflict between John's account and that of the other gospel writers because the others mention that Peter's first denial took place in the palace of Caiaphas. However, the fact is that "Annas and Caiaphas occupied the same palace, and the courtyard where Peter denied the Lord was in front of both apartments" (Burton Coffman, *Commentary on John*, p. 190). In any event, Peter now has one strike against him and more on the way.

### **Annas Questions Jesus** (John 18:19-24)

<sup>19</sup>The High Priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. <sup>20</sup>Jesus answered, "I have always spoken publicly to everyone; all my teaching was done in the synagogues and in the Temple, where all the people come together. I have never said anything in secret. <sup>21</sup>Why, then, do you question me? Question the people who heard me. Ask them what I told them — they know what I said."

<sup>22</sup>When Jesus said this, one of the guards there slapped him and said, "How dare you talk like that to the High Priest!"

<sup>23</sup>Jesus answered him, "If I have said anything wrong, tell everyone here what it was. But if I am right in what I have said, why do you hit me?"

<sup>24</sup>Then Annas sent him, still tied up, to Caiaphas the High Priest.

Jesus actually went through six trials, standing before Annas, then Caiaphas, then the Jewish Sanhedrin, then before Pilate, before Herod, and back to Pilate (Matt. 26:57-59; Mark 14:53-59; Luke 22:66-71; 23:6-12). But John concentrates our attention primarily on his examination before Annas and Pilate. And here "Jesus turns the tables. He demands that they produce witnesses to testify. He has no secrets to conceal. These judges knew that they had no evidence to present against Him. The demand of Jesus that they bring witnesses to testify brings their lack of evidence into the open" (Paul Butler, *The Gospel of John*, II, 364).

## Peter Denies Jesus Again

(John 18:25-27)

<sup>25</sup>Peter was still standing there keeping himself warm. So the others said to him, "Aren't you also one of the disciples of that man?"

But Peter denied it. "No, I am not," he said.

<sup>26</sup>One of the High Priest's slaves, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, spoke up. "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" he asked.

<sup>27</sup>Again Peter said "No" — and at once a rooster crowed.

Here the apostle Peter publicly denies Jesus for the second and third time in a matter of hours. He was in a difficult position. So he resorts to lying and profanity to escape being branded as a follower of Jesus. Luke records that after the third denial the Lord, probably as he was being led through the courtyard, "turned around and looked straight at Peter, and Peter remembered that the Lord had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows tonight, you will say three times that you do not know me.' Peter went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61-62).

## Jesus is Tried by Pilate

(John 18:28-40)

<sup>28</sup>Early in the morning Jesus was taken from Caiaphas' house to the governor's palace. The Jewish authorities did not go inside the palace, for they wanted to keep themselves ritually clean, in order to eat the Passover meal. <sup>29</sup>So Pilate went outside to them and asked, "What do you accuse this man of?"

<sup>30</sup>Their answer was, "We would not have brought him to you if he had not committed a crime."

<sup>31</sup>Pilate said to them, "Then you yourselves take him and try him according to your own law."

They replied, "We are not allowed to put anyone to death." (<sup>32</sup>This happened in order to make come true what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he would die.)

<sup>33</sup>Pilate went back into the palace and called Jesus. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked him.

<sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, "Does this question come from you or have others told you about me?"

<sup>35</sup>Pilate replied, "Do you think I am a Jew? It was your own people and the chief priests who handed you over to me. What have you done?"

<sup>36</sup>Jesus said, "My kingdom does not belong here!"

<sup>37</sup>So Pilate asked him, "Are you a king, then?"

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this one purpose, to speak about the truth. Whoever belongs to the truth listens to me."

<sup>38</sup>"And what is truth?" Pilate asked.

Then Pilate went back outside to the people and said to them, "I cannot find any reason to condemn him. <sup>39</sup>But according to the custom you have, I always set free a prisoner for you during the Passover. Do you want me to set free for you the king of the Jews?"

<sup>40</sup>They answered him with a shout, "No, not him! We want Barabbas!" (Barabbas was a bandit.)

John bypasses the trials before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, focusing instead upon Pilate and his willingness to let the Jews have their way. Pilate had been appointed governor of Judea by Tiberius Caesar in 26 A.D., and remained in that office until 36 A.D. He had little respect for the Jews and seems to have pushed them as far as he could at every opportunity. When he moved his headquarters from Caesarea to Jerusalem, he paraded the image of Caesar (whom the Romans regarded as god-like) through the streets and thereby stirred up a riot which resulted in his finally removing the images from Jerusalem. Then he aggravated the Jews by raiding the Temple treasury to get money with which to build an aqueduct to bring water into Jerusalem. He had been sent there to establish peace and order, but had made a mess of things so far.

So he has adopted an attitude of compromise to keep from losing his job. And when these Jews come to see him, it is he who is inconvenienced — he comes outside his palace to talk with them, because that is what they demanded. These very religious people who were conspiring to murder an innocent man, did not want to become ceremonially defiled by entering the Greek governor's home. That would have interfered with their participation in the Passover festivities!

The Jews wanted Jesus out of the way because he claimed to be the Messiah, but they knew that Pilate would not be moved by that charge. So they accused him of being a political enemy of the Roman government, and that put the matter squarely in Pilate's lap (18:31-32). That is why Pilate asks Jesus whether he is, as the Jews accused him of saying, king of the Jews (18:33).

Jesus explains that his kingdom is not of this world (18:36), but that he is indeed a king (18:37). He further reveals his purpose is not political revolution but revelation of truth. And Pilate, who certainly does not "belong to the truth" (18:37), fails to really

comprehend Jesus' meaning, so he sarcastically asks, "What is truth?"

After all, the only two truths that really mattered to Pilate at that moment were these: (1) Jesus has done nothing worthy of death; and (2) the Jews cannot be allowed to blow this up into a full-scale riot. So he first offers to release Jesus (18:39), only to be shouted down by hysterical shouts of "No, not him! We want Barabbas!" It is a sad day when any leader, whether religious or political, shows himself to be empty of courage and integrity.

### Thought Stimulators on John 18:1-40

1. Who led the soldiers and temple guards to Jesus?
2. What is the name of the place where Jesus was arrested?
3. Why was it that the soldiers and temple guards "fell to the ground"?
4. Why did Jesus stop Peter from fighting to protect him?
5. Name the first person before whom Jesus was brought to trial.
6. Why did Peter deny that he knew Jesus?
7. In what ways is it possible for a Christian today to deny Jesus?
8. Have you ever had someone you trusted suddenly turn against you? Compare the feelings you experienced with how Jesus must have felt at the actions of Judas.
9. Why did the Jews refuse to enter Pilate's palace?
10. Jesus said that everyone who "belongs to the truth" will do what?
11. What is truth? Write down the dictionary definition, then give your own idea.
12. Do a little soul-searching by putting yourself in Peter's place. Chose *one* of the answers in each section below:
  - (a) I would have reacted to the questions by: (1) changing the subject; (2) doing the same thing Peter did; (3) standing up for Jesus.
  - (b) The most intense pressure on me to deny Jesus comes from my: (1) close friends, (2) relatives; (3) fellow-workers or classmates.

# Lesson Twenty-Four

*(John 19:1-42)*

The angry mob had refused Pilate's offer of mercy to Jesus, demanding instead that a criminal named Barabbas be released. So Pilate then decided that the fickle Jewish leaders would probably be satisfied with seeing the man from Nazareth beaten to within an inch of his life. Indeed, everyone knew how vicious Roman punishment was. No man was ever the same after a Roman soldier had cut his back to pieces with a whip which had sharpened bits of metal and bone embedded in the leather strands.

## **Jesus is Condemned**

*(John 19:1-16)*

<sup>1</sup>Then Pilate took Jesus and had him whipped. <sup>2</sup>The soldiers made a crown out of thorny branches and put it on his head; then they put a purple robe on him <sup>3</sup>and came to him and said, "Long live the King of the Jews!" And they went up and slapped him.

<sup>4</sup>Pilate went back out once more and said to the crowd, "Look, I will bring him out here to you to let you see that I cannot find any reason to condemn him." <sup>5</sup>So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Look! Here is the man!"

<sup>6</sup>When the chief priests and the temple guards saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Pilate said to them, "You take him, then, and crucify him." I find no reason to condemn him."

<sup>7</sup>The crowd answered back, "We have a law that says he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

<sup>8</sup>When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid. <sup>9</sup>He went back into the palace and asked Jesus, "Where do you come from?"

But Jesus did not answer. <sup>10</sup>Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Remember, I have the authority to set you free and also to have you crucified."

<sup>11</sup>Jesus answered, "You have authority over me only because it was given to you by God. So the man who handed me over to you is guilty of a worse sin."

<sup>12</sup>When Pilate heard this, he tried to find a way to set Jesus free. But the crowd shouted back, "If you set him free, that means that you are not the Emperor's friend! Anyone who claims to be a king is a rebel against the Emperor!"

<sup>13</sup>When Pilate heard these words, he took Jesus outside and sat down on the judge's seat in the place called "The Stone Pavement." (In Hebrew the name is "Gabbatha.") <sup>14</sup>It was then almost noon of the day before the Passover. Pilate said to the people, "Here is your king!"

<sup>15</sup>They shouted back, "Kill him! Kill him! Crucify him!"

Pilate asked them, "Do you want me to crucify your king?"

The chief priests answered, "The only king we have is the Emperor!"

<sup>16</sup>Then Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

Paul Butler writes, "Scourging was a Roman method of extracting from condemned criminals confession of guilt or secrets. The scourge, or whip, consisted of a short wooden handle to which several leather thongs were attached. Fastened on the ends of these leather thongs were pieces of lead or brass or sharp pointed pieces of bone. The victim was usually tied to a post (Acts 22:25) and the blows were applied to the back and loins . . . The body was at times torn and lacerated to such an extent that the inner flesh was exposed and made to look like the raw meat of a butchered animal. At times even the entrails and inner organs of the victim were exposed. So hideous was the

punishment that the victim usually fainted and sometimes died from it" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 382).

In addition to the excruciating pain there were abusive insults heaped upon him by the Roman soldiers. As Jesus' blood poured from the torn capillaries and veins, the soldiers pressed a thorny "crown" down upon his scalp, causing even more loss of blood. Then they placed a purple robe around him and mockingly shouted, "King of the Jews!" And each of them took turns slapping him until Jesus' face was also bruised and bleeding.

Once more Pilate tried to reason with the crowd. But at the sight of the dazed, blood-splattered form of Jesus the Jewish authorities exploded in hatred: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" They would not be deterred from their evil mission, not even by Pilate's admission that he belied Jesus to be innocent (19:6). They even revealed their real reason for wanting Jesus killed: "He claimed to be the Son of God" (19:7).

Now that charge got Pilate's attention (19:8), so he went back into his palace and privately asked Jesus where he came from (19:9). And when to his surprise Jesus refused to answer his question, Pilate arrogantly reminds Jesus that he has the governmental authority to save or to take his life (19:10). But Jesus refutes that notion by saying that God is the one who really has the authority (19:11; Rom. 13), and that while Pilate was certainly not innocent the High Priest "is guilty of a worse sin" for violating his spiritual office in order to get Pilate to kill Jesus.

That was enough to cause Pilate to once more try "to find a way to set Jesus free" (19:12). But the Jews backed Pilate into a corner and delivered the final blow: "If you set him free, that means that you are not the Emperor's friend." That did it. Pilate knew these Jews would make that same assertion to his superiors in Rome if he did not condemn Jesus. So Pilate "handed Jesus over to them to be crucified" (19:16).

### **Jesus is Crucified**

*(John 19:16-30)*

<sup>16</sup>So they took charge of Jesus. <sup>17</sup>He went out, carrying his cross, and came to "The Place of the Skull," as it is called. (In Hebrew it is called "Golgotha.") <sup>18</sup>There they crucified him; and they also crucified two other men, one on each side, with Jesus between them. <sup>19</sup>Pilate wrote a notice and had it put on the cross. "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," is what he wrote. <sup>20</sup>Many people read it, because the place where Jesus was crucified was not far from the city. The notice was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.

<sup>21</sup>The chief priests said to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am the King of the Jews.' "

<sup>22</sup>Pilate answered, "What I have written stays written."

<sup>23</sup>After the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier. They also took the robe, which was made of one piece of woven cloth without any seams in it. <sup>24</sup>The soldiers said to one another, "Let's not tear it; let's throw dice to see who will get it." This happened in order to make the scripture come true: "They divided my clothes among themselves and gambled for my robe." And this is what the soldiers did.

<sup>25</sup>Standing close to Jesus' cross were his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup>Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing there; so he said to his mother, "He is your son."

<sup>27</sup>Then he said to the disciple, "She is your mother." From that time the disciple took her to live in his home.

<sup>28</sup>Jesus knew that by now everything had been completed; and in order to make the scripture come true, he said, "I am thirsty."

<sup>29</sup>A bowl was there, full of cheap wine; so a sponge was soaked in the wine, put on a stalk of hyssop, and lifted up to his lips.

<sup>30</sup>Jesus drank the wine and said, "It is finished!"

Then he bowed his head and died.

Scholars are divided as to whether Jesus was crucified on a Thursday or a Friday. While the answer is not vital to our salvation, it is an interesting historical study. Those who wish to pursue it should read the arguments for a Friday crucifixion in Paul Butler's *The Gospel of John* (Vol. II, 388, 405-08). The arguments for a Thursday crucifixion are well-stated by Cecil C. Ralston in the April 15, 22 and 29th issues of *Christian Standard* for 1973, and by Roger Rusk in the March 29, 1974 issue of *Christianity Today*. (Rusk argues rather persuasively that Jesus was crucified on Thursday, April 6th, in 30 A.D.)

After Pilate's order to execute Jesus was pronounced, the Roman soldiers placed a cross (probably just the cross-beam) on Jesus' lacerated back and made him try to carry it some 650 yards through the streets to the place of execution. But Jesus was too weak from the savage beating and the loss of blood, so a North African named Simon was forced to carry it the rest of the way (Luke 23:26).

When they reached "the Place of the Skull" (Hebrew, "Golgotha"; Latin, "Calvary"), the soldiers placed the cross on the ground and held Jesus against it. Swiftly and expertly, the

executioner probed for the slight depression at the front of each wrist. Then in four or five solid strokes, he drove a square, five-inch wrought-iron spike through the overlapped feet of Jesus. The soldiers lifted the cross, with Jesus nailed to it, and put it into position.

There were two other executions that day. Both of the other men were criminals. One of them mocked and insulted Jesus (Luke 23:39). But the other believed in him and said, "Remember me, Jesus, when you come as King!" And Jesus answered, "I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me." And no doubt he was saved. But this example should not be misused, as some people do, to argue that baptism is unnecessary for us today. We must realize that the New Covenant (including the command to be immersed) had not gone into effect at this time because Jesus had not yet died (Hebrews 9). Therefore, Jesus could offer salvation at this time on whatever terms he wanted. But when the apostles began to preach about Jesus on Pentecost in 30 A.D. they were bound to follow Jesus' instructions to immerse those who believe in him (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38).

Crucifixion was a death reserved for hardened criminals and traitors (Deut. 21:23), but the death of Jesus changed the cross from a symbol of shame to one of hope (Gal. 3:13; Isaiah 53:12; 2 Cor. 5:14-19). But Jesus had to endure physical hell in order to do it.

As the cross was erected and the weight of his body tore at the holes in his wrists, the pain shot along his arms and through his entire nervous system. So he tried to push himself upward to relieve that pain, only to receive the same agonizing torment from the wounds in his feet.

After this process had been repeated several times, Jesus experienced severe cramps in the muscles of his arms, shoulders, and legs. The cramps restricted his ability to push himself upward. And as he hung by his wrists, his pectoral and inter-costal muscles became nearly paralyzed. He discovered that while he could draw air into his lungs, he could not exhale in that position. So he had to force himself upward enough to release the carbon dioxide trapped in his lungs. Time and time again this painful process was repeated. And yet, looking down at his executioner and his enemies, he was able to pray, "Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Near the base of the cross the soldiers gambled to decide who would get Jesus' seamless robe (19:23-24; Psalm 22:18). Also standing nearby were four women who deeply loved Jesus: his mother, Mary; his aunt, Salome (Mark 15:40; Matt. 27:56); Clopa's wife, also named Mary; and the woman from whom Jesus had expelled seven demons, Mary from the village of Magdala (Mark 16:2; Luke 8:2).

It is to his mother and to the "disciple he loved" (probably the apostle John) that Jesus directs his third phrase while upon the cross (19:26-27), thus insuring that his mother would receive care and protection. Then he cried out, "I am thirsty" (19:28), as his loss of body fluid reached a critical stage.

The physical agony of the cross and the even greater load of sin upon him caused Jesus to cry out, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?" (Matt. 27:46). Jesus knew the answer to his rhetorical question: "The Father loves me because I am willing to give up my life, in order that I may receive it back again" (10:17). The agony and the loneliness of this hour would soon pass.

Then Jesus said in a loud voice, "It is finished!" (19:30). His work of personally teaching and preaching was done. His obedience to God the Father was completed. The Law of Moses was abolished (Col. 2:14), and that is why the veil of the Temple split (Matt. 27:51). His life as a human being was over. "It is finished!" was a shout of triumph. And his last words were: "Father! In your hands I place my spirit!" (Luke 23:46). Then he died.

### **The Burial of Jesus**

*(John 19:31-42)*

<sup>31</sup>Then the Jewish authorities asked Pilate to allow them to break the legs of the men who had been crucified, and to take the bodies down from the crosses. They requested this because it was Friday, and they did not want the bodies to stay on the crosses on the Sabbath, since the coming Sabbath was especially holy. <sup>32</sup>So the soldiers went and broke the legs of the first man and then of the other man who had been crucified with Jesus. <sup>33</sup>But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they did not break his legs. <sup>34</sup>One of the soldiers, however, plunged his spear into Jesus' side, and at once blood and water poured out. (<sup>35</sup>The one who saw this happen has spoken of it, so that you also may believe. What he said is true, and he knows that he speaks the truth.) <sup>36</sup>This was done to make the scripture come true: "Not one

of his bones will be broken." <sup>37</sup>And there is another scripture that says, "People will look at him whom they pierced."

<sup>38</sup>After this, Joseph, who was from the town of Arimathea, asked Pilate if he could take Jesus' body. (Joseph was a follower of Jesus, but in secret, because he was afraid of the Jewish authorities.) Pilate told him he could have the body, so Joseph went and took it away. <sup>39</sup>Nicodemus, who at first had gone to see Jesus at night, went with Joseph, taking with him about one hundred pounds of spices, a mixture of myrrh and aloes. <sup>40</sup>The two men took Jesus' body and wrapped it in linen cloths with the spices according to the Jewish custom of preparing a body for burial. <sup>41</sup>There was a garden in the place where Jesus had been put to death, and in it there was a new tomb where no one had ever been buried. <sup>42</sup>Since it was the day before the Sabbath and because the tomb was close by, they placed Jesus' body there.

The Roman soldiers used an iron mallet, something like a sledge hammer, to break the legs of the crucified criminals. This hastened their death by preventing them from being able to push themselves upward to exhale and by intensifying their state of shock. It was not done to Jesus because these experienced executioners recognized that he was dead. But as a final indignity, a soldier plunged his spear through the fifth interspace between the ribs and upward through the pericardium right into his heart. Immediately the fluid from the sac around the heart and the blood from the inside of the heart poured out (19:34). This gives medical proof that Jesus did not suffocate, as other crucifixion victims did. Instead, Jesus died of heart failure due to severe shock and to the construction of the heart by fluid in the pericardium.

The death of Jesus fulfilled numerous prophecies made hundreds of years before. Psalm 22 said that the Messiah would be nailed to a tree or cross (22:16), abandoned by God (22:1), mocked (22:7-8), and have his persecutors divide his clothing among themselves (22:18). The prophet Isaiah said that the Messiah would die and be buried among the rich, that he would be numbered with sinners and yet make intercession for his killers (Isaiah 53:9-12; Mark 15:27-28; Matt. 27:57-60). Other Old Testament writers said that he would be given sour wine to drink (Psalm 69:21), that his body would be pierced (Zechariah 12:10), but not a bone would be broken (Exodus 12:46; Psalm 34:20).

Jesus probably died after 3:00 p.m., so Joseph and Nicodemus had to work very fast to give him even a minimal preparation for

burial because they had to be done before the Sabbath observance began at sunset. They did not embalm Jesus. They simply anointed his body, wrapped it in fine linen, and placed spices and aloe in the folds in the linen. Then they left.

### **Thought Stimulators on John 19:1-42**

1. Who were the leaders who demanded that Jesus be crucified?
2. What was the real reason why the Jewish authorities wanted Jesus killed?
3. Pilate's authority as governor had been given to him by whom?
4. What was the final and most convincing argument that the Jews gave to Pilate?
5. Name the place where Jesus was crucified.
6. Who were the women who stood by the cross?
7. Name the man who carried Jesus' cross.
8. Since the one crucified criminal was saved by faith without being baptized, why should a believer today be baptized?
9. Why did the soldiers break the legs of the two criminals?
10. Name the two people who came to get Jesus' body.
11. What do you think Paul meant when he wrote, "I have been put to death with Christ on his cross, so that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. This life that I live now, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me" (Gal. 2:19-20).
12. What does Jesus' death mean to you, personally?

# Lesson Twenty-Five

*(John 20:1-31)*

Joseph and Nicodemus had placed the bruised and bloody body of Jesus "in a new tomb where no one had ever been buried" (19:41). On the Sabbath day Pilate gave orders for his soldiers to guard the tomb to prevent any real or imagined escape from taking place (Matt. 27:62-66). But nothing — neither puny man nor powerful Satan — could keep the Son of God in that tomb!

## **The Resurrection of Jesus**

*(John 20:1-10)*

<sup>1</sup>Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the entrance. <sup>2</sup>She went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

<sup>3</sup>Then Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb. <sup>4</sup>The two of them were running, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup>He bent over and saw the linen cloths, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup>Behind him came Simon Peter, and he went straight into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there <sup>7</sup>and the cloth which had been around Jesus' head. It was not lying with the linen cloths but was rolled up by itself. <sup>8</sup>Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in; he saw and believed. (<sup>9</sup>They still did not understand the scripture which said that he must rise from death.) <sup>10</sup>Then the disciples went back home.

"Early on Sunday morning" (literally, "on the first day of the week") was the time of Jesus' resurrection. And that day became the special day on which New Testament Christians met for worship. It is important to realize that Jesus left his followers two memorials: the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day. There is a strong, divine link between the two memorials, for when we assemble for worship on the day on which Jesus was resurrected we are vividly reminded of his sacrificial death by our participation in the Lord's Supper each and every Sunday.

Lewis Sperry Chafer pointed out that "following the resurrection of Christ, there is no injunction given to Jew, Gentile, or Christian to observe the Sabbath, nor is Sabbath-breaking once mentioned among the numerous lists of possible sins" (*Systematic Theology*, IV, 255).

When Mary Magdalene got close enough to the tomb to see that the large stone had been removed from the entrance, she naturally assumed that something had happened to the body of Jesus. So she turned and ran to Peter and "the other disciple" for help (20:1-2). And both men, alarmed by her words, ran toward the tomb.

"The other disciple" arrived first and saw the neatly-folded grave clothes, but he remained outside the tomb until Peter caught up and went in first (20:3-8). It was still "early" in the morning (the Greek word *proi* was a technical word for the period between 3:00 A.M. and 6:00 A.M.), but it was light enough to see . . . and to believe (20:9). For the grave clothes "were lying there in their regular folds as if the body of Jesus had simply evaporated out of them and left them lying" (William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, II, 310). It was clear to them that Jesus' body had not been carried off; it had miraculously changed. The physical body had taken on a new spiritual dimension (1 Cor. 15:20,44,50).

## Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

(John 20:11-18)

<sup>11</sup>Mary stood crying outside the tomb. While she was still crying, she bent over and looked in the tomb <sup>12</sup>and saw two angels there dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup>"Woman, why are you crying?" they asked her.

She answered, "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!"

<sup>14</sup>Then she turned around and saw Jesus standing there; but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup>"Woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who is it that you are looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener, so she said to him, "If you took him away, sir, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

<sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned toward him and said in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (This means teacher.)

<sup>17</sup>"Do not hold on to me," Jesus told her, "because I have not yet gone back up to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to him who is my Father and their Father, my God and their God."

<sup>18</sup>So Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and related to them what he had told her.

Peter and John had left Mary Magdalene far behind them when they ran to the tomb. And by the time she arrived, they were gone. She had not been inside the tomb, so she was unaware of what the two men saw and its impact upon them. All she knew was that Jesus' body was gone. And the possibility that the Romans or even grave robbers had removed and mutilated the body was too much for her to bear. So she stood there weeping her heart out until, finally, she recovers enough to look inside.

Suddenly she was face to face with two angels who were sitting in the tomb. They asked her why she was crying. After all, the victory had been won. Satan and death had been defeated! But she didn't know it.

Blinded by her grief, Mary Magdalene didn't even recognize Jesus when he appeared before her (20:14-15). But when he spoke her name, she immediately recognized her Lord and held on to him for dear life (20:16-17)! Although Jesus allowed others to touch him (Matt. 28:9; John 20:27; Luke 24:39), he commanded her to let him go and to tell the other disciples what his plans were

(20:17). And she did exactly as Jesus instructed (20:19), for she knew that belief and obedience always lead to greater blessings.

### Jesus Appears to His Disciples

(John 20:19-23)

<sup>19</sup>It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you," he said. <sup>20</sup>After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup>Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

John does not mention the event, but soon after the appearance to Mary Magdalene Jesus also appeared to two of the disciples as they were on their way to the village of Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).

Concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus, G. Campbell Morgan wrote: "His enemies thought they had done for him, and they were glad. His friends thought he was done for, and they were sad. But heaven watching was preparing the music that should ring around the world declaring the defeat of evil, the mastery of sin, and the ransom of the race" (*The Gospel According to John*, p. 306). No wonder, then, that the ten apostles who were present behind locked doors "were filled with joy at seeing the Lord" (20:20)! What a wonderful climax to a glorious day!

Jesus reminds them of their great responsibility to carry on his work (20:21). And then Jesus "breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' " (20:22). Burton Coffman says, "Jesus' appearance in this verse as conveyor of the Spirit is no contradiction of the fact that Jesus sends the Spirit from heaven, as on Pentecost. Furthermore, even in this verse, the Spirit came from both God and Christ who are one . . . , there being thus no possible denial of the Spirit's coming, even here, from heaven" (*Commentary on John*, p. 348).

Verse 23 has been abused by the Roman Catholic Church, as they teach that their popes and priests succeeded the apostles and so have the authority to absolve or forgive people of their sins. The fact is, however, that this "passage" does not grant the apostles the power of absolution. The verbs *apheontai* (they are forgiven) and *kekratentai* (they are retained) of this verse are in the perfect tense in the Greek. Now the perfect tense means 'an

action having been completed in past time with a continuing result.' Literally translated verse 23 would read, 'whose soever sins ye forgive, they have already been forgiven them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they have already been retained.' It is very interesting indeed that in the other two instances where Jesus similarly commissioned the disciples (Matt. 16:19; Matt. 18:18) the verbs are also in the perfect tense! There the verbs are *dedemena* (has already been bound) and *lelumena* (has already been loosed)" (Paul Butler, *The Gospel of John*, II, 431).

### Jesus and Thomas

(John 20:24-29)

<sup>24</sup>One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

Thomas said to them, "Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup>A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!"

<sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

<sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, "Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!"

Thomas apparently had a stubborn streak in his personality and tended to be pessimistic. When Jesus told the apostles that Lazarus had died and that they were returning to Bethany, it was Thomas who in a "gloom and doom" fashion said, "Let us all go along with the Teacher, so that we may die with him!" (11:16). He was not a coward; but he wasn't very optimistic, either.

And here he flatly refused to believe the testimony of the other disciples that they have actually seen the risen Lord (20:25). This self-imposed unbelief continued for an entire week. It was not until his personal encounter with Jesus on the following Sunday (note the day of the week) that he accepted the fact which the other apostles had been rejoicing in for seven days!

But there is something to be said for demanding evidence. As Burton Coffman says, "Neither Christ nor his religion has anything to hide, nothing to conceal or cover up, no issues to avoid or problems to evade. To every unbeliever of all ages, the

challenge of the risen Christ still thunders across centuries and millennia: *investigate!* Test the evidence; make your own examination of the facts; and be not faithless but believing. Thus infidelity was rooted out of the sacred group, and thus it has been rooted out of the heart of every unbeliever throughout history who took the trouble to investigate" (*Commentary on John*, p. 440).

However, it is not necessary (or even possible) to personally verify every statement before it can be accepted. I have never been to London, but I believe that the city exists because of the testimony of other reliable people. I believe that heaven exists, not because I have personally been there, but because of the testimony of Jesus and the inspired apostles. And that is the point which Jesus makes in 20:29. From that year to this, millions of people around the world have accepted Jesus as their Lord because of the written testimony of the apostles (the New Testament).

### **Why John Wrote This Gospel**

(*John 20:30-31*)

<sup>30</sup>In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.

John could have written a much, much longer account of the life and miracles of Jesus (20:30). But the Holy Spirit guided him to include only enough information to provide the honest inquirer with sufficient evidence to induce belief in Jesus, the Christ or Messiah, as the divine Son of God (20:31).

### **The Importance of the Resurrection**

John Allen Chalk wrote: "The resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of Christianity. Here, by this mighty act of God in time and history, Jesus' claims to be God's Son and man's Savior were fully vindicated. The hope of future life for all men, the authentic Christian faith, the truthful testimony of eyewitnesses, the reality of forgiven sins, and a faith for eternity make it clear that Jesus' resurrection is no sideline affair."

Are you aware that Christian baptism is a symbolic reenactment of the resurrection of Jesus? In immersion we share in both the death and the resurrection of the Lord: "For surely you know that when we were baptized into union with Christ Jesus, we were baptized into union with his death. By our

baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, 'so also we might live a new life' (Romans 6:3-4). It stretches the imagination to think of sprinkling or pouring as being a *burial*, much less something from which one can be *resurrected*. Only immersion fulfills that symbolism. But without the resurrection of Jesus, baptism would be meaningless.

### Thought Stimulators on John 20:1-31

1. Who was the first person to go to the tomb on Sunday morning?
2. Who were the first two men to view the empty tomb?
3. What was there about the tomb that caused the men to believe that Jesus had risen?
4. What did Mary Magdalene see when she looked inside the tomb?
5. What two instructions did Jesus give to Mary Magdalene?
6. Why did the apostles meet behind locked doors?
7. How did the apostles react when Jesus appeared to them?
8. On what day are Christians to gather for worship?
9. Did the apostles personally have the authority to forgive peoples' sins?
10. Name the apostle who did not believe that Jesus had been resurrected.
11. What was it that caused the doubting apostle to believe?
12. Why did John write his account of the life of Jesus?
13. Immersion symbolizes what two events in the life of Jesus?
14. What would have happened if Jesus had never been resurrected? (1 Cor. 15:1-23)

# Lesson Twenty-Six

(John 21:1-25)

Chapter 21 contains another post-resurrection appearance to the disciples by Jesus, along with two incidents in which Jesus teaches Peter to have greater trust in him. The disciples had returned to Galilee, just as Jesus had commanded (Matt. 28:10,16).

## Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples

(John 21:1-14)

<sup>1</sup>After this, Jesus appeared once more to his disciples at Lake Tiberias. This is how it happened. <sup>2</sup>Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael (the one from Cana in Galilee), the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples of Jesus were all together. <sup>3</sup>Simon Peter said to the others, "I am going fishing."

"We will come with you," they told him. So they went out in a boat, but all that night they did not catch a thing. <sup>4</sup>As the sun was rising, Jesus stood at the water's edge, but the disciples did not

know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Then he asked them, "Young men, haven't you caught anything?"

"Not a thing," they answered.

<sup>6</sup>He said to them, "Throw your net out on the right side of the boat, and you will catch some." So they threw the net out and could not pull it back in, because they had caught so many fish.

<sup>7</sup>The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Peter heard that it was the Lord, he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken his clothes off) and jumped into the water. <sup>8</sup>The other disciples came to shore in the boat, pulling the net full of fish. They were not very far from land, about a hundred yards away. <sup>9</sup>When they stepped ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there with fish on it and some bread. <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

<sup>11</sup>Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net ashore full of big fish, a hundred and fifty-three in all; even though there were so many, still the net did not tear. <sup>12</sup>Jesus said to them, "Come and eat." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup>So Jesus went over, took the bread, and gave it to them; he did the same with the fish.

<sup>14</sup>This, then, was the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from death.

Acts 1:3 tells about the purpose of the resurrection appearances of Jesus: "For forty days after his death he appeared to them many times in ways that proved beyond doubt that he was alive. They saw him, and he talked with them about the Kingdom of God."

So here they were, temporarily living on the edge of Lake Galilee. (The Romans called it "Tiberius".) Paul Butler offers his opinion that "the disciples were merely occupying the time while they waited for the Lord in plying their trade as fishermen. Some of them (Peter at least) could need to provide some sort of financial support for their families. Men of the sea, active, hard-working, industrious men could not remain inactive while they waited for Jesus to come" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 447).

Those of us who enjoy fishing might be tempted to use Peter's fishing trip as our "approved example." But let's remember that there is no evidence that he skipped the worship assembly on Sunday in order to do it! All of us need to relax and change our environment once in awhile. There comes a point, however, when "recreation" can be a detriment to our relationship with the Lord and a bad example to others. We must use our time wisely.

I can personally identify with these frustrated fishermen. They

fished all night, with no success at all. Then, as they slowly worked their way along the shore, they saw someone at the edge of the water. Since they were about 100 yards away and it was not completely light yet, they could not see exactly who the figure was.

The man asked them whether they had caught anything, and the embarrassing answer was, "Not a thing" (21:5). It may very well be that it was no accident that they had failed in this their regular profession, for Jesus wanted them to become fishers of *men*. Then the man on the shore told them to cast their nets on the right side of their boat. And when they tried it, they "could not pull it back in, because they had caught so many fish" (21:6).

"The disciple whom Jesus loved" began to put two and two together. The man's voice, his dim form, and his uncanny knowledge of exactly where they would find some fish — all these pointed to one person: "It is the Lord!" (21:7).

This miracle was proof that the apostles could depend upon the power of Jesus as they did his work. They not only caught some fish, they caught so many they had a hard time getting those 153 large fish back to shore. They must have been deeply impressed with the fact that Jesus is their Source, the one who will supply their every need (Phil. 4:13,19).

Well, when Peter heard John's words he pulled on his fisherman's cloak (a sleeveless garment which was knee-length) over his loincloth and jumped into the lake (21:7). Peter figured he was on a slow boat to China. He wanted to see Jesus and he didn't want to wait until they could maneuver the boat and net closer to the shore. By the time the other disciples arrive, Jesus already has a charcoal fire cooking a fish breakfast for them.

"The main point to get from this section," according to Paul Butler, "is exactly the point the disciples got and the one Jesus intended: a dramatic and awe-inspiring demonstration of the omnipotence and omniscience of Jesus Christ, the resurrected Lord of heaven and earth" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 451).

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples on at least ten different occasions. We know that he appeared to Mary Magdalene (20:11-18), the women (Matt. 28:9-10), Cleopas and his friend (Luke 24:13-35), Simon Peter (Luke 24:34), to the apostles here on Lake Galilee, to over 500 people in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20; 1 Cor. 15:6), to Jesus' brother James (1 Cor. 15:7), to the apostles on Mount Olivet (Acts 1:4-11; Luke 24:50-51), to the

apostles with Thomas absent (20:19-23), and to the apostles with Thomas present (20:24-29).

## Jesus and Peter

(John 21:15-25)

<sup>15</sup>After they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?"

"Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my lambs." <sup>16</sup>A second time Jesus said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." <sup>17</sup>A third time Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter became sad because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" and so he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!"

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep. <sup>18</sup>I am telling you the truth: when you were young, you used to get ready and go anywhere you wanted to; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you up and take you where you don't want to go." <sup>19</sup>(In saying this, Jesus was indicating the way in which Peter would die and bring glory to God.) Then Jesus said to him, "Follow me!"

<sup>20</sup>Peter turned around and saw behind him that other disciple, whom Jesus loved — the one who had leaned close to Jesus at the meal and had asked, "Lord, who is going to betray you?" <sup>21</sup>When Peter saw him, he asked Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?"

<sup>22</sup>Jesus answered him, "If I want him to live until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!"

<sup>23</sup>So a report spread among the followers of Jesus that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say he would not die; he said, "If I want him to live until I come, what is that to you?"

<sup>24</sup>He is the disciple who spoke of these things, the one who also wrote them down; and we know that what he said is true.

<sup>25</sup>Now, there are many other things that Jesus did. If they were all written down one by one, I suppose that the whole world could not hold the books that would be written.

Some eloquent sermons have been preached on the two different Greek words which are both translated simply as "love" in the TEV and most other English translations. The first two times Jesus used the Greek word *agapao* to inquire of Peter's love for him, and each time Peter replied with the Greek word *phileo*. But when Jesus asked the question the third time, he used the word *phileo* just as Peter did. The point is often asserted that

*agapao* referred to a deeper, stronger love than the word *phileo* conveyed. However, *both* verbs are used to describe God's love for man (3:16; 16:27), God's love for Jesus (3:35; 5:20), the love of men for Jesus (8:42; 21:15-16), and to describe brotherly love (13:34-35; 15:19). So we should guard against being very dogmatic about the "differences" between the two words.

The text itself shows that Peter was upset by the *number of times* that Jesus asked the question, not by his use of a different Greek word (21:17). Just as he had three opportunities to witness for Jesus in Pilate's courtyard, Jesus gave him three more opportunities to reaffirm his love. And he did. But the number "three" was still a sore place for him.

Jesus expressed his confidence in Peter by instructing him to teach his disciples (21:15,17). Everyone knew that Peter had made a mistake, one which stood out more clearly because he followed Jesus right up to Pilate's doorstep. Jesus realized, as some Christian leaders do not, that when a person rededicates himself to the Lord he needs to be put to work. So Jesus reminded Peter of his great responsibility of preaching to the lost and of teaching the saved (Matt. 28:19-20).

In 20:18-19, Jesus reveals that Peter will also give his own life for God's people. Paul Butler says, "The figure of speech used by Jesus was vivid. The Jews, in walking or running, gathered up (girded) the long folds of their outer garments and fashioned them about their waists like belts, that their progress might not be impeded. The figure then expresses the freedom to go as one pleases unimpeded and unfettered. In fact Peter had just so "girded" himself and made his way to Jesus on the shore unfettered and unrestrained. But in his later years it shall not be so. Solemnly Jesus told him that he would stretch forth his hands to be fettered and bound and he would be led according to the will of another" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 457-58).

Then an interesting thing happened. Peter had just found out what would happen to him, and when he saw John nearby his curiosity was flamed. "Lord, what about his man?" (21:21). Peter and John had been very close friends. And they, along with James, had been Jesus' most trusted disciples. It was only natural that Peter should wonder about the future of his friend.

However, being "natural" did not make his question acceptable. Jesus replied, "If I want him to live until I come, what is that to you?" (21:22). In other words, he told Peter that God's will would be done and that was no particular business of his. It is

awfully tempting for us to say, when given a responsibility, "Yeah, but what about *them*?" As members of the Lord's Army, we must accept our personal orders and let our Commander take care of the other soldiers.

In 20:23 we have a good example of how quickly false information can get started. Before we pass on information, we should make sure of the facts of the case and make sure we are not using facts to hurt others. Whenever someone says, "A little birdie told me this," make sure it wasn't a cuckoo! (Verses 24 and 25 aren't found in the oldest available manuscripts, so we won't comment on them.)

### Final Remarks

The gospel written by the apostle John is an exciting and accurate account of the highlights of the life of Jesus. John did not sit down to write just a biographical work about an unusual man. He wrote about the unique and divine Son of God, Jesus the Messiah. John said it this way: "In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. But these have been written *in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life*" (20:30-31).

Similarly, this workbook on the gospel of John was not written just so you could engage in an intellectual exercise. It was written to help *you* examine the evidence about Jesus so that you would claim him as your Lord and be immersed into his body. If you have accepted Jesus as a result of this study, would you please write to me and tell me about it? Write to: Stan Paragien, %College Press, Joplin, Mo. 64801, U.S.A.

### Thought Stimulators on John 21:1-25

1. "Lake Tiberias" was also known by what other name?
2. Who was the first person to recognize Jesus standing on the shore?
3. What did Peter do when he realized that Jesus was on the shore?
4. Why did Jesus appear to his disciples after his resurrection?
5. What was the purpose behind Jesus providing them with a good catch of fish?
6. How many times did Jesus appear to his disciples after his resurrection?
7. What upset Peter when Jesus questioned him about his love?

8. What steps can we take to stop rumors?
9. Based upon the evidence presented in the gospel of John, do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the only Son of God?
10. Do you believe that Jesus died upon the cross to make salvation possible for you?
11. Do you love Jesus enough to turn away from your sins?
12. Do you love Jesus enough to follow his command to be immersed (if you have never done so)?

