

James Philip Bible Readings

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THE BOOK of JOHN

It is hardly possible to come to this wonderful piece of writing without beginning very quickly to develop a feeling of awe and a sense of mystery, for John is a deep and profound writer, and his insight into the meaning of the gospel seems to bring us to the very heart of ultimate meaning. Anyone familiar with the four gospels is conscious that John stands in many ways distinct from the other three (the synoptics). There are marked similarities in the latter, in structure and in material, but John's account differs in both. He omits many things the others include: here there is no genealogy, no account of the birth of Christ, no boyhood scene, no baptism, no temptation, no transfiguration account, no Gethsemane agony. On the other hand, John alone records our Lord's first year of ministry in Judea, the discourses on the new birth, the living water, the bread of life, the good shepherd, the light of the world and, above all, the Upper Room discourse and our Lord's great intercessory prayer. These are some of the considerations that make John's gospel a very profound and mysterious book. The words of the woman of Samaria may well be used to describe the sense of inadequacy with which a minister of the Word comes to expound it: 'Sir, the well is deep, and thou hast nothing to draw with'.

d) I:I

The literature on John's gospel is immense, and the number of commentaries legion, with interpretations manifold and various. This stems at least in part from the fact that his record seems too different from the others, leading scholars to assume that it is a 'spiritual' or even 'mystical' gospel, while the others are factual and historical. This was the view of critical scholarship until about forty years ago. One writer then said, 'John may contain a few fragments of true tradition, but in the main it is fiction' i.e. not in the true sense a historical record only sermonic and spiritual interpretation of the significance of Jesus. But scholarship has taken an about turn in recent years (so much for the reliability of 'the assured results of modern scholarship!'), and C H Dodd now says, 'Behind the fourth gospel lies an ancient tradition independent of the other gospels and meriting serious consideration as a contribution to our knowledge of the historical facts concerning Jesus Christ'. Two things may be said about this. One is that we cannot really think of John's account as different in kind from the other three; it is only a different emphasis, dealing with the same subject matter. How could it be essentially different? The other thing is that while the above has an important bearing on New Testament studies in general and has given a great deal of illumination in the right interpretation of the gospels, such critical issues and questions do not basically concern us in our study of the gospel as the word of God. The spiritual value of the book is not in question, and our concern is to interpret it spiritually. William Temple states in the Introduction to his Bible Readings in John: 'I am chiefly concerned with what arises in my mind and spirit as I read; and I hope this is not totally different from saying that I am concerned with what the Holy Spirit says to me through the gospel'. And he goes on, 'This is always a legitimate way to read the Bible, and religiously the most important'.

2) I:I

John states the purpose of his having written the gospel clearly and succinctly in 20:31: 'These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His name' - that is, the creation of faith and the maintaining and strengthening of it in the life of the believer. It is therefore in the truest sense an evangelical writing. We may thus note in passing that the written word is the true agent and medium of the gospel. This can be said just as truly of all the Scriptures. It is a Book which inspires, creates and imparts faith and salvation, God's living Word, the Bible.

To believe that 'Jesus is the Christ', the Messiah - this is John's concern. But 'Messiah' is an Old Testament concept and takes us right back as Mark also does at the beginning of his gospel (cf Mark 1: 1, 2). John follows the same pattern in his Prologue, but does so more comprehensively than any of the others. Alexander Maclaren says, 'The other gospels begin with Bethlehem; John begins with the bosom of the Father. Luke dates his narrative by Roman emperors and Jewish high-priests; John dates his 'in the beginning'. Matthew and Luke take us to the cradle and the manger, Mark to the prophecies of old; but John takes us back into the mists of eternity. '

3) 1:1-18

The Prologue of the gospel, as it is called, consists of the first eighteen verses of the first chapter. To read it makes one think of Moses' experience at the Burning Bush. We are standing on holy ground. But when we say this, it does not mean that all we have is a solemn impression of awe, for there is both form and content in these wonderful words. Indeed, we may go as far as to say that they contain in embryo the essence of the record that John gives. There are good grounds for saying that what John unfolds in these verses is the seed-plot of his entire gospel. They divide into three sections, 1-4, 5-13, 14-18. The first of these, 1-4, speaks of the Eternal Word; the second, 5-13, of Jewish unbelief; the third, 14-18, of Christian faith. And these three sections are expounded and elaborated throughout the remainder of John's writing, for in 1:19-4:54 we have the manifestation of the Eternal and Incarnate Word; in 5:1-12:50 we trace the development of unbelief; while in 13:1-17:26 we see the growth and development of the new humanity in Christ, and the teaching here is exclusively confined to His own, the disciples. Thus does John in brief, summary form state what he is about to unfold to us in his gospel. But, brief and summary though it is, it is charged with enormous spiritual significance, and it is not possible to pass from it without spending considerable time studying it in detail. This we shall proceed to do in the next few notes.

4) 1:1-4

The content of these verses is what gives perspective to gospel thinking. The story of Christ does not begin at Bethlehem, or even, as Mark tells us, in the prophetic writings. It begins beyond the frontiers of time, in the secret counsels of God in eternity. Before the worlds began, the gospel was there, and our names were written on the palms of God's hands, This is mystery and paradox indeed, but it is surely the necessary implication of John's words here and, after all, the Scriptures do speak elsewhere of the blood of the everlasting covenant and of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. This, then, is what the gospel is about: This Jesus, says John, of Whom I speak, is the Eternal Word, made flesh for our sakes, He Who in the beginning made all worlds has come down, as Man, to remake fallen man and give him new life, The work of creation in the beginning is simply the reflection of an infinitely greater work of re-creation in the gospel, This is why it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. Life is restored to the dead by Him Who is the author of life in the beginning. This is He with Whom we have to do. One wonders what impression these words made on those who first heard them. It must have been absolutely overwhelming. The trouble with us is that we are so familiar with them that we miss the immensity of what John is saying. That the Power behind all powers should speak Himself into a human frame putting on a face, hands and feet to tabernacle as Man among men - what unspeakable magnitude there is here. This is really the key to everything John says. Given this premise, everything else falls into place. Think of the miracle at Cana (2:1-11) - water into wine- an unheard-of thing. Yes, but if Christ is the Eternal Word Who made all things, Who invented wine, the miracle becomes not only understandable but inevitable. This is the kind of message John is concerned to put over.

5) **1:1-4**

A threefold statement of profoundest importance is made in 1, with three definite ideas expressed. The first part, 'In the beginning was the Word', stresses its eternity. It is as if John were saying, 'When everything began, it (the Word) did not begin. It was, and it was there anterior to all created things and to time itself'. The emphasis here is on the verb 'was' - it is the state of being. It is significant that when John speaks of the creation in 3 the phrase 'All things were made' literally rendered reads 'All things became by Him'. The contrast John makes is between 'being' and 'becoming', the eternal being of the Word and the coming of creation into existence, Word' ('logos' in the Greek) has been the subject of much learned discussion, and scholars attempt to relate it to the philosophical idea of 'logos' as 'Reason'. But it is quite possible to be uncomplicated here, for this reason: The phrase 'In the beginning' in 1 clearly directs our thoughts back to the opening verses of Genesis and its account of Creation and in that account we repeatedly read the words 'And God said....' This should surely indicate that John's reference is not to reason, however divine, but to divine speech, God speaks to men in Jesus Christ. He Who spoke at sundry times and in divers manners unto the fathers by the prophets has finally spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1). In the second part of the verse, 'the Word was with God', the preposition 'with' stresses proximity. It is not merely that the Word was associated with God, but in intimate fellowship with God, the idea is of an active out-going of love in the direction of God. It is this intimacy of union and communion between the Father and the Son that John stresses.

6) 1:1-4

The third phrase in 1, 'the Word was God' underlines the truth that as well as being distinct as to His Person from God the Father, Christ is God the Son. Community of essence is the thought, as distinction of persons is the thought in the second phrase. The A. V. rendering here is the only legitimate rendering of the Greek, and indeed is the only one that makes sense in the context of what John is saying. It is not too much to say that the deity of Christ is so essential in the Christian scheme of things that we can assert that unless Christ is God there can be no salvation. For atonement, which is the heart of salvation, requires Jesus to be God as well as man. What we mean is this: Atonement, if it is really to take place, must take place in man's life and from man's side, for it is man who has sinned. But for atonement to be possible it must be made by God, since it is something so incommensurable and infinite that no mere man could ever accomplish it. The agonising paradox, in which atonement must come necessarily from man's side, and is possible only from God's, is resolved once for all in the mystery of the Person of Christ as the God-man, uniting two natures, divine and human, in one Person. This is the measure of the importance of John's statement here.

In this sublime and mysterious teaching that John gives here, he is intent on bringing us right through to ultimate reality. It is not possible to go further back than this, but is it not wondrously comforting and reassuring to find out that at the ultimate heart of all existence and all meaning there is the Person of Christ. How wonderful to get through and find that ultimate reality has a smile on its face, and compassion, and pity, and love!

7) 1:1-4

We pass to creation in 3. There is at least a suggestion that creation was in some sense the result of the eternal fellowship expressed in the relation of the Word to God, as Westcott points out. This is a fruitful idea, because the impulse of love is to create. There is an alternative reading for 3b, 4, which alters the punctuation as follows: 'Without Him was not anything made. All that came into existence found its life in Him, and that life was the light of men. "This does not greatly alter the essential meaning of the words, but gives a certain difference of emphasis. As one commentator puts it, 'Life, in all the width and height of its possible meanings, inheres in Him, and is communicated by Him, with its distinguishing accompaniment, in human nature, of light, whether of reason or conscience'. This is the view that Calvin takes, though it is fair to say that others take 'light' to refer to salvation rather than the light of reason or conscience. The point John is making is that nothing in the created order has any life in itself but only through Him Who upholds it and sustains it. This idea is echoed in Paul's teaching in Colossians 1:16, 17, and the conception of both apostles is sublime and exalted. What a tremendous 'build-up' John gives here, as he finally comes to 14 - this only Creator and Sustainer of all life, Maker of heaven and earth, the Eternal Word, He was made flesh and dwelt among us. Surely this is the mystery of all mysteries!

8) 1:5

The second section of the Prologue begins here, and now John introduces us to a mystery. This light of which he has been speaking shines in darkness. The 'darkness' was not made by Him, but it is there, and the light has to contend with it. This is the first indication by John of a conflict and antagonism present in the created order, and the implications here are considerable. For John's words assume some kind of cosmic tragedy by which darkness has become a factor in the human situation. He implies therefore, or assumes that his readers knew about, the fall of man as a coming of darkness into the world that necessitated the coming of Christ into the world as God incarnate. Maclaren says: 'John takes 'the Fall' for granted, and in 5 describes the whole condition of things, both within and beyond the region of special revelation. The shining of the light is continuous, but the darkness is obstinate. It is the tragedy and crime of the world that the darkness will not have the light. It is the longsuffering mercy of God that the light repelled is not extinguished, but shines meekly on.' Such is John's summary indication of the fact of unbelief. The word 'comprehended' has an ambiguity of meaning that may perhaps be intentional on John's part. The literal meaning is 'to take down under', and this can give the sense of either 'to take right into the mind', or to apprehend or understand and receive, or 'to take under control', that is, to overcome. Here, then, are two opposite meanings, but it is the subtlety of John's writing that both are equally true. To apprehend light is to be enlightened by it, to overcome light is to put it out. And John is saying that although the darkness refuses the light and will not receive it, it is not thereby overcome and put out. It shines on.

9) 1:6-8

The abrupt introduction of John the Baptist at this point seems at first glance strange and inexplicable, and unconnected with anything that has been said thus far. But connection there is, and it is this: John has been speaking of the fact of darkness in the world, and here is God's provision for the dispelling of the darkness. He sends a man into the world to bear witness to the light. And wherever there is darkness in the world, God wants to send a messenger to bear witness to the light. This is a wonderfully fruitful thought. Is there darkness in your office, your place of work, in your home, in your street? That is why God has placed you there. He wants a messenger there, to bear witness to the light, to point to it and speak of it. This is what every true servant of Christ is called to do and be, and this is the divine provision for the prevention and the dispelling of the darkness of unbelief. What encouragement and what challenge are here! Take the case of a believer burdened about the members of his family, He has borne testimony in his home to Christ, and they have repudiated his testimony. The darkness would not appropriate the light. But it cannot put the light out, for God has placed it there; it must persist faithfully and patiently, for it is stronger than the darkness. In the end, it must produce belief (7).

10) 1:9

The modern renderings of this verse differ from that of the A. V., and the difference depends on whether the phrase 'cometh into the world' refers to 'every man' or to 'the light'. The R.S.V. and the N.E.B. take it with 'the light'. This seems almost preferable to the A.V., although not a great deal of difference in the general meaning results. But it serves to link John's thought here to what he has said in 8. John was not the true Light, but only a witness to it: 'the real light, which enlightens every man, was even then coming into the world' (N.E.B.). This is similar to the thought expressed in John's words in Mark 1:7, 'There cometh one mightier than I after me....', that is, the coming of Christ in His incarnation was the culmination, so to speak of the witness that had been borne to Him down the ages. As Westcott says, 'The mission of John was one and definite; but all along up to his time the Light of which he came to witness continued to shine, being revealed in many parts and in many ways... (John's) words declare that men were not left alone to interpret the manifestations of the Light in the Life around them and in them. The Light from whom that Life flows made Himself known more directly. From the first He was (so to speak) on His way to the world, advancing towards the Incarnation by preparatory revelations. He came in type and prophecy and judgment.' As to the 'light that lighteth every man', Calvin says, 'Men have this peculiar excellence which raises them above other animals, that they are endued with reason and intelligence, and that they carry the distinction between right and wrong engraven on their conscience. There is no man, therefore, whom some perception of the eternal light does not reach'.

11) 1:10-12

The conflict between light and darkness, which has been John's theme from 5 onwards, stands out very clearly and starkly in these verses. One almost senses a ring of astonished awe in his words as he underlines the extent of the alienation and estrangement, when the world that was made by Christ and for Him, no longer knew Him. John seems to make a distinction between the world that knew Him not and the people that received Him not, and the implication is that His own did know Him but, knowing Him, did not receive Him. There is a sense in which we could say, 'How could the world know Him, fallen as it was, and not having been the recipients of revelation?' But this could not be said of His own, because to them, as Paul puts it, 'pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God and the promises (Romans 9:4)'. There is a sense in which all that was necessary for their knowing Him had been given to the chosen people, and yet they had not received Him. This was their condemnation. Over against this, however, stands the new humanity (12), those who did, and do, receive Him, and in them the purpose of His coming into the world is fulfilled and realised: they are born into the family of God and receive the adoption of sons, with all the rights and privileges that this involves. What was denied to His own, because of their unbelief, is freely bestowed upon all who received, and receive, Him. This 'receiving' is defined at the end of 12 as 'believing on His Name'. This is beautifully underlined in the Shorter Catechism, which defines faith in Christ as 'a saving grace whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel'.

12) 1:13

This verse completes the teaching in 12. To receive Christ, to believe on His Name, and being born of God, all belong together, and the one cannot happen without the other. To receive Christ, to believe in Him, is to be born of God. We should note two things in particular. The first is that to believe on His Name has far-reaching implications, for a name in Scripture is a revelation of personality (cf 'Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins'). To believe on His Name, therefore, is to believe on the whole revelation of Him as a Saviour, in His atoning work on the cross, and to enter all its infinite virtue. This is the miracle that we call spiritual rebirth. The second thing to note is that spiritual rebirth means that a man is born, not of blood - there is nothing physical in this operation - nor of the will of the flesh - it is not a matter of one's senses - nor of the will of man - it is not a matter of human reason - it is entirely from above, from God. It is not a human act, but a divine one, not something that we do, but something that is done to us by God. It is He Who brings us to the birth. Yet the marvel is that within this glorious mystery there is a place for real human responsibility. When we are summoned to believe on His Name and receive Him, this is our act, our responsible decision to receive Him. But behind this, and making this possible, is His decision to receive us, His regenerating power. This is the deepest truth:

He drew me, and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice divine.

13) 1:14

Here is John's climactic word in the Prologue, and all he has said thus far leads up to it. On the one hand, we see the majesty of his conception when we take 1-4, with their teaching on the Godhead and Creatorhood of the Son, and read this into this tremendous statement. That Word, John means, has become incarnate in our flesh and nature. On the other hand, we must see the association of ideas with what immediately precedes this verse. John has been speaking of the contrast and conflict between light and darkness; between those who see, and those who refuse to see, the light (5, 10, 11). Those who see are those who receive Him (12), and in the use of the word 'us' in 14 he includes himself and his fellow-believers and gives a further description of what it means to believe: it is to 'behold His glory'. When our eyes are opened to see, it is His glory that we see. Next, when we think of the Word become flesh, we must be clear that this cannot mean that He ceased to be the Eternal Word. Christ is God manifest in the flesh, and at no time, not even as a helpless babe in the manger did He cease to be God. Whatever else may be said, this must at all costs be safeguarded. The phrase 'dwelt among us' is also open to possible misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The word has sometimes been translated 'tabernacled among us'. A tabernacle is a temporary dwelling, but there is no suggestion here that Christ's becoming man was a temporary expedient to be dispensed with when no longer necessary. When He assumed manhood, He did so for ever. He never lays aside His humanity. The humanity of the glorified Son of God is a cardinal point in Christian theology. The risen manhood of the Son is the pledge and guarantee that one day we shall be in the glory also, as men, rather than as glorified spirits.

14) 1:15-18

The introduction of John the Baptist's witness here, as in 6-8, serves to underline the way in which the apostles came to behold the glory of Christ. God sent him into the darkness of their time to bear witness to the light, and it was John, as we see later, who pointed them to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world (29). The correct rendering of 16 is 'Because of His fulness...'. The words seem to depend on 14, and refer back both to 'full of grace and truth' and to 'we beheld His glory'. The seeing of His glory consists in, and flows from, receiving His fulness. We see His glory and know Him as full of grace and truth by receiving of His fulness. This is the force of the 'because' with which the verse begins in the Greek. The reference is, moreover, to the experience of conversion, rebirth, receiving Christ (12, 13), for when we receive Him we receive One in Whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form. One cannot but think of the similarity of John's teaching here to that of Paul's in Colossians 1:15-19 and 2:9, 10, Paul's 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Col. 1:27) exactly corresponds to John's 'As many as received Him' in 12. The parallel extends also to the manner in which this fulness is imparted: for Paul goes on to say, 'Whom we preach, warning....and teaching....that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus' (Col. 1:28), while John makes reference to the testimony and preaching of John the Baptist. It is in the context of the preaching of the Word, and through that preaching, that a whole Christ, in all His fulness, is mediated to the hearts of men.

15) 1:15-18

Two further points remain for comment in these verses. First of all, the phrase in 16, 'grace for grace'. The R.S.V. translates 'grace upon grace', while the Greek reads 'grace instead of grace'. What John means is that in the fulness that we receive in Christ, God gives us a constant supply of grace, grace that is succeeded by more grace, to meet every need that arises. Grace for every fresh situation, every new crisis, that arises in our lives His is a full and sufficient salvation. It is not possible to conceive of anything bigger than the fulness of the Godhead - and it is ours, in Christ.

Secondly, in 17, there is a double contrast presented, between law and grace, Moses and Jesus, and between 'giver' and 'came'. Moses was distinct from the law; the law was given by him, but he was not the law. But grace and truth came by Jesus Christ because He is grace and truth. Westcott comments, 'The Law is represented as an addition to the essential scheme of redemption (cf Galatians 3:19, Romans 5:20). It was 'given' for a special purpose. On the other hand the Gospel 'came', as if, according to the orderly and due course of the divine plan, this was the natural issue of all that had gone before. Judaism was designed to meet special circumstances; Christianity satisfies man's essential nature.... The Gospel is spoken of as 'grace', so far as it is the revelation of God's free love, and as 'truth', so far as it presents the reality and not the mere images and shadows of divine things.'

Finally, in 18, John justifies the claim of the gospel to be the Truth. The Christian revelation is an exclusive revelation. There is no other way of knowing God except through Jesus Christ. And this, John means, is what I am now going to write about.

16) 1:19-28

These verses begin the first main section of John's record (1:19-4:54), which is an explication of the opening thesis of the Prologue, 'the manifestation of the Eternal Word'. Godet sums up the section as follows: "Jesus is declared to be the Messiah by John the Baptist; a first group of disciples is formed round Him, His glory shines forth in some miraculous manifestations in the circle of private life. Then He inaugurates His public ministry in the Temple at Jerusalem. But this attempt being frustrated, He confines Himself to teaching while working miracles, and to gathering round Him new adherents by means of baptism. Finally, observing that even in this more modest form His activity gives offence to the dominant party at Jerusalem, He retires to Galilee, after sowing by the way the germs of faith in Samaria."

The section divides into two parts, as see 2:11 and 4:54, each recording a sojourn in Judaea which ended in a return to Cana of Galilee, with each return signalled by a miracle wrought there. This kind of analysis is useful as a background for more detailed study, and will help us to see the structure of John's testimony in his gospel. There is nothing haphazard in his presentation of the truth. Visionary and mystical as he may be thought by some to be, he has nevertheless a keen, logical mind; he knows what he wants to say, and follows a carefully thought out and constructed plan in doing so.

17) 1:19-28

John the Baptist's ministry had clearly been a sensation in the land, causing widespread interest, concern and comment. Hence the official deputation sent to him by the rulers, to discover its significance. Was he the long-promised Messiah? There must clearly have been a sense of expectation that something significant was about to happen. Was this it? This was their question. But John explicitly disavows any claim to be the awaited Messiah, or Elijah either (the reference in the latter being in Malachi 4: 5, 6), or the prophet mentioned by Moses ('A prophet shall the Lord God raise up unto you, like unto me'). "I am a voice", he says (cf Isa.40:3). Two points should be noted in this connection. The first is - and all the commentators underline it - the humility of John. The testimony he bears to Jesus is a self-effacing testimony. He refuses to claim any positive identity. I am not important, he says. I am simply the mouthpiece of God. I, in myself, am not significant; I am simply taken up and used of God. It is what I say, not who I am, that is important. This is surely a pattern for witness today - anonymity, and not the man but the message. No one can give the impression at one and the same time that he himself is some great one and that Jesus is a great Saviour. In order to magnify the Saviour, all that one can afford to be is a voice, and this is true for preacher and witness alike. This is summed up very succinctly in a later word of John's in 3:30: 'He must increase, but I must decrease'. In the words of the well-known hymn, it must be a question not only of 'Less of self and more of Thee', but ultimately of 'None of self, and all of Thee'.

18) 1:19-28

There are two further points to note in these verses. One is what might be called the essential ambiguity of John's ministry. On the one hand, there can be no doubt that a genuine spiritual awakening had taken place through his preaching, widespread, deep and on a national scale. It was a time of refreshing from the Lord, in its own right. On the other hand, however, there is a sense in which it was a negative, preparatory movement, symbolised by water-baptism as opposed to the Spirit-baptism that was to follow (26), Pentecost. Of necessity this was so, since John's ministry stands on the borderline between two dispensations, the old and the new, belonging therefore to both. In relation to the old, the movement was comparable to the great movements of revival in old time, such as in the times of Josiah, Ezra and Nehemiah; but in relation to the new, it had a preparatory significance.

The other point concerns what John says in 26b, "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not". He does not necessarily mean that Jesus was even then standing among the crowd. The verb is in the perfect tense, - "there has come one among you" - and John is in effect saying, "He has come into the world, the long promised Messiah, and you have not recognised Him". It is a repetition of what has already been said in the Prologue (10). This bears witness, then, to the blindness of the Jews in face of the light in their midst, but John's words can be applied very worthily and accurately in a more general sense, because they are true about every act of witness. When we faithfully bear testimony to Christ, it is always true that an unseen Presence stands in the midst, for the risen Christ promises to be present when His people bear witness to Him. He is always standing there. What encouragement there is for us here!

19) 1:29-36

Bishop Ryle says of 29 that as one star differs from another star in glory, this is one of the texts that shine more brightly than others in the Scriptures. It is a glorious, sublime statement, but familiarity with it may conceivably obscure its significance. It needs to be pondered quietly and patiently. It was spoken by John the Baptist, an orthodox Jew, son of a Priest. It was spoken to orthodox Jews deeply versed in Old Testament Scripture. We must remember these facts when we seek to interpret its meaning. There are those who take from the phrase, 'the Lamb of God' lessons about the meek and gentle nature of Christ. One well-known phrase speaks of 'the lamb-like character' of the Son of God. But this is surely to miss the point John is making. He is not thinking of meekness and gentleness as such here. The phrase 'the Lamb of God' could only have certain associations for an orthodox, pious Jew; he would immediately think, in the first instance, of the great Messianic passage in Isaiah 53, where the suffering servant of God is spoken of as a lamb led to the slaughter. And his mind would just as inevitably go back further to the story of the Passover lamb in Exodus 12. And further back still, he would think of the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22. 'Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' asked Isaac and Abraham replied, 'God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering'. Is it without significance that the first mention of a lamb in the Old Testament is in that story, and the first mention of a lamb in the New Testament is in John's words? God has indeed provided Himself a lamb for a burnt offering!

20) 1:29-36

There are two thoughts in particular that emerge from a consideration of the second part of 29. We note first in passing, however, that it is the sin of the world, not merely sins, that He bears away. It was the dark mass of the world's sin that our Lord took upon Himself. In thus taking that sin upon Himself - this is the first point - He stood in for us as a Divine Substitute. The old hymn expresses this truth not only beautifully but in a theologically accurate way:

Bearing shame and scoffing rude
In my place condemned He stood
Sealed my pardon with His blood
Hallelujah: what a Saviour.

The second thought involved in this word is that in bearing the world's sin He bore it away. The idea expressed in the levitical ordinance of the scapegoat (Lev. 16) is useful in this connection as an illustration and illumination of John's meaning. The priest laid his hands on the head of the scapegoat, thus transferring the sins of the people to the hapless victim; whereupon the goat was led away into the wilderness to wander in a land not inhabited, bearing away out of sight the sins of the people.

The remaining verses of the passage speak of the inner debate in John's heart and the secret intimations that must have come to him as he abode in the wilderness till the time of his showing to Israel. He did not know who Messiah was, but was given this indication by God (33), and put two and two together when he saw the Spirit descending on Jesus at His baptism. Thus he bore witness that Jesus was the Son of God and the sacrificial Lamb.

21) 1:37-39

Our Lord's encounter with the first two disciples is highly significant. The more one thinks of His question to them, 'What seek ye?', the more one sees its profundity. It is as if Jesus had said to them, 'What is your heart's need? What are you really after?' This is very penetrating. Do people always know what it is they are looking for? The object of life, what men ask of life, - this is a deeper question than we often realise, but in one way or another, we are always asking it. Is it a sense of direction, a sense of meaning, a sense of purpose that we seek? All this is surely implied in our Lord's penetrating question to these two men. In answering as He did, He was not rebuffing them, for it was not a merely curious question that they asked, He was rather saying to them, in effect, what He later said to blind Bartimaeus, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" And one may be very sure that the way in which Jesus spoke these three words, "What seek ye?", and the look on His face when He spoke them, must have been full of invitation and encouragement to them. The words in His second reply, "Come and see", are 'loaded' words. Both of them are used in the Scriptures as symbols and emblems of faith. To 'come' to Him is to experience His salvation; to 'see' Him is to pass from darkness into light. What He said therefore to these men was a double invitation to faith. And, we are told in 39, "they came and saw....and abode". This is the history of salvation; this is how it happens.

22) 1:40-42

The first thing that Andrew, one of the two disciples mentioned in the previous verses, did was to bring his own brother to Jesus. Is not this wonderful? There is something very moving when a man leads his natural brother into a relationship with Christ so that he becomes a spiritual brother too. Someone has pointed out that Andrew is scarcely ever mentioned in Scripture except in terms of introducing someone to Christ: it was he who brought the young lad with the five loaves and two small fishes to Jesus, as also the Greeks, when they came to the disciples saying 'Sirs, we would see Jesus'.

But 41 can be read another way: "He was the first to find his own brother", the implication being that the other disciple (who surely was John) went off to find his, but Andrew was first to do so. And the way he did so was not by argument or discussion but by testimony and proclamation. And when he said to him, 'We have found the Messiah', it was as if he had said 'We have found the answer, and what we have been seeking all our lives'. This is the kind of testimony that is able to bring others to Christ. Our Lord's words to Simon (43), 'Thou art...thou shalt be' ring like glorious music in the ear. They are prophetic of the gospel's grace and power in any and every life that is brought to Christ. By the grace of God, what we are today, as we read these words, need not be determinative of all our future, for there is a Saviour, risen, exalted and all-powerful. Who is able to say - and does say - to discouraged and despairing hearts, 'Thou shalt be'.

23) 1:43-45

The other disciples sought Christ and found Him, but here, Christ seeks out Philip unsought. This bears testimony to the variety of religious experience and to the danger we fall into when we tend, as we sometimes do, to insist that everyone must come to a knowledge of salvation in the same way. Everyone does not come the same way, and there can therefore be no 'cut-and-dried' blueprint of salvation. Some come, and find, after long and earnest seeking, and others, as those that stumble on something unsought. Our Lord describes this in two of His parables in Matt. 13:44-46, about the man who found treasure hid in his field and the man who found the pearl of great price. With the one, it was treasure unsought, with the other it was his trade: his job was seeking pearls. But, once he had been found, the previous pattern began to assert itself: the word of authority, and the call to obedience. We should particularly note what Philip said to Nathaniel in 45 - not, 'I have found....' but 'We have found....' John's writing here is very compact, almost elliptical, and we must assume that when Philip was found by Jesus he was introduced into the disciple band to become part of it. This is very significant. The New Testament does not recognise a Christian experience that exists apart from the fellowship of believers. To be a 'loner' is something entirely anomalous, and there is no warrant or encouragement for it in the Scriptures. To want to be 'out on a limb' argues an independence of spirit that has little in common with the New Testament doctrine of membership in the body of Christ.

24) 1:45-51

Nathanael, it seems likely, is the Bartholomew mentioned by the other gospel writers. He is mentioned here, and in 21:2, in a permanent position among the other disciples. There is no mention made in the Synoptists of the name Nathanael, just as there is no mention in John of the name Bartholomew. In the lists of apostles in Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:16, and Luke 6:14, Bartholomew is coupled with Philip's name. These considerations weigh heavily in bringing us to the conclusion we have about Nathanael's identity. We should note how well-informed scripturally Philip is. He is deeply taught in the Word and has already been able to interpret his experience in terms of a discovery of the long-promised Messiah. This surely bears witness to the value of one's early training in the Scriptures: when a true experience of Christ comes, all that we have learned lights up with new meaning and glory, and enables us to forge ahead spiritually. We should also note, however, the mistake Philip made in calling Jesus the son of Joseph. We know that he was not Joseph's son, but Philip did not know at this time (we are sure he learned it later). This should be an encouragement to us. It is quite conceivable, indeed inevitable, that a new believer should make serious mistakes in his theology while nevertheless having a genuine spiritual experience, and this should warn us against brushing aside or dismissing as of doubtful value a believer who cannot as yet dot all the "i's" and stroke all the "t's" of our theological systems. Rome was not built in a day, and we ourselves did not attain theological orthodoxy in a day either.

25) **1:45-51**

Nathanael was a man with doubts (46), and not untouched by prejudice. We can learn from Philip here how to deal with such problems. One does not argue with prejudice, for prejudiced people are not generally amenable to argument. What Philip said was, 'Come and see'. And, give Nathanael his due, he was impressed with what Philip said, in spite of himself, and went. Thank God when prejudice begins to crumble. Our Lord's words to Nathanael (47, 50, 51) are full of significance. There is more in them than a first reading of them generally yields. Scholars are fairly certain that there is a reference in 47 to the story of Jacob, and particularly to his experience at Peniel in Genesis 32 when he wrestled with the angel. The force of the phrase 'in whom there is no guile' is that up to the time of Peniel there was a great deal of guile in Jacob, and only in wrestling with the angel was the guile driven out of him and he became a new person. In speaking of Nathanael in such terms we must assume that Jesus had something like this in mind. Nathanael was sitting under the fig tree meditating, thinking out the whole disturbing upheaval that had come to the community through the preaching of John the Baptist, wrestling with his doubts and, still more, it may be, with his prejudices. And Jesus sees in him another case of Jacob wrestling with God and emerging into newness of life even as he came to Jesus. 'Here is a man', says Jesus, 'for whom the wrestling is already over, and who has become a prince with God'. It seems just as clear that there is another reference to Jacob's experience in 51 - to Jacob's ladder in Genesis 28. But why the repeated reference to Jacob at this point? Well, in 43 we read that Jesus was travelling from the south northwards to Galilee, and He and His disciples would have passed by Bethel and Jabbok, places full of association for the patriarch, and may well have made comment on the incidents to the disciples on the way. This must remain conjecture on our part, but it is surely one possible explanation of the references to the patriarch.

26) 2:1-11

This is a lovely story with a fragrance all its own, but it raises questions, and the kind of questions it raises are: What are the lessons it intends to teach us, and what purpose has John in recording it? In the many interpretations that have been placed upon it we have a good example of the proverb which speaks of not being able to see the wood for the trees. Many speak, for example, of human marriage being 'hallowed by our Lord's gracious presence at the marriage in Cana of Galilee' - words spoken in the course of most marriage ceremonies in our Church. This is true, and it is a very worthy thought, but it is not the point of the story. Others have stressed the blessedness of inviting the Saviour of men to a marriage and having His disciples also as guests. This is a great example to follow, indeed, and a legitimate lesson to draw. But this is not the real point of the story, and it is not why John recorded it. Others have speculated as to whose wedding it was; some suggest it was John's, others a nephew or niece of Mary's, others Mary Magdalene. It is idle to speculate, for we are not told. And the reason we are not told is that the bride and bridegroom do not come into the story at all. Everything is in the background except the Lord and the sign He performed. It is not the marriage, but the miracle, that holds the stage. And the key to the message that John wants us to grasp is found in 11. The word 'miracle' here would be better translated 'sign'; it is used by John to describe miracles that were performed with a particular purpose, having an underlying meaning and conveying a particular message. It is thus that we must interpret what happened at the wedding at Cana of Galilee.

27) 2:1-11

There would seem to be a link between the story of the miracle at Cana and the last verses of the previous chapter, when Jesus spoke of the heavens opening and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man. The message there, so to speak, is: Heaven brought down to earth through Christ. This is what we have at Cana, where power from on high breaks in to work wonders - the powers of the world to come invading the human situation. That, says John, is what the gospel is about. The Word was made flesh; the water was made into wine. The two things belong together. There seems also to be a reference back to 1:14, where John says, 'We beheld His glory'. Here also (11) that glory was manifested, and the result was faith: His disciples believed on Him. But what precisely constituted the manifesting of His glory in this miracle? What is the significance of it? For John there was a deep symbolism in the act of power behind and beyond the gracious act that saved the day for that particular bridal feast, because he saw in it the symbol of what the coming of Jesus means. This sign - with the others which follow it in John's record - points to the new order in Christ. The message is simple and to the point: It is the difference that Jesus makes when He comes to a human situation, a human heart, a human life. He touches nothing that He does not transform. And as the disciples watched the miracle, this truth dawned on them; they 'got the message', and believed.

28) 2:1-11

Mary's words to our Lord gives us a pertinent lesson on prayer. She did not know what Jesus would do in the situation of need that arose, nor did she presume to tell Him what to do. All she did was to put the facts before Him: "They have no wine". Sometimes this is as much as we can do in prayer. The water pots in 6 stand as a symbol of the old economy, the whole Old Testament ritual as such, and what John is saying is that the old ritual with its symbol of water is passing away and a new is taking over, symbolised by wine. It was the new wine of the kingdom of God that flowed on that wedding day. We may also link this with the distinction drawn by John the Baptist in the previous chapter between water-baptism and the baptism of the Spirit, for the thought is the same. The dispensation of 'water' was not meaningless, but its power was limited and partial. The old dispensation was one of promise, the new is one of fulfilment. The old was therefore suggestive, symbolic, preparatory, a shadow, while the new is the reality to which all the shadows point. All this inclines us to see something of significance even in the opening phrase, 'the third day', for inescapably the new order is associated in its fulness with Christ's resurrection on the third day. The signs always point forward to the climax in His death and resurrection. And, watching this simple, gracious miracle at Cana, John and his companions suddenly realised it had this deeper significance, that it was saying something to them all about the purpose of His coming.

29) 2:1-11

One can easily see the evangelistic value of this sign, John is in effect saying: 'This is what our Saviour can do for you, if only you will trust Him He can make all things new - old things will pass away if you believe in His Name.' What the apostle is crying out, if we have ears to hear, is, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man that trusteth in Him'. Just as in the beginning, the Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the waters and on the darkness of the deep, so here the Incarnate Word brings order out of chaos and beauty out of nought.

A word about the phrase 'Mine hour is not yet come', Christ's glory was manifested, but only partially. It was only a glimpse of it the disciples had, and it was because His hour was not yet come. The full glory (i) awaited the cross, his hour of passion and victory; and (ii) awaits the crowning Day. There is a 'not yet' in the gospel We are saved in hope. In this sense, the miracle points forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb, when the glorious consummation of full redemption takes place, and all things will be new.

Finally, we are told that the disciples believed in Him. The 'sign' was effectual. This is what made and strengthened faith for them and it should make and strengthen faith for us too. We see, then, the value of understanding the Word, finding its meaning through the patient teaching of the Spirit, for it is through the Word that faith dawns and doubts depart.

30) 2:12-17

John records this episode of the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, but the other three gospel writers record it at the end. This raises a very real question. Has there been confusion here, as some scholars think, and was there in fact only one cleansing? If so, either John or the others have got the chronology wrong. Not that this in itself would present a difficulty, because we know that on occasion the evangelists were not over concerned about presenting a chronological sequence in their narrative - Matthew, for example, deliberately groups incidents and teaching together with a particular didactic purpose, departing from the exact chronology of things. But the question still remains: Did Jesus thus act on two occasions or only one? There is surely nothing intrinsically impossible in the idea that He did so twice. Why should He not have done so twice, if occasion offered? And, if so, it is quite feasible that He should have done so at the beginning and at the end of His public ministry. Two considerations lend weight to this possibility. The first is that while in John Jesus speaks of His Father's house as a house of merchandise, the other gospels speak of their having made it a den of thieves (Matthew 21:13) - a stronger and perhaps more sinister and fateful phrase, as if to suggest that, while Christ's action at the beginning of His ministry may have been done in hope, the situation by the end of the time had so deteriorated that nothing was left but judgment. In the second place, John's words in 19 about destroying the temple are not recorded by the other three, yet the latter do record the twisted version of Jesus' statement brought against Him at His trial (Matthew 26:61) "Thus they attest the accuracy of the narrative even while they seem not to have known of the incident".

31) 2:12-17

We should take note of the significance of the position John gives the incident in his record. Thus far in his account of the gospel he has underlined the new experience in the lives of the disciples (Chapter 1), followed by the lesson, in the story of the wedding at Cana (Chapter 2), on the difference that Jesus makes, the transformation of water into wine symbolizing the change from the old order to the new. And now, in the temple cleansing incident, there is the clear message that transformation is not possible without purging. Not without pain is water turned into wine. Here is the idea of collision between light and darkness mentioned in the Prologue. Moral and spiritual resurrection, and the overcoming of darkness by light, is not possible without purging and pain. This is John's central thesis and message here, and it must be borne in mind throughout.

Our Lord's action is sometimes cited to justify violent resistance of injustice. But it may be asked whether the whip was an instrument or a symbol. It is said that what He picked up was a handful of reeds or rushes which served as bedding for the cattle, and wove them into some semblance of a scourge and the question arises whether it was the sheep and cattle, rather than their owners, that He drove out, as the RSV indicates (the Greek can be so translated). One wonders whether the real point of the story lies in the moral indignation our Lord expressed, rather than the physical impact that He made. And if we bear in mind that this is the beginning of His public ministry, it is easy to understand that He should have inaugurated His work by a claim - and by an act of authority - to be the King of Israel and Lord of the Temple, and by a deliberate assumption of the role of Messiah (cf. Malachi 3:1-3). This is one major significance of the story.

32) 2:12-17

When the King comes to His temple, crisis is always precipitated. This is a principle in spiritual life, and it is surely illustrated by this story. One thinks of how it was in the early Church, when Christ came by His Spirit in the word of the gospel and in the preaching of the apostles. There was disturbance in every synagogue in Asia and Europe. This is the one constant factor in the record of the Acts - division, uproar, dissension. Why? Because it is a King who comes, and men rebel against His lawful authority. Why should Jesus have shown such blazing moral indignation? This can be answered by raising the whole question of what the function of the temple was supposed to be. We have only to look at passages such as 1 Kings 8:22 ff. and especially vv. 30 ff. and 9:3-5, to realise that it was meant to be a place of prayer, where forgiveness of sin and help in time of trouble could be known and experienced, a place where men could meet a loving and gracious God. What possibilities, what potential of blessing in this, a vehicle and instrument of grace indeed. But here, alas, in the temple of our Lord's day, there was nothing but an empty shell, without heart, and devoid of the Spirit. Its state is eloquently portrayed in Acts 3: the lame man sitting in all his need at the gate of the temple that was supposed to be the symbol of hope and it could give him nothing, for it had nothing to give. This was the tragedy in Jesus' day, and it drew forth from Him this blaze of moral indignation – an indignation doubtless heightened by the fact that the incident took place at the time of the Passover, a time for remembering the mighty acts of God. Where was the God of the Passover in the experience of His people then?

33) 2:18-22

Christ's action was therefore symbolic, expressing His desire that the temple should be the temple, that His church should be the church and do its proper job, and for this, purging was needed. Judgment must begin at the house of God, and in His coming it did. Indeed, the old order was purged and overthrown, and displaced - and replaced by a new thing. This is the force of the reference to His resurrection in 22, which is the basis of all moral and spiritual resurrection in the individual and in the Church. Our Lord's words in 19, "Destroy this temple", were misconstrued to mean that He was threatening to destroy it. He did no such thing. It was they who, even then, were destroying the temple, by dragging in all the alien things that had robbed it of its testimony. They did not know what they were doing, but they were putting to death any possibility of spiritual ministration. This has, of course, an application in personal life also, because our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost, and we can destroy that temple by what we do to our lives and with them. But the wonderful thing is - and this is the note of hope in the passage - that Jesus claims to be able to raise up the fallen temple once again. He can both restore in us all that we by our sin have destroyed and reconsecrate what we by our sin have destroyed and reconsecrate what by our profanity we have polluted and make our hearts worthy temples for His presence. Not only so: He can also restore life to the dead and lifeless thing that is His Church, renewing its face and filling it with His Spirit, to make it fulfil its God-given function in the world. This is the difference Jesus makes!

34) 2:23-25

A very interesting and significant point emerges from the final verses of the chapter. They speak of many people believing in Christ because of the miracles He performed. This, John tells us at the close of the gospel record (20:31), was their whole point. But in 24 we are told that Jesus did not "commit" Himself to these people. The word rendered "commit" is the same as that translated "believed" in 23, and we may translate thus: "Many believed in His name but He did not believe in them. This means that there is a belief in Christ that He is not impressed with and to which He is not prepared to commit Himself, not so much because He thinks it is not genuine, but because it does not go far enough. It is a belief that is merely a question of being impressed by Him (because of the miracles) but nevertheless a belief that does not involve commitment. It is significant that in 24 the AV renders the word "commit" because it is the faith that commits one to Christ that is saving faith, and nothing less. This is a lesson of critical magnitude, and there is all the difference between salvation and eternal loss in the distinction that is made here. Is the faith in Christ that we have, the kind that has led us to a complete commitment of ourselves to Him? It is on these terms alone that we enter into the kingdom of God.

35) 3:1-8

It would hardly be possible to find a more fruitful chapter to study in all Scripture, or one better known, than this. It is important not only for the words Jesus speaks to Nicodemus and the emphasis on the new birth, but also as a revelation of the method He uses in dealing with the ruler. We are coming to it in the best possible way and with the best equipment when we do so having first of all studied the first two chapters of John. For we must see this encounter with Nicodemus in the light and in the context of John's general purpose in writing the gospel. The gospel, John has been saying, is about the giving of life, life through His Name. This Jesus of whom I speak (says John) is the Eternal Word made flesh for our sakes. He who in the beginning made all worlds and has come down as Man, to remake man and give him new life -He it is who now confronts Nicodemus. And this is what explains the nature of Jesus' words to him about rebirth. That is one point. The other is this. In the context of presenting the message of grace, there are problems and difficulties and complications; there is active opposition and antagonism to the gospel - the darkness versus the light, and the clash between them. This also we see in the story before us. Then, having laid down the principles, so to speak, in the Prologue - the theology of the situation, John proceeds to illustrate them, by recording the signs in the second chapter - turning the water into wine and cleansing the temple. First, principles, then signs illustrating these, and now in this chapter an exemplification of all this in concrete terms in a man, Nicodemus.

36) 3:1-8

In the light of what was said in the previous note, we should therefore expect to see the principles at work in this story - the overshadowing of the Eternal Word, and the conflict between light and darkness, in the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Further, we should expect to see the announcement of the meaning of the "water-into-wine" miracle - the old replaced by the new - and this is one force of the words, "Ye must be born again" (old things passed away, all things become new); and also of the cleansing of the temple, with its message that this transformation cannot come without purging and pain. Hence the emphasis on "water" and "Spirit" in 5, symbolising repentance and faith, and the reference to men loving darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil (19). Such is the background against which we should study this chapter. It has three movements in it, regeneration by the Spirit, the centrality of the cross, and the necessity of faith.

The AV begins the chapter as if it were a completely new theme, but in the Greek there is a connecting particle, linking the story with what is said at the end of the previous chapter. John has just spoken of many who believed in Jesus because of the miracles which He did, but whose faith nevertheless did not impress Him because it did not go far enough in terms of real committal. And now, in this chapter, it is as if John were saying, "And here is a case in point". It is the miracles that have impressed Nicodemus (2), and he therefore precisely belongs to the category mentioned in 2:23-25. It is one of the great values of the story that it shows us how Jesus deals with such people.

37) 3:1-8

Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews, a master in Israel, and we are probably meant to think of him as representative of the best in Pharisaism rather than of the worst. That he came to Jesus by night is an indication of his caution, and of how careful he was of his reputation and standing with his fellow-Jews. He was non-committal, and this helps us to understand our Lord's devastating broadside in 3. There is no room for neutrality in the kingdom of God. It is interesting to compare Nicodemus' words in 2, "We know...." with what the Pharisees said of Jesus later in 9:29, "as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is". To begin with, the Pharisees were quite polite to Jesus, recognizing the authority in the signs He performed; but when they began to see only too clearly that what He stood for challenged the very heart and core of their religious life, contempt and loathing filled their hearts against Him. A question seems to have been implicit in Nicodemus' words, for Jesus makes answer in 3. Whatever the ruler had expected Jesus to say, he could hardly have expected to hear these words. He was clearly shaken by them, for they demolished his whole position from the outset. It was 'shock-treatment' par excellence, and doubtless very salutary for him. Luther comments on Jesus' insistence on new birth: "Christ is saying, My doctrine is not of doing and of leaving undone, but of being and becoming; so that it is not a new work to be done, but the being new created - not the living otherwise before the being new born". That is sufficient for one day's meditation.

38) 3:1-8

Two further points must be noted here before we pass to the next verses, The first is that Nicodemus' words in 4 seem to indicate that he was an elderly man. Bishop Ryle says this is something that should make us understand and appreciate the slowness with which age adapts to new opinions and new ideas, but it is also an encouraging proof that no one is too old to be converted. The second point relates to the words 'water' and 'spirit'. Interpretation here falls into two schools of thought: there are those who believe that 'water' refers to baptism, and there are those who believe it does not. Among the latter are numbered Bishop Ryle and Calvin, and the general view they hold is that the phrase 'water and spirit' simply refers to regeneration by the Word and Spirit of God, and that it is analogous to that other word of Jesus when He spoke of being baptised with the Holy Ghost and with fire. To refer it to baptism in the sense that regeneration is by baptism is simply to make nonsense of the general teaching of the Scriptures. As Ryle points out, Jesus goes on to rebuke Nicodemus for not knowing these things (10). But regeneration by baptism is nowhere spoken of in the Old Testament Scriptures, and Nicodemus could hardly be rebuked for not knowing something that he could have no opportunity of knowing. There may, however, be an even simpler explanation: it is that 'water' refers to John the Baptist's ministry and to his baptism of water, Jesus would then mean, as Temple puts it: "The first step needed is openly to become an adherent of John's revival, the mission of repentance, in which has sounded after so long a time the authentic word of prophecy. That first; but that is not enough, then openly join this company among whom the powers of the new birth, the new life, is moving". This is how the first disciples came into the kingdom. First John's water baptism, then the baptism of the Spirit. So it must be with Nicodemus – that is, he must come the same way as the others.

39) 3:7-13

In these verses Jesus gives Nicodemus two reasons why he should not marvel at what He has just been saying to him about spiritual rebirth. In the first place, He instances the action of the wind, and draws an analogy from it, as if to say (in Temple's words), "Don't wait till you know the source of the wind before you let it refresh you, or its destination before you spread sail to it; it offers what you need; trust yourself to it". We should notice also, the contrast between the freedom of the Spirit, represented here by the wind, and the fabric of institutional religion represented by Nicodemus. What Jesus was saying was going to blow institutional religion to pieces. It is hardly surprising that Nicodemus felt apprehensive; if he grasped anything of the import of what Jesus meant, he must have been afraid. In the second place, Nicodemus need not marvel at His teaching as something mysterious and unheard of because it is borne witness to in the Old Testament. Jesus found it strange that the teacher of Israel should be ignorant of this. It is as if He said, "Haven't you read Ezekiel, or Jeremiah, Nicodemus? Don't you read your Bible, then?" (Ezekiel 36:26, Jeremiah, 31:31 ff.). This is a word that it is sometimes apparently necessary to speak to present day teachers and instructors in the Word of God also. In 11, Jesus is saying that He is not speculating or theorising. "When I speak of new birth I am bearing witness to something I have seen in operation. Look at My disciples. What do you suppose has happened to them?" In 12, it is suggested that "earthly things" are said to refer to truths for which a human analogy can be found (e. g. regeneration, and Jesus has just used the analogy of the wind). If, then, Nicodemus has not understood, even with the help of an analogy, how is he going to understand when Jesus speaks about things for which there can be no human analogy, like justification, atonement, reconciliation? And, significantly, Jesus goes on in 14 to speak of these truths of redemption. It is interesting to note that on the three occasions when Nicodemus speaks in 1-13, he shows very plainly his lack of understanding and perception (2, 4, 9).

40) 3:14-17

With these verses we come to the second movement of the chapter, emphasising the centrality of the cross. There is a deep significance in this new emphasis. The first part of the chapter speaks of impartation of life, but what is this new life, and what relation does it bear, if any, to Christ and His saving work? Well, what is the connection between Christ's work and that of the Holy Spirit? Is regeneration by the Spirit a separate work, a parallel work to that of Christ, or has it an integral connection? This is an important consideration today in view of some of the things that are taught about the Spirit. It is surely made clear in 16 that the gift of everlasting life (which is the new birth and life in the Spirit) is associated with the giving of Christ to the death. That is the first thing we must notice here. What, then, is the nature of the new life? It is life in Christ, never something separate or distinct from Him. The new life that is imparted by the Spirit in regeneration is the Christ-life coming to indwell us (cf. Colossians 1:27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory"). This is the only new life there is in the New Testament, and we must never think of regeneration by the Spirit as something distinct from the gift of Christ; it is when Christ indwells our hearts that we are regenerate by the Spirit. The angel Gabriel's words to Mary in Luke 1:35, which give a perfect illustration of the meaning of regeneration, make this point well: the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost results in "that holy thing....which is called the Son of God" being born in us. This is the new life of which Jesus speaks to Nicodemus. Furthermore, we can go on to say that this new life in Christ is associated supremely with His death and resurrection, in the sense that it is our association with - our being grafted or incorporated into - that death and resurrection that brings life to us

41) 3:14-17

If what we have said in the previous reading is correct interpretation, then it may be said that Jesus in a very real sense literally answers Nicodemus' question in 9, "How can these things be?" In this connection we should notice two things: the first is that it was not a new message that Jesus brought to him, but one foreshadowed in the Old Testament Scriptures (14); and the second - and this is enormously important and significant in relation to our Lord's method in dealing with the ruler - is that Jesus directed him to the Word of God. This is the secret and fountain-head of all true evangelism. If we believe that the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, our first task and concern will be to direct men to the Scriptures, as Jesus did here. It is the Word that is the great means of enlightenment and salvation, and we must learn to trust in its inherent virtue and power to do this to men. The illustration Jesus uses to enlighten Nicodemus - the story of the brazen serpent in Numbers 21 - serves to bear out what John says of Jesus in 2:22-24, "He knew what was in man....His use of this story, therefore, tells us the truth about man's need. The "as, so" in 14 is conclusive here. As the Israelites were in urgent danger of dying from the serpent bites, and in their desperate predicament because of their rebellion against the Lord, so also man in his revolt against God is in urgent need of the healing that the gospel brings, and for him also there is no time to lose. This is the pulse that must beat in all true presentation of the gospel word.

42) 3:16-18

These are probably the most wonderful verses in the whole Bible. Luther was surely justified in calling 16 the Bible in miniature. Some have liked to lay alongside it, by way of explicating it, the statement Paul makes in Ephesians 3:18 about "the four dimensions of redeeming love" - its breadth (God so loved the world), its length (that He gave His only begotten Son), its depth (that whosoever believeth in Him), its height (should not perish but have everlasting life). Temple points out that this is a greater statement than the other that John makes in his epistle, "God is love", which is a statement about the nature of God, whereas 3:16 is a statement about the action of God. The divine purpose is stated in 17 as being not to condemn, but to save. Nevertheless, Christ's coming precipitates a crisis for men. And, as Temple says, "If a man refuses belief - trust - in the manifested nature of the Son of God, he is condemned already. There is no further verdict needed; his conduct finds him guilty. His failure to accept the revelation when it comes is itself the judgment on the character he has been forming. For the essence of judgment is not the sentence but the verdict, the discrimination between the approved and the condemned. The Cross itself, the very means of redemption, is an agent of that discrimination, that judgment." The presence of Christ in the world issues in the judgment of the world, for weal or woe. He sifts men.

43) 3:19-21

These solemn verses tell us how men are lost, and they stand with unmistakable clarity notwithstanding the Scripture's equally unmistakable teaching on predestination, Salvation is all of God, but man's ruin is from himself. It is Dr James Denney who points out so forcibly that the wrath of God is spoken of in Scripture not in relation to a divine decree but to man's ungodliness and unrighteousness. It is not, as we see here, because of lack of light, but because of lack of will to be saved, that men are finally doomed. For light has come - this is incontrovertible, but men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. Those therefore that refuse Christ, do so because there is evil in them, and their way of life will in the end prove to have been evil. When Christ is refused, we may be sure that there is something or other in heart or life that is not right in the sight of God. Human eyes may not detect the flaw; but the eyes of an all-seeing God do. This is a very sobering and challenging thought, and one that ought to enable us to see the "good" of "good" men, who nevertheless dispute the necessity of conversion, in proper perspective. If Jesus' words mean anything here, they mean that true goodness will always come out on Christ's side - and this means on the side of conversion, salvation by the blood of the cross and rebirth by the Spirit. The "good" man who takes issue with Christ on these fundamental matters simply exposes himself as being against Christ - and therefore against goodness too, and God.

44) 3:22-26

From this point until the end of the chapter, we have John the Baptist's final testimony to Jesus, and we must look at it with care. Jesus now moves away from Jerusalem into Judaea, into the country districts and rural areas around the capital. We are given a significant note on the chronology of our Lord's ministry in 24. It will be recalled that the other three gospel writers all alike date Jesus' Galilean ministry from the time John was cast into prison, and it is clear from this that the Jerusalem and Judaeian ministry recorded by John here ante-dates by probably as much as a year what is given us by the synoptic writers.

It is not certain what was the nature of the argument that arose between John's disciples and the Jews in 25. Perhaps the Jews were taunting the disciples about the fact that their leader seemed to be losing his disciples to Jesus, and suggesting this was a proof that John's baptism was not really a purifying power, or comparing John's baptism unfavourably with Jesus'. What does seem clear is that the argument had to do with baptism, and this prompts the observation that times do not change very greatly in some respects. How people love to argue about baptism: They go on and on and on, as if the whole of the gospel was comprised in the rite. Some Christians have water on the brain, and their preoccupation with it would be comic were it not for the fact that such obsessional preoccupation generally beguiles them from the simplicity that is in Christ and takes the edge off their testimony and their usefulness in Christ's service. Their allegiance has been transferred from Him to "another gospel" which is no gospel.

45) **3:27-29**

John's dealing with his disciples is instructive. They were clearly riled by the Jews' taunts, because they were jealous for John's ministry, and its decline in popularity was a source of annoyance to them. This was perhaps natural in the circumstances, but their undoubted irritation is surely open to question. One question we might well ask is, "Why were they still John's disciples?" Ought they not to have received his testimony about Jesus (26) and followed the Lord, as Peter and the others had done? May there not be a gentle rebuke in John's words to them in 27 for not having done so? Another thing we may learn from this incident is just how dangerous a petty party spirit can be. We see the damage such a spirit can do in the Corinthian epistles. And John dissociates himself from it. What he seems to mean in 27 is: "I cannot command continued success in my ministry. I can only receive what God gives me. If He thinks fit to give another more acceptance with men than myself, I cannot prevent it and have no right to complain. All success is of God." That is a fine way of dealing with the situation. And one sees the strength and stature of the man in saying it. Moreover, in 28 John reminds his disciples that his was a secondary part; he was the forerunner, not the Messiah, the "best man", not the bridegroom. The illustration of the bridegroom is a telling one (29), and one used in another connection by Jesus Himself, in Matthew 9:15. John means, in effect, "The great day of the marriage has come and the bridegroom is calling the bride to himself. I therefore rejoice, and now my task is over".

46) 3:30-36

John's words here are tremendously challenging and moving. We find him at the end of his ministry as at its beginning, bearing faithful and honorable witness to Christ, a Christ-exalting, self-abasing testimony (30). John knew he was only the morning star. Jesus was the sun. The idea here is of the star's light gradually fading as the sun rises, after break of day. The stars do not in fact become less, or perish, but they pale and become invisible before the sun's greater brightness and glory. What John says here of Jesus is worthy of comparison with the most exalted of Paul's teaching in Ephesians 1 and Colossians 1, and puts a different complexion on the general notion held of the Baptist as an uncouth, almost forbidding figure thundering forth repentance up and down the land. Surely this is the fruit of his long meditation in the deserts as he was taught of God and given insights and revelations into the mystery of the Person of Christ akin to those Paul himself was given. How like Colossians 1:19 John's words in 34b are, and how similar 35 is to Ephesians 1:10. Well might our gospel writer say in 10:41, "John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true." No greater tribute could ever be paid to a man of God than this. God grant that it may be truly said of us also.

47) 4:1-4

It may be that John's selection and arrangement of his material is meant to make us consider the resemblances and contrasts between this chapter and the last. In the case of Nicodemus, our Lord was meeting with someone very much inside the covenants of promise, but here it is with an outsider, who was doubtless regarded as outside the bounds of respectability and decency also. Yet the same Lord deals with them both, and in the same way, with wonderful patience. Nicodemus was blind to the things of God; he could not understand. And Jesus led him to the Scriptures. The woman of Samaria was blind; she could not understand Jesus' words, but He led her on patiently, and one of the wonderful things in the story is the dawning of revelation on her soul, and the growing understanding that came to her.

The commentaries suggest, with regard to 4, that the Samaria route was the quickest way to Galilee. But would the Holy Spirit have recorded a mere geographical note here? May there not be a deeper significance? It is not difficult to see something more in it. This is the "must needs" of grace, which speaks to us, at the least, of the foreknowledge of the Saviour and of His infinite love and compassion reaching out to a broken piece of humanity. The reason why He "needs must go" through Samaria was that He was going to meet somebody that day by Jacob's well. And is it not wonderful that we have a Saviour God like that, thus sensitive to the needs of the broken and the lost?

48) 4:5-10

One of the wonderful things about the Apostle John's testimony to Jesus is the way in which our Lord's humanity is placed side by side with His divinity. We stressed His foreknowledge of the woman's need in yesterday's Note, while here, in 6, it is His sheer humanity that stands out so clearly. He so completely shared human life that after a journey of some hours, He was weary enough to throw Himself down by the well to rest while His disciples fetched food from the town, and ask for a drink of water (7). This could be put another way: in effect, He was saying, "I thirst", and we may well wonder whether John is thinking of that later occasion when the Son of God said, "I thirst", as He hung on the cross, as if to suggest that here was a shadow of His sufferings and a faint adumbration of the miracle and mystery of redeeming grace. Different interpretations have been given of Jesus' opening words to the woman, and some have thought they were, so to speak, His "opening gambit" in the religious discussion that was to follow. But this is to read something into them that is not there, He surely asked for a drink for no other reason than that He was thirsty. It is the sheer naturalness of His approach to her that is so striking, and this has something very important to teach us. In this case it was the truly human and natural that led to the truly spiritual and divine. But too often we fail to be simply human in our contacts with people; in our concern to be spiritual, we forget to be natural. This is often why we give them cause to fear that we will "button-hole" them without possibility of escape. How different it was here, with Jesus and the woman!

49) 4:5-10

It is reality in the lives of believers that makes impact on others, not our methods or our "opening gambits" or our sometimes subtle and sometimes purely clumsy efforts to twist the conversation round to spiritual things. And reality will sometimes mean that we shall break with "orthodox procedure", as Jesus did here. It was not the done thing for Jews to consort with Samaritans, nor for men to be speaking with women. But how little store did Jesus set by any religious pattern! There is an important lesson for us here, and it is this: if being natural conflicts with orthodox patterns, so much the worse for orthodox patterns, because the Lord prefers us to be natural than to be orthodox. He wants us to be real, and if it puts our lives into an unnatural mould when we try to conform to an unorthodox pattern, we ought to throw the latter overboard, because it is dispensable, in the way reality and naturalness in Christian life are not.

The history of the rift between Jews and Samaritans goes back to post-exilic times. We are told in Ezra how the Samaritans asked the returned Jewish exiles to be allowed to help them rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Their refusal, on the grounds that the Samaritans were a mixed race, with a semi-heathen, semi-Jewish religion, led to a bitter and unremitting antagonism between the two peoples (cf. Ezra 4, 2 Kings 17: 24-34).

50) **4:9-14**

It is customary to interpret the woman's words to Jesus in 9 as indicating her astonishment at His speaking to her at all. This is doubtless true, but it would also be true to say that this kind of woman would not be much concerned with religious distinctions of that nature, and she may well have been saying these words with a twinkle of mocking laughter in her eyes. This raises the more general question of how we are to envisage her as a character. One commentator points out that there is no single word of description of her in the entire chapter. Yet she stands out graphically, as a positive personality. Hers was a broken, burnt-out life, it is true, but it would be a mistake to represent her as a droopy, bedraggled figure, like a typical Dickens portrait. Being dead in sins does not mean being inert, either emotionally or psychologically. She had sparkle, as her conversation clearly shows. And it would not be far from the mark to say that the mocking note of laughter persisted in her words even when an undertone of seriousness began to be evident. This is true to human psychology. She clearly did not know what to make of Jesus, and one can almost see the quizzical look developing in her eyes as He began to speak of living water, as if to say, "What is this you are saying to me?"

There is much to learn here about personal work. One sometimes meets with people like this, with positive, even dazzling personalities, though wicked and depraved. And mocking laughter ought not to be allowed to put us off. If this was on her face, we may be sure that our Lord matched it with the look in His eyes and on His face, smiling to her even as He spoke His tremendously serious words. And he went patiently on, until He broke through her mystification and her mockery, and got to her heart.

51) **4:9-14**

Calvin interprets 10 to read, "If thou knewest the gift of God, namely, who it is that saith unto thee " - in other words, our Lord's talking to her was itself God's gift to her at that moment. This is a very telling interpretation, and if it is correct it means that talking about spiritual things to people is in itself God's offer to them. This is why it is so important they should get to know that God is speaking, for it is possible after all, to miss the time of one's visitation. In 11 it is striking to see that the woman shows the same kind of mental obtuseness as Nicodemus did in 3:4. Even when the Son of God speaks, there is this lack of understanding, and this should both underline for us the depth of nature's blindness and also put our own failure to communicate in a truer perspective. It may well be, as we have already suggested, that there is an element of mockery in the woman's words in 11, 12, with perhaps a deliberate stress on the literal meaning of the word "water" but it is difficult not to think also that there was by this time a serious note beginning to assert itself, as if she were saying, "I'm laughing at you, you know, Stranger, but in spite of myself, I'm listening hard. " There are many like this, and we should not be too discouraged when we see them laughing, or disconsolate either, thinking our testimony is not cutting any ice. We must keep on, as Jesus did here. Who shall know whether the next thrust will prove decisive? The lesson here is: Go on teaching, till light breaks, trusting in the light-bearing properties of the Word. As the Psalmist insists, the entrance of Thy words giveth light.

52) 4:15-26

Our Lord's words in 14 seem to have had the effect He intended, for they drew from her a response in which all mockery must by this time have disappeared and which revealed the deep yearning of her heart. But it is significant that having worked to bring her to this point, Jesus did not meet her conscious need of living water - and for this reason: this was not her basic problem, but only the evident symptom of it. Her life was all wrong, and she needed cleansing there, in the disorder that was making her thirsty. Until that was dealt with, there could be no possibility of that thirst being quenched. Our Lord's words in 18 are just as devastating as those to Nicodemus in 3:3, and they served the same purpose, namely, to bring a conviction of real need and to indicate that this was no more man who was addressing her. In this connection, it is very significant to note the dawning illumination that was taking place in her mind. She began by thinking of Jesus simply as a Jew; then, as the conversation continued, she became conscious that he was more than this, that He was a prophet; and from this she graduated to the conviction that He was the Messiah, and finally that He was the Saviour of the world. This is how our Lord works: He discloses Himself, in the context of speaking the Word, and blind eyes are opened to see His glory. Not but that the growing revelation is disputed and resisted - sometimes for long enough - in the human heart. This is one of John's basic points in his gospel, as we have seen - the conflict between light and darkness - and it is evidenced very clearly in 20, where we see the woman seeking to evade the very uncomfortable personal challenge by recourse to a theological question in the abstract, an interesting point of discussion. But, how graciously, gently and firmly Jesus dealt with her in 21-24, bringing her right back to priorities once again. Oh for grace and wisdom to do likewise.

53) 4:15-30

We include the next few verses in this reading to complete this part of the story. Our Lord's words spoken in answer to the "red herring" the woman drew across the discussion seem to have left a marked impression upon her mind, bringing her right back to serious spiritual realities - and in view of what He said, is this really surprising, for they are among the most spiritual and exalted in the New Testament: At all events, she gave voice to a statement about the Messiah which, coming from a Samaritan woman, was remarkably thoughtful and penetrating. All the more so when we bear in mind the almost total misunderstanding the Jews themselves had about their own long-promised One; for they looked for a warrior-hero, but she spoke of One who "will tell us all things" - a very much more spiritual conception. Jesus' response to her in 26, plainly confessing Himself Messiah - something He never directly did to the Jews during His ministry - is a good instance of the truth of the words, "to them that hath it shall be given". Her mind was open to spiritual considerations and ideas (25), and to that openness He gave Himself. Her words in 29 are doubly significant: not only was she impressed with His apparent omniscience concerning her (cf. the same astonished awareness in Psalm 139), but also - and even more important for her - that He should have known all about her and still treat her with courtesy, and respect and dignity. To have known the worst about her, and still be so kind - this was the amazed awareness that convinced her that this must be the Messiah.

54) 4:31-38

There are two things we should notice about the disciples here. In the first place, it is striking to realise how considerably, albeit unconsciously, they were conditioned by the climate of religion of their day (27), and by the Pharisaic attitude to "sinners" (cf. Luke 15:2). Jesus was cutting across that attitude in His dealings with the woman, but they were surprised and concerned, because they were all unawares conditioned, more than they knew, by the atmosphere and spirit of their time. How careful we need to be, in this respect: The second thing relates to their misunderstanding of Jesus' words in 32, 33. It is quite remarkable that they should show the same kind of spiritual obtuseness as both Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria showed in 3:4 and 4:11, putting a literal interpretation on words that were given a spiritual meaning by our Lord. This prompts the reflection that as between them and the disciples there was not a great deal to choose, and that even in the context of discipleship there was so much for them to learn. The "meat" Jesus speaks of has no reference to any miraculous supply, as suggested by some, for He explains what that "meat" is in 34. The word "finish" indicates bringing the work to its proper end, which in the case of the woman was to have brought her into the light of the gospel. We are not to suppose that Jesus was no longer hungry for ordinary food - doubtless they went on to share their meal - but that in the doing of the will of God there is a satisfaction and a fulness that nothing else can bring.

55) 4:31-38

The implications of our Lord's words in 35-38 are considerable and merit careful consideration. What was our Lord's point in quoting (to the disciples) the well-known proverb about harvest, with the telling addition of the words "white already..."? Some think there is a reference to the prophecy in Amos 9:13 about the messianic age in which the ploughman shall overtake the reaper. In other words, Jesus is announcing that the messianic age has dawned and the kingdom has come, for sowing and reaping have been well-nigh instantaneous in the case of the woman of Samaria. Jesus is saying, in effect, "There is no need to wait any longer for the harvest; the days of eager waiting and expectation are over. I am come, as the great Reaper, to gather My harvest." If this be the meaning, it becomes clear that there is no contradiction between what Jesus says here and what is recorded in James 5:7 about having long patience waiting for the harvest to be produced. It is a different emphasis in James, and what he says is always true in its own sense. Long-term work is always a reality. But there may also be the suggestion of a rebuke to the disciples, reminding them that postponing the time of harvest to some future date can be an evasion of the challenge of the hour, and an evidence of lack of faith. This may be indicated in 38, in the words "I sent you to reap". The disciples had conversed with the people of Samaria in buying meat from them, but apparently had not thought to bear witness to Christ among them - as the woman had done in her own artless, spontaneous way. Perhaps the disciples had decided that Samaria was too hard a place to expect much response from. How wrong they were proved is seen in these verses. Even as Jesus spoke (35), the men of the city could be seen coming towards Jesus (cf, Isaiah 49:18 ff. for a striking parallel, and a suggested source for Jesus' words).

56) 4:39-42

Two remaining points must be underlined before we leave this wonderful passage. The first relates to the contrast between the Samaritan's attitude and that of Jerusalem. Jerusalem rejected and repudiated Jesus' testimony, and therefore He had gone up to Samaria, where they besought Him to tarry with them (40). In Jerusalem, Jesus did many miracles (2:23) but few were won to real faith; in Samaria, He did no miracles, but only gave the Word, and many believed unto salvation. Secondly, we should note the transition from faith that has come through dependance on the authority of another, and the assurance that arises from personal experience. This is a transition that must always be made. We generally start with a faith that has come about because of what we have been told about Jesus - faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. We believe on the basis of the testimony that has been borne to Jesus by witness or by preaching. The Samaritans believed on the strength of the woman's testimony concerning Christ. But then there came the transition to true assurance of faith arising out of personal experience. It is always so. We begin by standing on the bare word of Christ as it comes to us in the gospel but this always leads to personal experience of Christ as a living and loving Saviour. As the Samaritans said, "we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world".

57) 4:43-54

A point of practical importance arises in 43-45, from our Lord's quotation of the proverb about a prophet having no honour in his own country. Two interpretations are possible. One is that Judaea is to be taken as "his own country", and, if this be so, the meaning is that, having been repudiated as to His testimony in Judaea, He came northwards to Samaria and Galilee, and so to Cana, where the people's welcome of Him on a previous occasion (2:1 ff.) had drawn forth a manifestation of His power, in the turning of the water into wine. This prompts the reflection that Jesus does tend to return to the places which have made Him welcome and have given Him His rightful place; and this is precisely where He may be expected to work more miracles. The second interpretation, however, is that, Nazareth being His home country, Jesus was even thus early deliberately seeking to withdraw from public ministry and concentrate on His chosen followers. And perhaps the contrast that is meant here is between the simple reception of Him by the Samaritans in 39 ff., and the interest the Galileans were showing in Him because of the miracles He had performed at Jerusalem. The pattern of events had been as follows: In Jerusalem, men had been prepared to recognize Him because of His miracles; but this was not the kind of response Jesus was prepared to acknowledge (2:23 ff.) In Samaria, there had been no miracles, only the Word, yet many had come to genuine faith in Him there. And now, once again, as soon as He crossed the border into Galilee, He came up against the same preoccupation with signs and wonders, hence His words in 48.

58) 4:43-54

John emphasises the fact that this was a second miracle performed at Cana, and there is a lesson intended in the contrast presented between the two. The one was performed in the context of joy and gladness at a marriage feast, the second in the context of fear, anxiety and distress - a complete contrast, yet the link is in the idea of the family. In the first, Christ blessed the marriage in its happiness and joy, while in the second He blessed the home in its cares and anxieties about the family. As Maclaren finely puts it, He who began by breathing blessing over wedded joys goes on to answer the piteous pleading of parental anxiety. He has the same kind of interest in both. And the lesson surely is plain: If Christ blessed the marriage, will He not undertake for the children?

That being said, it is all the more startling that Christ, confronted with a distracted father weeping over his dying boy, should utter the words of 48, almost as if He were rebuffing him. And, we may think, what a time for a rebuff. But when we consider a little more deeply, we begin to realise that there is much more involved. Maclaren suggests three points in the account of the incident, which we may well consider: First of all, Christ lamenting over an imperfect faith; then, Christ testing, and so strengthening, a growing faith; and finally, the absent Christ rewarding and crowning a tested faith. We shall look more closely at these points in tomorrow's Note.

59) **4:43-54**

Our Lord's lament in 48 was due to the fact that even in his urgent consciousness of need, the man was looking to him as to a wonder-worker, with the perhaps unconscious but nevertheless clearly defined attitude, "Come on, heal my boy; that is what You are for". And, therefore, in the first instance, it was more important to deal with the man's faith than with his son. In this respect, the story is a parallel to that of the Syro-Phoenician woman in Matthew 15:21 ff. The fact is that often, when we go to Christ with some pressing need, the first answer we receive is a revelation of the unworthiness and imperfection of our faith. Here, Christ refused to go to the nobleman's home, and this refusal was a strengthening to faith. One recalls what the centurion said to Jesus, in a similar situation, in Luke 7:6, 7, "Lord, trouble not Thyself....But say in a word, and my servant shall be healed". This is precisely what Jesus did do in this instance - He said in a word, "Go thy way, thy son liveth" (50), to teach the man. Has not this something to teach us about prayer and hearing the word? How slow we are to go out and believe the word He has spoken to us. It is a feeble faith that requires the support of something visible to make it effectual, and our Lord is intent on weaning us from this kind of weakness and dependence on visible, even sensuous tokens. The all-important point in the story is the nobleman's response to what must undoubtedly be regarded as a tremendous challenge (50). Jesus said, "Go thy way, thy son liveth" – i.e. leave your worry, your burden here, and take assurance with you, resting on My word. And, we are told, the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him. This is faith, and it is to this that Jesus wants to bring us all. Well would it be for us if we could simply take Him at His word, nothing doubting.

60) 4:43-54

It would have been easy for Jesus to have said to the nobleman, "Yes, I will come down and heal your son". But if He had done so, the man's faith would have remained faith in a miracle-worker, and nothing more, and Jesus was not content that this should be so. His words to the nobleman were a summons to him to believe in the reliability of His word, and 53 tells us the result of this gracious and faithful dealing with him, because he came to faith as committal and trust. Faith for healing passed into faith as real committal, the kind of faith the Samaritans came to in 42. And Christ is prepared to delay the answers to our prayers and cries if by so doing He can make something of our faith, as He did of this man's, summoning us out of the little shell in which we either demand tokens or signs or invent them for our spiritual comfort, or weaning us from adolescent attitudes in which feeling plays far more part than true faith. The man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him (50), and there is one sense in which we may truly say from this verse Jesus. word is as good as His presence. His presence was not needed in Capernaum, all that was required was His word. And that word is not bound by space or time; Capernaum could be ten miles away, it could be on the other side of the world, but it would make no difference if the man believed the word Jesus spoke to him. This is the great lesson of the story for us - to rest on the bare word of the Lord and to know that heaven and earth will pass away before that word is ever broken.

61) 5:1-9

The next sign which John records is the healing of the impotent man at Bethesda. We have already seen, in John's use of the word "signs" to describe the miracles of Jesus, that these miracles are meant to be illustrations in the physical realm of what Jesus came to do in the spiritual realm, and that Jesus Himself indicates this in the way He proceeds to discourse on their significance. Thus, the healing of the impotent man here becomes the "text", so to speak, on which the following sermon on the imparting of life to the dead (17 ff.) is based. It cannot therefore be arbitrary to draw spiritual lessons from this miracle. We have the best of authorities for doing so. John, then, is giving further weight to his main message about the meaning of Christ's coming, by showing the grand initiative of the Son of God Who comes to loose them that are bound and proclaim liberty to the captive. And it is this initiative in its most sovereign aspect, apart from faith on the man's part, for he is singled out from the crowd of blind, halt and withered, and sovereignly blessed by the Saviour. In all this, John's point is: Jesus is an all-sufficient Saviour, and there is nothing He cannot do, no need however great, however long-standing, that He cannot deal with and meet. To spiritualise the miracle in this way is not of course to belittle or decry its validity in the physical realm, for it was a remarkable evidence of the power of God that a man who had been impotent for thirty-eight years should have been made immediately and utterly whole. What could more convincingly demonstrate the breaking in of the kingdom of God into human life than this and the Kingship and Lordship of Christ over all sickness and disease?

62) 5:1-9

Another link between the physical and the spiritual in the impotent man's predicament is seen in the fact that when Jesus met the man later in the temple, He said to him (14), "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee". The infirmity, then, was due to some sin or sins in the man's past. This is a genuine biblical insight; it does not mean that all physical infirmity or impotence is due to sin, but that some of it may be, as was the case with this man.

Here, then, was a man who was a prisoner to his own past. It is not difficult to envisage some of the possibilities that may have lain behind his paralysis - medical science can attest only too well that some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment (1 Timothy 5:24), and that the way of the transgressor is hard. Drunkenness, alcoholism, debauchery - these are only some of the sins that can bring physical disaster and tragedy upon a man of this very nature, and it may well be that he had sown his wild oats, suffering terribly and paying very dearly for his folly. To sow the wind sometimes means to reap the whirlwind. But, being a prisoner to the past is also true in a far deeper sense of every man. We all have a past, and the shadow of guilt rests upon every man's life; this is the sickness of all men everywhere. Sin brings man into bondage, so that he is no longer his own master. This is the theology that the story intends to illustrate, and it explains a good deal about the nature and heart of man's sin. What we mean is this: sin expresses itself in the desire for independence of God and freedom from His control. This we see in the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 (and is not the man in our chapter another such?) and it traces back directly to man's primal sin in the Garden of Eden, when Satan tempted him to rebel against God and secure his freedom from Him, by holding out the tempting bait of independence which, Satan implied, would give him god-like powers and therefore all the expression of freedom he desired. It was only at a later stage - i.e. when it was too late - that man found that instead of freedom, he had entered a bondage from which no human means could ever extricate him. All this is implicit in the story of the Pool of Bethesda.

63) 5:1-9

Into that multitude of impotent folk, blind, halt, withered, and right to where the impotent man was, Jesus came. It is fitting that we should be reading this story in the days leading up to Christmas, for this is exactly what Christmas means:

He comes, the prisoners to relieve,
In Satan's bondage held.

And the significance of what we call "the festive season" was surely fulfilled in this poor, broken piece of humanity, as Christ's presence and power transformed his life. Our Lord spoke two words to him, one a question, the other a command. These are full of significance and instruction. Concerning the question, two things have to be said. First of all, this: however we may render or translate the words, it still remains a strange question to ask. Was it not asking the obvious, to ask him if he wanted to be healed? Not necessarily. Here is a man who has been ill for thirty-eight years - a long, long time for any man to be thus incapacitated. Can we imagine what this must have done to his mind? The long and dreary continuance of his condition must surely have robbed him of any expectation of being made better, and this must have brought a listlessness and apathy on his soul, and bludgeoned his mind and heart into a condition of insensitivity, as he acquiesced in the utter dullness and despair that such a condition would bring. The man must have been little more than a vegetable, as we would say. And Christ's question introduced to him a new possibility of something that had long since left him. Our Lord was recalling him to humanity. This was one major purpose in asking the question. Its other significance we shall discuss in the next note.

64) 5:1-9

The second point about the question is this: even in the context of his misery, listlessness and despair, the question would still require to be asked, for it is possible for men to prefer to remain sick, conscious though they are of their need, rather than to be made whole again. Some invalids do not really want to get better. Illness is a necessity for some people; consciously or unconsciously, they have a need to be ill. And such people are the saddest of cases. What is true in the physical realm is also true in the spiritual; even in the context of real and conscious spiritual need, we need to be asked whether we really want to be made whole, and whether we want to deeply enough to receive it on any terms God cares to make. Indeed, it is precisely this problem and question that sometimes underlies men's seeming inability to understand or grasp the meaning of the gospel. Their eyes appear to be blinded to the truth that is so plain to us, but it is often a willing blindness. There are none so blind as those that will not see. This is how it was with Nicodemus: to understand what Jesus meant by new birth would have been too costly for him to grasp or understand. For the woman of Samaria to have understood what Jesus said about living water would have involved her in a revolution of life for which she was not at first prepared. To be made whole takes away from us the opportunity of feeling sorry for ourselves, and sometimes this is too precious a luxury to give up. This in itself is a sickness, both in the physical and the spiritual realm, and needs to be faced in all honesty. There can be no healing until we do.

65) 5:1-9

There is something terribly pathetic about the man's reply to Jesus in 7, "Sir, I have no man...", because they underline the essential loneliness of the life of need and the life of sin. Ultimately, it was not a man that he needed, but a God, and it was a Saviour God that met him that day; but what he said bears a disturbing challenge to our hearts as Christian people. There are many needy people in the world today who speak as this man did - they also have no man, for the world passes them by in their need and misery, caring little and brushing aside their plaintive appeals for help. But ought Christian people to do likewise? Is there not a ministry here for those sensitive enough to discern the needs of men? Were there no other people at Bethesda who could have helped the man? The truth is that there are always some around that could help, if they had the will to. And that is where we come in, as servants of Christ. We must not only have the will, but also the compassion, to stretch out a hand of help. If we are too busy with other things to notice need and to offer help, then we are too busy, and we need to make an urgent reappraisal of our priorities, to bring our lives into conformity with the compassion of Christ. Let us allow this word "I have no man" ring in our ears today as we go about our business, and let us allow it to ask us whether, in one needy circumstance or another, God might not mean us to be that man who will help at a critical time.

66) 5:1-9

In many ways, Christ's second word to the man, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk" is the most astonishing and extraordinary in all the New Testament. To rise up and walk was precisely the one thing the man could not do, and it was this inability that had kept him at the pool these long years in growing despair. He certainly would not have been lying there if he had been able to do so. And yet, when Christ gave the command, he rose, being made immediately whole. There is a wonderful verse in Proverbs which says, "Where the word of a king is, there is power". This is what is displayed here. Behold your king, says John. This is what I am writing about in my gospel; behold the power He exercises: To command the impossible, to call the things that are not as though they were, this is the prerogative of Deity. John began his gospel with the statement, "In the beginning was the Word. . .", and he means to say that it was this Almighty Word, by whom all things were made, that stood before the impotent man that day, and spoke him into newness of life. When we think of it in these terms, there can be no surprise at what happened. The surprise would have been if the man had not risen and walked!

He speaks, and, listening to His voice
New life the dead receive.

One further point must be noted, The verbs used in the narrative in 6 are deeply suggestive and significant. "Jesus saw, knew...saith". He sees our need - no one's need is outwith the range of His all-seeing eye; He knows how long it has been going on and how deep it is; and He speaks, on the basis of what He sees and knows. What hope and assurance are here: He speaks to us in His Word; and when that word is backed by the power behind all powers in the universe, it becomes more than a word, it becomes an experience and a salvation and an unspeakable joy.

67) 5:10-18

We turn now to a consideration of what followed the miracle of healing at Bethesda. This falls into two parts: the debate about the Sabbath, and the spiritualising of the miracle by Jesus. We deal with the first of these now. Consider the situation presented here: A man had been healed, in body and in spirit; a notable miracle had taken place; the man had been thirty-eight years an invalid. The grace of God had come with blessing; goodness and mercy had been made manifest in the renewal of that broken and marred life. Was not this a great thing, a cause for rejoicing, for undivided and unreserved approval? One would have thought so, but instead, it provoked a murderous hatred against Christ. Another of the gospels reminds us that in face of the works of love and mercy He performed and the words He spoke, there was a division among the people. There is something very important for us here. To believe that whenever the grace of God is made manifest in power men will necessarily respond to it without reserve or difficulty is a mistaken optimism. It is often very different. The presence of the Son of God not only does not win general acceptance, but it sifts the hearts of men. Christ came not to send peace but a sword. This is just as true with the proclamation of the gospel. It is a mistake to think that if only a faithful gospel were proclaimed, men would inevitably turn to Christ. Not so. Some will, but some will react in the opposite way. And the more powerful the proclamation, the more violent will be the hostility it provokes. Christ is a divider of men. "This Child", said old Simeon, "is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel". This is the conflict that John recognizes as being basic to the whole concept of the gospel, the conflict between light and darkness referred to in 1:5, 10,11.

68) 5:10-18

The Jews' reaction against the violation of the Sabbath was characteristic. On their interpretation of the Sabbath, the man was of course breaking the law; but it is a measure of how very far their understanding of the law had departed from its true spirit and meaning that they should have regarded the wonder of what had happened to the man as nothing by comparison with the infringement that had angered and upset them. It is significant to see what Jesus said to them (17); it forms a bridge between their opposition on the Sabbath question and their opposition on His claim to equality with God. He said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work". These words express an attitude almost of aggression: Jesus did not try to smooth things over by saying something like "I may have broken the letter of the law, but fulfilled its spirit in healing the man", although this would have been true. He said what He did, knowing it would add fuel to the flame of their resentment. He carried the war, in fact, into the enemy's camp, deliberately challenging them even more deeply than the miracle itself had, as if to say, "you are opposing Me on the question of breaking the Sabbath law. But I want you to see that your opposition to Me is deeper than the Sabbath law. It is against the claim that I make, Well, I will make it again: My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." And the Jews got the message (18): It is as well, is it not, that they should have been made to see the real heart of their opposition against Him Jesus is not content to let any man labour under false pretences in his attitude to ultimate things.

69) 5:19-29

R V G Tasker (Tyndale Commentary p 87) says that the way Jesus answers the charge of making Himself equal with God (18) "suggests that this expression was understood by His listeners in the way the Rabbis usually understood it, A man who acted independently of God, or who rebelled against God's judgments, was said to be placing himself on an equality with God. Jesus therefore at once asserts (19) that for Him to act independently of God would be utterly impossible, because the relationship between God and Himself is a Father-Son relationship; and no son can act all the time independently of his father In His case, moreover, the relationship is unique. . in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, the Son can, and indeed must be true to the Father's purposes and do the Father's work, because the love of the Father and the obedience of the Son are perfect. Such a divine Son is so completely controlled by the Father's love that He displays it in all that He does, Without this unique relationship, none of the works of Jesus would have been possible" Christ, then, was saying in effect that He was not making Himself equal with God in the sense they understood the term, but was making Himself equal with God in the sense that He understood the term.

70) 5:19-29

We turn once more to John's gospel. In our last Note on this passage we spoke of the oneness of the Father and the Son in the fulfilling of the divine purposes. A very dramatic insight can be given into this if we take the words in 19b and place alongside them Paul's great statement in 2 Corinthians 5:19. If it is true that the Son does nothing but what He sees the Father do, we must take it that what Christ did on the cross once for all when He was crucified under Pontius Pilate was something that He saw in the heart of the Father before all worlds. This is a very wonderful thought. That Christ should see the principle of the cross in the heart of God, and that this should reveal to us what the heart of the Father is like, must surely write upon our souls something of the immensity of the gospel revelation. If this tells us anything, it tells us that the self-emptying of the Son expresses and reflects the self-emptying of the Father. This, then, has been the heart of the Christmas message we have been celebrating in these days. Great, indeed, is the mystery of godliness: Nor are the verses which follow (21 ff.) less expressive of the Christmas message, for the giving of life is what it is about. As Wesley sings, Christ was

Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth,

and this is the theme of our Lord's words here, In this connection, it is significant to see yet another "Christmas" insight in a comparison of 25 with 28, where the immediate imparting of life in regeneration (cf. "and now is", 25) is set over against the final bestowal of life on the resurrection day, This corresponds to the fact of the two comings of Christ, one as a Babe, the other as a King. We need both, to complete the picture.

71) 5:19-29

One further comment on this passage seems called for, in order to relate our Lord's teaching here to that of the miracle of healing in 1-9. It is clear that "hearing my word" (24) and "hear the voice of the Son of God" (25) take up the central fact in the miracle story, that of Christ speaking the word of power to the impotent man. The parallel between what happens in the spiritual realm and what happens in the physical is perfect and complete. Man in his sin is impotent, and helpless to help himself; he is dead in trespasses and sins, with nothing in him capable of responding to God. It is in this helpless state that the word of the gospel comes to him, and that word imparts life, and gives him the power to respond to the summons to rise into newness. The paradoxical nature of the language here is significant. How can the dead hear a voice? But this is the whole point. The miracle resides in the nature of the voice. For it is the voice of Him Who in the beginning made the world out of nothing, and it speaks a new creation into existence. And even the power to hear His voice is bestowed in the gift of grace, for salvation is all of God. This is the message that the miracle is meant to teach us, and that our Lord's "sermon" on it in these verses confirms.

72) 5:30-47

It will help us to see the significance of this final section of our Lord's teaching here if we look at the general structure of the chapter. First of all, there is the miracle of healing and restoration, then the reaction of opposition and the interpretation of the miracle in spiritual terms; and now the closing verses speak of a fourfold witness to Christ. This seems to flow from what has gone before. Jesus has claimed authority to bestow life (24) and to judge men at the last day. And now, in face of the opposition against Him, He points out that the Jews have had a fourfold witness to Him, and that there can therefore be no excuse for them not coming to a knowledge of salvation. "Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life", He cries in 40. The way was open for them, by this fourfold witness, and they would not take it. In the same way, this fourfold witness is given to us, and to every man. There is no need for any man to miss eternal life. The way to heaven and home is clearly set forth for all who will take heed.

The first witness mentioned in these verses is John the Baptist (33). On their own confession, all that he spoke concerning Jesus was true (10:41), He was not the light, but a lamp whose shining illumined the darkness for any who had a mind to see the light. What he had said was, "Behold the Lamb of God... ", and the result was that some had received the witness and followed after Christ. Of others, however, Jesus very penetratingly said that they "were willing for a season to rejoice in his light" - that is, they were attracted to John's ministry and message for a time, but when they saw what it implied and involved, they turned back. The seed had fallen among thorns and had been choked. Men have the witness of John today also, in the proclamation of the Word. This is the initial and primary means by which men enter into life. Preaching bears witness to Christ and, in one way or another, cries "Behold the Lamb of God". To refuse, therefore, such witness is to leave men without excuse. They will not come to Him that they might have life.

73) 5:30-47

The second witness to Christ mentioned in these verses is borne by 9 the miracles He performed (36). The Jews not only had John's word concerning Him, they saw His works. In the Synoptic gospels the miracles are presented as the credentials of His kingship and lordship. If the Baptist's word was "Behold the Lamb", what the miracles were saying to the Jews was "Behold your King", He came announcing a kingdom and proclaiming Himself a King, and these were the proof that His claims were not false. The Apostle John's attitude to the miracles, however, is rather different. They point, he says, beyond themselves to the message of the gospel which they illustrate. The healing recorded at the beginning of this chapter illustrates the life-giving, soul-transforming power of Jesus in the gospel. Today also, this witness is borne to Christ. The works He does are eloquent of His power to save, The gospel is not just a story, it is a power that invades men's lives, When our Lord's disciples were called Christians first at Antioch (Acts 11) they were so called because their lives were so distinctive that a new word was coined to describe them. Their opponents had to acknowledge, however grudgingly, that something had made them different. Nor is it otherwise today: it is through the testimony of changed lives that many are brought to Christ They meet with people whose lives are different, and the difference bears witness to the power that has been at work in them, But sadly there are often those who see this difference, yet they reject the testimony. They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

74) 5:30-47

The third witness to Christ mentioned in these verses is that of the Scriptures themselves (39). Christ makes a truly astonishing claim here. The reference He makes is to the Old Testament not merely to the specifically Messianic passages, but to the Old Testament as a whole. They all point to Him. He is what the Old Testament is about, from Genesis to Malachi; He is the subject matter throughout Jesus' point in making this claim is that a right understanding of Moses must surely have led them to believe in Him, for this was the whole point of Moses' writings, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, like unto me; him shall ye hear", But they refused the witness of the Scriptures to Him, This is borne out in apostolic preaching, the burden of which was, quite simply, to show that Jesus was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. To refuse such testimony, therefore, is to be without excuse.

The final witness Jesus mentions is that of God Himself (37). Peter tells us (Acts 2:22), that Jesus was "a man approved of God", and Paul (Romans 1:4) that He was "declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead". At His baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration, God bore witness, "This is My beloved Son". The point Jesus makes is that when witness is thus borne to Him and men refuse it, the witness itself is their condemnation. He Himself will not require to accuse them, the witness itself - "even Moses", 45 -will do so. How solemnising: Every sermon a man has heard and not heeded will add accusation against him on the Day of Judgment. Well might Jesus say to us all, "Take heed how ye hear"!

75) **6:1-14**

This chapter unfolds the same kind of pattern as we have seen in the previous one; first, a miracle in the physical realm, then a spiritual discourse based on it, with the theme of Christ as the bread of life. But, on this occasion, there is an insertion between the miracle and the discourse of another miracle, that of Christ walking on the water, and, as we shall see, considerable significance attaches to this insertion. First of all, however, we think of the feeding of the five thousand. This is the only miracle of our Lord's that is recorded by all four gospel writers, and the only other incident that is recorded by all four is the story of the crucifixion. This is some indication of the importance the miracle had in the mind of the early Church. It has many values for us today. Its central lesson lies in what it says about Christ. This is the point in the whole of John's gospel, but, we see it very particularly here. It is a very spectacular miracle, and in essence there can be only one explanation - that it was the action of a God. It was a miracle in which a creative act was performed. In this sense, it contrasts with the miracle of healing recorded in the previous chapter, which was, as it were, a turning the clock back, a restoring of something that had been lost. Here, however, it is not the restoration of anything that had been lost, but a new creative act. This may be why all four gospels record it. Certainly, John's purpose in recording it is to show that Jesus was God. He is Lord of nature, and He can multiply as He pleases. If we bear in mind what John says of Him in the Prologue - "All things were made by Him" - it becomes clear that He could easily do this. Indeed, the whole question of the miraculous in the New Testament comes to rest here. If we have a right view of Who Jesus is, no miracle is going to be a stumbling block in any way. If Jesus Christ be God, we can have no problems with the miracles He performed.

76) 6:1-14

The reference to the Passover in 4 is significant, and when we remember the symbolic nature of John's writing, it becomes very meaningful for us. For the Passover itself was a shadow of things to come, and illustrates Christ's death on the cross, Christ, as Paul says in his Corinthian epistle, is our Passover Lamb, and it is by His death that He becomes the bread of life to mankind, and it is by that death that the living bread becomes available to the world, for that bread is the benefits of His passion and victory, justification, forgiveness, reconciliation, adoption, newness of life, daily grace and blessing. This is why John is so intent on focusing our attention on the work of Christ: the sign, the work of power in the physical realm, illustrates a principle operative in the spiritual, and what takes place in the sphere of creation points away from itself to the sphere of redemption. The multiplication of the loaves and fishes rivets attention on Christ as the bread of life and illustrates the real meaning of the gospel. This, then, was the purpose and intent of the miracle - it was a sign, performed at a deeply significant season of the year, by which those who witnessed it could discover Who He really was, and the nature of the work He came to perform. This interpretation is, of course, borne out by the sermon Jesus preached afterwards - "I am the bread of life". The evangelistic value of such a record is surely plain. In John's day, and in ours alike, there were hearts conscious of hunger and aching with longing, looking for that which will meet and satisfy their need. Christ is the One who can meet that need. We are made for Him, and only in Him can we find rest for our souls.

77) 6:1-14

The circumstances leading up to the miracle have something to teach us. Jesus asked Philip a question about the provision of bread, and John adds that He did so "to test Philip" (6). This is significant, apart from the matter of the miracle itself. When we company with Jesus, He is never prepared to allow us simply to amble along, but puts tests in our way. He keeps prodding us, so to speak, because He is concerned that we shall grow in grace. In one sense, being a disciple of Christ is a very uncomfortable business. One is not allowed to sit back and take things easy. Philip's reply to Jesus in 7 was pretty uncompromising as to the impossibility of anything being done for the multitude; which seems to show that, so far as Philip was concerned, he was not learning very much through His companying with the Saviour. Doubtless he had been present when the woman of Samaria had been converted, and when the man was healed at Bethesda. He had seen a miracle-working Jesus, yet when our Lord, as it were, puts the ball into Philip's court, inviting him to believe in His miracle-working power, all Philip can say is "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient". It is as if he had said, "Lord, it would take a miracle to feed all these people" - and, all the while, he was staring the miracle-worker in the face, and it did not dawn on him: "O Philip, you dullard!", we are tempted to say. But, are we ourselves so different? Sometimes in our prayers we think despairingly, "It would take a miracle to do this", and we sink back in despondency, forgetting that it is a miracle-God that we come to, in our prayers. Andrew (8) seems to be admitting the possibility of something happening, with the young lad's scanty provision. Perhaps he spoke more in hope than in faith, as if to say, "Perhaps He might do something with this supply, I'd better mention it, just in case". It was hardly a strong, positive attitude of faith, but surely it was better than Philip's attitude!

78) 6:1-14

The inadequacy of provision proved all that was needed on this occasion, for Jesus turned the little into much, making a feast for the five thousand in which all had sufficient and much was left over. Not that Jesus needed even this in order to work the miracle. He could, as Creator, have done it as well without the five loaves and two fishes as with them. But He deigned and condescended to make use of human provision, and herein lies an important lesson for us on the question of Christian stewardship. The lad gave up all he had to Christ; and it fed a multitude. We may not have much to offer Christ, but unreserved giving leads to blessing, for He multiplies it. This underlines the fact that it is not so much what we have or how much or how little we have, but the spirit in which we give it to Him, that is the all-important thing. Little, given unreservedly into the hands of Christ will always be made into much for His glory. All that we have is rightly His in any case. The lesson that stands out clearly here is that a true stewardship of what we have - time, talents, money - will always lead to miracle-working power being released among God's people. The young lad who became the instrument of this notable miracle is not even named - in this, he is the representative of countless of God's people who seek to exercise a wise and faithful stewardship in the work of the gospel, and whose giving is never in the forefront of the news but dear to the heart of the Lord. He is not slow to acknowledge and commend it. The Father who sees in secret, we are told by Jesus Himself, shall reward them openly (Matthew 6:4, 6).

79) 6:15-21

We come now to the second miracle recorded in the chapter, and its significance. What is said in 15 is crucial for a proper understanding of it. Jesus, we are told, withdrew from the crowd because He saw they wanted to make Him a king. This was evidence that they did not perceive the meaning of the miracle recorded in 1-14. It is against this background that we must understand what follows here. Why should the miracle of the walking on the water be recorded by the Holy Spirit at this particular point? Two things may be said. The first is this: It was a sign for the benefit of the disciples rather than the multitude. The latter had failed to see the message in the earlier miracle. Did His disciples see? Perhaps they did, dimly. This second sign was to teach them the same lesson, in a different way. The first sign taught Who He was, and so does this one. It is a great, stupendous miracle. He Who brought the seas into being by the word of His mouth now walks on their waves. And it was just as easy for Him to walk on them as it was to make them in the beginning. Thus, the sign bore witness afresh to His Godhead. But -more. He was saying to them in different language the same thing as in 1-14: "It is I you need, and life is but loss without Me. Whatever you have, if you have not Me, all is vain, and you are tempest-tossed and in jeopardy. This illustrates the first miracle's meaning graphically. Men are not always conscious of spiritual hunger, although they are always hungry. It is the conscious times that reveal the need - when the clouds come on, when the storms begin to rage, and they stand alone. It is then the realisation comes. Mark 6:45 tells us Jesus sent His disciples across the sea - i.e., He sent them into the storm, to discover their need of Him, and He often does this today. The heart of God longs that men might become conscious of their need of Him.

80) 6:15-21

The second point here is that this miracle was a protest from the Lord against the misunderstanding of His mission and message. The miracle was in a particular sense a especially supernatural one, and one which evidenced the powers of the world to come in a marked fashion. It is a different kind of miracle from most of the others: healing is a reversal of a wrong process and principle, but this is something new. We know of no kind of life in which bodies can be upheld by water. Here was a glimpse of a new kind of world, the other world, the world to come. This is very important for a true interpretation of the significance of the miracle. For it was a reaction against the "this-worldliness" of the multitude's reaction. This is a needful reminder today. J B Phillips points out somewhere that in many quarters today Christianity is considered seriously only because of its social implications. This is precisely the attitude Jesus is reacting against. The multitude wanted to make Him a king because He had power to meet their temporal, material needs. It is of course good to be able to deal with material needs - this is not in dispute - but Jesus protested because in their preoccupation with the material they had neglected the spiritual. How often is this true today: What is the characteristic note in the Church's voice in our time? Is it not on temporal matters, things of this world, and do not its most serious and vocal pronouncements have to do with things like the H-bomb, Vietnam, the Common Market and such like? Our Lord is protesting against this kind of preoccupation in which graver issues are forgotten. The central message of the gospel is about eternal issues, and it is criminal folly and negligence to soft-pedal this message or ignore or distort it (compare 27 with Luke 12:4, 5, for the relative values of the material and spiritual, and the temporal and eternal).

81) 6:15-21

We may look at one or two further points in the story of the walking on the water before passing to the next verses. One very important consideration is concealed by the AV translation of Jesus' words in 20, "It is I; be not afraid". In the Greek, the words are, "I am; be not afraid". John has certainly recorded this with a deep sense of the significance of their meaning. It is earlier in this same chapter that Jesus makes the first of His superlative claims with these words in them, "I am the bread of life". The disciples, steeped as they were in the tradition of the Old Testament Scriptures, must surely have been conscious of the association of these words with the revelation God gave of Himself to Moses at the burning bush. To have used the mighty and mysterious words that were sacred to the name of Jehovah could have meant only one thing to them: it was another assertion of Deity.

Some commentators suggest that another miracle is involved in 21b. To come immediately to land when they were twenty-five furlongs away, more than suggests something supernatural. Others suggest an association of ideas with Psalm 107:9, 10 - the similarity is almost too striking to be coincidental - and, if so, the implication once again is that Jesus is God, for it is of God that the Psalm speaks. John's gospel is full of hidden claims and assertions about the Godhead of Christ.

82) 6:22-34

The remainder of the chapter falls into four sections: 26-34, 35-50, 51-59 and the Woman of Samaria in 60-71. In the first of these, Christ underlines the interpretation suggested in the Notes on 15-21 about the danger of making material considerations our concern and preoccupation instead of spiritual considerations (27), There is, of course, no suggestion, in the use of the word "labour", of salvation by works, When they said, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" (28), Jesus replied, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" (29). What is clear is that our Lord's injunction is that we must "labour to believe", as if to say, "Make it the great business of your life, and something engaging all your energies and might, to come to saving faith in Me". Behind the questioning in 30, 31 lies the Jewish belief that the coming of the Messianic kingdom would restore again the gift of manna from heaven. Hence their word about the "sign": "If you are the Messiah, prove it by sending manna from heaven again". Two points arise here. Firstly, had He not already given them bread from heaven, in the, feeding of the five thousand? Were they so blind to the realities of the situation that they could not see in this a fulfilment of their cherished belief? Secondly, He went on to reply to them in the words of 33 and 35, The manna in olden time was the divine provision for the wilderness journeyings to the Promised Land, and it was given day by day right to the end, That, points out Jesus, was not the true bread, but it was a symbol of it, and an illustration, and the true bread is likewise for the pilgrim journey of the people of God on their way to the Kingdom. But they did not understand, in spite of the seeming response in 34. They wanted bread, but He was offering Himself (35), and Him they were refusing. The same kind of misconception was at work in them as in the Woman of Samaria in 4:15.

83) 6:35-50

These verses develop our Lord's argument. Not only does He give the bread of life to men, He is that bread. And, therefore, it is in a personal relationship with Him that souls are fed and satisfied. The bread of life is not a blessing we receive, it is Himself. Nor is this anybody's simply for the asking (34), but only for those who are drawn by the Father to the Son (37, 39, 40). Belief in the Son is possible to men because He is incarnate, and can be seen by them (36), yet, though they have seen Him they have not believed. This is ultimately a mystery, to be understood in terms of divine, electing grace (37 ff.). The Jews murmured at His words (41), making clear that what was said in 34 was a complete misunderstanding of the situation, They knew Him, they said, but their knowledge was a knowledge after the flesh, not a spiritual discernment of Who He was, and therefore not true, saving knowledge at all. Belief in the Son (44) is the work of the Father, as Isaiah says in 54:13. What our Lord adds in 45b is an extremely important statement, particularly in relation to what we sometimes call comparative religion. The test of the truth of any religion is ultimately its attitude to Christ, If any man - be he Hindu, Muslim, Taoist or animist - has been truly taught of God, then they will truly respond to Christ as soon as they hear of Him. This applies alike to the Jews, and to all religious folk who claim they worship God. If they do so truly, they will embrace Christ; if they do not come to Him, it means that the God they have been worshipping is not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the true and living God, This is the great, the conclusive test: "What think ye of Christ?"

84) 6:51-59

We should notice the sequence in the sections of our Lord's teaching. First, He speaks of the bread that comes down from heaven; then He claims to be that bread, indicating that it is found only in fellowship with Him. Now, in 51-59, He takes the discussion a step further and points out that fellowship with Him will necessarily mean fellowship death. This is where the bread of life is found. There can be only one meaning for Jesus' words in 51, 53. They are couched in sacrificial terminology, and they imply violent death. It is the giving of Himself in death that makes Him the bread of life to the world. The bread must be broken before it can become food for men, This focusing of blessing to men on the death He was to die is quite central to the theology of the gospel, and indeed is a fundamental presupposition of everything John and the other gospel writers record. Every miracle Jesus wrought, every work of power, whether in the realm of nature or of disease or the dark underworld of spirits, owed its virtue to the death He was to die when His hour was come. They were performed on the strength of that death. It is not too much to say that every possibility of divine blessing anywhere in the universe centres upon that death and partakes of its grace. This is the point that Jesus is making. Not to understand this is simply not to understand the meaning of the gospel.

85) **6:60-71**

The offer of the bread of life implies and involves fellowship with Christ in His death, and this means an experimental crucifixion of all that is natural and fleshly in the heart, if we would taste of the hidden manna and be satisfied. It means dying to sin daily, accepting the discipline of the cross daily in our lives, letting its heart-bruising message slay all manner of evil things in us, mortifying the deeds of the body through the Spirit. This is just another way of saying that in Christian experience we die to live. We must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ before we can know the freedom of the gospel. Crucifixion precedes resurrection in the experience of the believer. And this is the price many are not prepared to pay, and they therefore go hungry and their souls are poverty-stricken and lifeless. For them the message of fellowship with Christ in His cross is far too devastating and rigorous; it is a stumbling block, because the life of the flesh, with all its seductive charms, sometimes on very high, legitimate levels, is too attractive to them and means too much to them. Furthermore, it means a Christ-centred life. Jesus says, 'I am the bread of life', therefore feed on Me alone, find all your satisfaction, fulness and blessedness in Me. At first, this sounds attractive to the natural heart, but it is really the heart of the offence, for it means a one-track life in the fullest sense of the term. Paul expressed it in the words, 'To me to live is Christ'. This is not always appreciated by Christians. So often, in the lives of believers, there are other centres to Christian life, Christian service, Christian fellowship, Christian concern. What do we live for? These things, good in themselves, are still things, and only fellowship with Him can satisfy our hearts. It is not that service or fellowship must go (how could we think so?) but that they should be displaced from the centre and given their proper place, and be rid of all that is fleshly in them. Our interests, habits, recreations, friendships - everything must come under the discipline of the cross. Only then can they be free from the danger of competing with Christ.

86) 6:60-71

But now the other reaction - Peter's (68). To appreciate the full force of his words we need to look ahead into the history of Acts. It is there that we see how he and his companions really embraced Jesus' words. They were weaned from their earth-bound existence, to prove the reality and the fulness of the hidden manna. They were men who had entered into fellowship with Christ in His death. What do we suppose was the explanation of the mighty character-formation in the lives of believers in the early Church? It is just that they were feeding on the death of Christ and drawing eternal virtue from His atoning sacrifice to make them strong. What riches are to be found in this wonderful paradox of death and life. This is the living bread, and no man will ever hunger spiritually when he is feeding there. Above all, they were in fellowship with Him. He was the centre of their lives; they walked with Him day by day, and they knew the power of that transforming friendship. Here, then, are the alternatives: 'This is a hard saying' or 'Though Nast the words of eternal life'. This is the issue of discipleship; and in this costly and agonising paradox all the greatest and most fruitful experiences of grace lie. Have we not found it so?

87) 7:1-9

In no chapter of John's gospel does the symbolic and allusive character of his writing appear more clearly than here, and it is particularly necessary to understand this if we are going to get through to the meaning and point, of what he says. It is a long chapter, and at first glance seems to be a stringing together of various disjointed utterances and arguments, But the unifying theme is the Feast of Tabernacles, and it is here we must start. It is in 2 that we have the opening statement which gives the key to everything else, just as in the previous chapter the statement about the Jews' Passover leads into the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand and the discussion on the bread of life, In the feast of tabernacles the Jews commemorated their journeyings in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. It was a great feast, when the mighty works of God on their behalf were brought to mind. It was also celebrated at the close of the harvest, and was regarded as a foreshadowing of the day of the Lord and the final harvest day of God, One of the Scriptures read at the feast was Zechariah 14, which speaks of conditions obtaining in the messianic age - continuous daylong and unending supply of water. Two ceremonies took place during the festival, connected with the prophetic utterance in Zechariah: the first was the ritual drawing of water from the Pool of Siloam in a golden pitcher, to be poured on the altar by the priests, to the accompaniment of the singing of the congregation, 'With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation' (Isa 12:3); the second was the all-night illumination of one of the temple courts on the first night of the festival, and on other nights also, so brilliantly that every court in Jerusalem was said to be lit up by it, Water and light are therefore the two keynotes; and it is with this background that we must understand our Lord's statements in 37 and in 8:12, 'If any man thirst....' and 'I am the light of the world'.

88) 7:1 9

The NEB rendering of 3 and 4 reads much more graphically than the A V., and should be looked at for a deeper understanding of what was being said. Jesus' brothers were exhorting Him to go into Judaea and chiding Him for remaining in seclusion if He really wanted to make a public impact. It is clear that they did not really understand what Jesus was about, and their lack of faith in Him (5) is a fairly unmistakable indication that they were to be classed with those in 2:23 - 25, so far as believing in Him was concerned. What is even more astonishing in these verses is to find that so considerable a scholar as William Temple should subscribe to the idea that the 'brothers' of Jesus could only have been half-brothers, sons of Joseph by an earlier marriage. Others suggest that the 'brothers' were really cousins. There is no evidence in Scripture to substantiate such assumptions. One sees of course why this unwarranted interpretation is put upon the plain text: it is that it is regarded as unthinkable that Mary should have ever had other children, after bearing Jesus. This, however, is a Catholic tradition, not a biblical one, and is based on the idea of the perpetual virginity of Mary. But why should it be thought that Mary must not have had any more children? It calls in question the whole point of the Incarnation to suppose any such thing. The birth of Jesus was unique; but it did not impose any magical incapacity on Mary to have any more family; it was at this one point - and this one point only - that the natural processes of conception were suspended. Thereafter Mary reverted to being an ordinary woman and an ordinary mother, and it is no reflection either on the reality of the miraculous conception of Jesus or of the activity of God in the Incarnation to say so. Mark in his gospel names the four brothers of Jesus, and adds that they had sisters. Surely the obvious interpretation is that they were natural brothers and sisters of our Lord. The doctrine of the real humanity of Christ commits us to such a view.

89) 7:10-13

One thing that stands out in this passage is the sense of conflict and tension throughout. It is one of John's concerns in the chapter to convey this. It is the third recorded visit of our Lord's to Jerusalem (the others being the cleansing of the temple in chapter 2 and the miracle at Bethesda in chapter 5), and it is as if John were saying to us, 'Here is another example of what I meant in the Prologue when I spoke of the conflict between light and darkness'. The drama of the situation can be felt. Clearly there was a division among the people about Jesus. One section of them were saying 'He is a good man' - an unwitting confession, almost, in John's eyes, of His divinity; others saw in Him 'a deceiver of the people'. And when one realises that these opposing views were held and being expressed, not openly, but under cover, so to speak, for fear of the authorities, it is easy to understand how tension was building up almost to flash-point. Seldom could there have been a celebration of the feast of tabernacles in such a drama-charged situation. Little wonder there was a sense of expectancy that something tremendous might happen! It was into such a situation that Jesus came and began to teach in the temple.

90) 7:14-24

One wonders whether John is thinking of Malachi's prophecy (3:1,2), 'The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple'. Jesus' coming to the temple certainly precipitated a sense of tension and crisis there. The Jews were astonished at His teaching, but 15 is an expression not of admiration but of criticism - criticism that one who was obviously untrained in the rabbinic schools should be speaking with such confidence and authority. But Jesus refers them to His authority as being God (16), and asserts that if they are prepared to do the will of God they will know whether His teaching comes from God or is merely His own. An interesting point arises here. Men are often much more concerned to quote or refer to acknowledged authorities of the past than they are to recognise or discern a true spiritual authority in what they hear. In many quarters there is an unwillingness to pay any heed to what a man says unless he can bolster it up with copious footnotes from the scholars. This, in our view, is not a healthy state of affairs - not that the scholars have nothing to say, or that scholarship is not an essential (indeed it is), but that to give it an exclusive prerogative in the realm of truth can effectively prevent the spirit having His freedom in the Church, for it makes the tacit assumption that no creative truth or new insight into truth is possible except from the past. And this is absurd.

In 19 ff Jesus deliberately takes the offensive, bringing out into the open the point of contention that became plain as far back as chapter 5 - the healing of the man on the Sabbath day. This was the burning issue: His challenge to the Jews' entrenched interpretation of the law was one that they could not bear. And it led, humanly speaking, to His death.

91) 7:25-31

From the comments of the crowd in these verses it is clear that they were conscious of the conflict that was in the air. It is difficult to decide whether they are with a dawning sense of awe or in sheer cynicism. They have been listening to Jesus speaking openly in the temple, they know that it is He whom the authorities are seeking to kill, yet He is allowed to teach on without their taking any action. Can it be, they say, that our rulers have decided after all that this is the Messiah? Perhaps there was both cynicism and tentative belief in their voices. At all events, they must have understood from His words in 28 and 29 that He was making an implicit claim to be equal with God. But it is one thing for them to say, 'Is not this the Christ?' and another for them to accept it when He Himself made the claim to be Messiah, and this seems to have goaded the authorities into action (30) - action which 'His hour' successfully forestalled, since it was not yet come. This is an important reminder to us all that a man is immortal till his work is done, and should encourage us when we tend to be fearful in the midst of adverse circumstances. The commentators suggest that the 'belief' expressed in 31 must be regarded as suspect: they were judging Him by the number of miracles He had performed, and assessing His claim to Messiahship on these grounds. But it may well be that with some there was a sincere turning to Him because, after all, wherever Christ is there is division about Him, with some reacting against Him, and some for Him. Why should not some have come to true faith through His testimony?

92) 7:32-36

In the context of the continuing conflict of opinion concerning Jesus, in which the temple guard were sent to arrest Him, we have our Lord's statement about His coming death and resurrection (33, 34) which was completely misunderstood by the Jews. In this connection it is interesting to note that we have in 35 yet another instance of the same kind of literal misunderstanding of Jesus's words that John has repeatedly recorded for us. When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about being born again, Nicodemus literalised the thought (3:4); when the woman of Samaria heard of the living water, and said 'Give me this water, , ' she was still thinking in terms of the well of Jacob; when the Jews said, 'Evermore give us this bread' (6:34) they were thinking in material terms. And here, they were also thinking thus, and assumed that when He talked of going away He was using geographical terms, and meant that He was perhaps going off as a missionary to the dispersion and preach to the Gentiles. Their puzzlement must have been great; and it serves to emphasise still more dramatically John's central contention that in the coming of Christ there came a conflict between light and darkness which only the illumining Spirit of God could ever solve. Hence, as we see in tomorrow's reading, the reference to that Spirit (39).

93) 7:37-44

At the climax of the feast, Jesus stood up and uttered the wonderful words recorded in 37, 38, Taken even by themselves, they are rich in the message they bear, but they become infinitely more so when their context is understood, and it is this we must study with great care. The reference to living water links up with the water used in the festival ceremonial (see note for Friday, 14th), and its symbolising of the water from the rock during Israel's wilderness journeyings. It is as if Jesus were saying, 'You are remembering how thirst was quenched in the wilderness by water from the smitten rock, I am that Rock, and faith in Me will bring supplies of living water that will quench your thirst for ever more. Come to Me and drink. What happened in olden time was but an illustration, a symbol, of what was to happen when Messiah came. I am He, and living water has now come'. In the words He spoke here, therefore, He claimed to be the fulfilment of Old Testament promise and prophecy. But more. He yearned that in their observance of the feast they should see its fulfilment in Himself. He could see that although they were celebrating it, they were really strangers to its real message. They were 'outside' it - it was, to them, something that happened long ago, and they were looking back at it as such. It had nothing to say to their present need. This was the real tragedy about Judaism then. It was not a living religion; it had a great and wonderful tradition, but it was only a shell. There was no kernel in it. It was a formal, lifeless, second-hand religion. All along, Jesus perceived this tragedy and offered Himself to men as One who could make real the message of the Scriptures and fulfil all its promises to them. All this is involved in a true understanding of Jesus words here.

94) 7:37-44

The application of the thoughts expressed in yesterday's Note is surely pertinent and obvious today. For the danger of institutional religion has always been that it should degenerate into a barren formalism, with no life in it. It is certainly one of the great problems that face the Church in our time. There is no lack of religion in Scotland, with more than 1¼ million members on our rolls. They come to God's House, they work for the Church with a loyalty that is indisputable, yet so many are 'outside' and strangers to the real meaning and message of the gospel. They think of Christ as He was 2000 years ago, they think of Him as Example, Inspiration, Hero, but it is always something in the past. It is for this reason that there are multitudes that are in error about the Faith, and have no real assurance of salvation; it has never become a vital reality to them, it had never happened to them. It is over against this that the gospel word must be proclaimed. And O, the need for a protest today against the dead and barren institution of religion, O, for a breath of the living Spirit to bring real religion to men's hearts and to congregations, to make all the great affirmations of the Faith into real, living experience, to make them happen to people!

95) 7:37-44

A careful examination of the chronology of Luke 1 reveals a deeply interesting fact, which we may now consider in relation to the feast of tabernacles. Luke tells us that Zacharias was 'of the course of Abia (Abijah)'. The record of all the temple courses is given us in 1 Chron 24:7-19, where we learn that there were 24 in all in the annual rote, i.e. one each fortnight. The eighth course, that of Abia, would therefore fall in the second fortnight of the fourth month, which fell in our June/July period. It was then that John the Baptist was conceived in the womb of Elizabeth, who, we are told in Luke 1:24, hid herself for five months. Then in the sixth month - i.e. six months after Elisabeth's experience, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary foretelling the birth of Jesus. This, the sixth month after Elisabeth's experience, makes it the tenth month of the Jewish year; which means that the birth of Jesus took place in the second half of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, i.e. at the time of the feast of tabernacles which, as Lev 23:34 tells us, was celebrated from the 15th to the 21st of the seventh month. It is surely not without significance that the Son of God was born at the time of the feast of tabernacles, and may well have been born on the last great day of the feast itself. The association of ideas here is very wonderful, and even John's statement in 1:14 about the Word being made flesh takes a new significance when we recall that the word 'dwelt' literally reads 'tabernacled among us' in the Greek. Is not this to us a proclamation that His Incarnation, His birthday, is the fulfilment of the meaning and purpose of the ancient feast? And what must it have meant to His own inner self-consciousness, as He celebrated His birthday at the feast?

96) 7:37-44

If we follow the symbolism of John's thought throughout the chapter, it is not fanciful to see in the course of events a portrayal of his main message. Consider what happened at this feast: Jesus came up to Jerusalem in secret, then made Himself known suddenly. Then, when the people were divided over Him, He withdrew and retired from the scene. Such is the outline of the chapter. Is John saying something to us in all this? We may recall Malachi's prophecy. The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple....But who may abide the day of His coming?', recall too !John's own words in the Prologue, 'He came unto his own, and his own received Him not. The chapter certainly reflects the story of His coming to the people of Israel: He came to them in secret, incognito, then manifested Himself to them in miracles, wonders and signs; there was a division among them, they could not make up their minds about Him; they resisted and finally rejected Him. And He finally withdrew from them and left their house desolate (Matt 23:38). Is Christ here, then, by His symbolic action, conveying this warning to them - the sudden appearing, the manifestation, the withdrawal? There may be something in this. But more: this is also the pattern of the Holy Spirit's dealings with men. He comes to men's hearts like this, sometimes secretly, sometimes suddenly, confronting them with His tremendous challenge and claims. This is the crisis of grace; and when men delay their response to Him and resist His overtures, He withdraws from them. This is one of the awesome things about the gospel. We may not presume to keep Christ waiting too long. He is the King, and He summons us to obedience. This is why Isaiah cries 'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near'.

97) 7:37-44

Some further points in these verses call for comment before we leave them. The reference to the scripture in 38 has puzzled commentators, as no specific passage of the Old Testament can be cited, but cf Zech 13:1, 14:8, Isa 44:3, 55:1, 58:11, which certainly give substance to our Lord's words here. John's comment in 39 is even more significant: 'This spake He of the Spirit'. The Spirit, then can be spoken about when He is not specifically referred to by Name! This is a salutary reminder, and we have a very excellent example of this in Paul's letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, in which the name of the Spirit is hardly mentioned, but His presence, working and power are everywhere evident. John next goes on to say 'which they that believe on Him should receive' - that is, saving faith appropriates the Spirit, and this is what opens up a well of water within us. Deeply interesting also are the words which follow: 'The Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified'. One commentator properly points out that this is a theological, rather than a chronological, statement, and it does not mean that the Spirit was not at work in the disciples' lives before Pentecost. Statements such as that in Mark 12:36 surely make it abundantly plain that the Spirit was at work even in the Old Testament dispensation, let alone among the disciples of our Lord before Pentecost. Theologically, however, and dispensationally, the Spirit could not have been as yet given, since Jesus had not yet accomplished the work on which the giving of the Spirit depended. In the spiritual sense, however - and this bears a message of great import for us - the dispensational order holds good: there can be no endowment of the Spirit until Jesus is glorified in a believer's life. 'No cross, no crown' is an unailing principle in spiritual experience.

98) 7:45-52

These verses return to the thought of 32, and to the command of the Pharisees to the temple police. The latter are influenced and affected by His ministry to such an extent that they are rendered powerless to arrest Him. 'Never man spake like this man' they exclaimed. The emphasis here in the Greek is on the word 'man'. It was as if they said, 'No mere man could ever speak like this'. In other words, they discerned His divinity, and this is what kept their hands off Him. They sensed that to handle or molest Him would be like committing an act of sacrilege, and they were not prepared to obey even the scribes and Pharisees to defile themselves in that way. But this left no impression on the hardened Pharisees, who contemptuously dismissed the police as being deceived and bemused. 'You will not find any responsible person believing in Him', they said - but in fact Nicodemus, one of their number, was in the process of coming to faith in Him, as we see in 50 ff. And his point is a very shrewd one. The Pharisees were dismissing the crowd as ignorant rabble (49), but Nicodemus asks them, in effect, 'Do you yourselves know the law, when you are condemning a man unheard? This clearly nettled them, as the sharp and contemptuous retort about Galilee indicates. But more important than the Pharisees' reaction here is Nicodemus's John seems to be drawing our attention to him (50), as if to say, 'Do you not see how this man is being drawn out to Christ?' At this time the shadow of the cross was coming down more and more upon Jesus and as it became more evident, people became more conscious, from the spiritual point of view, of its drawing power. 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me' (12:32)

99) 8:1-11

The manuscript evidence for this passage is against its position here, or its attribution to John. Some think it is by Luke, It certainly interrupts the sequence of thought and discussion arising out of the celebration of the feast of tabernacles, for 8:12 belongs to the 'tabernacles' theme, referring to the illumination of the temple during the feast days. Yet the arguments put forward about relegating the passage to an appendix to not quite convince one. And there is one consideration which, it seems, is important as an indication that there has been a divine over-ruling in the matter of its inclusion here, and it is this: in 8:7 Jesus says, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her'- And at the end of the chapter (59) we are told that the Jews took up stones to cast at Jesus. Is there not an association of ideas there? Jesus took the sinner's place, took the sinner's condemnation, and here, the stones that were the woman's due according to the law. Is John saying something to us here about substitutionary atonement for sin? Whatever the placing of the passage, however, the passage itself is authentic, and we shall treat it as such, in tomorrow's Note.

100) 8:1-11

Two things in particular stand out in the story: one is the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees, the other is our Lord's attitude, to the woman. As to the first, the truly odious thing is that these men were using the woman's circumstances to attempt to trap Jesus into error. They were tempting Him (6). As such, this incident is comparable to their saying, 'Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?', where either answer would have trapped Him: 'Yes' would have put Him in the wrong with them, 'No' with the Roman government. So here. To say, 'Apply the law and stone her' would have gone against the Roman government who retained the prerogative of capital punishment and did not allow the Jews to exercise it; it would also have gone against the more liberal and lenient attitude to such a law that was in vogue among the Jews at the time. To say 'Do not stone her' would have on the other hand opened him to the charge that He did not honour the Law of Moses. This was their craftiness. It was ugly in the case of the tribute money. But to use it here, and use the woman's shame as a lever against Christ was horrible and contemptuous, and it betrayed a heartlessness and inhumanity beyond words. It is a terrible thing to use people: They were the guardians of the law, but what were they caring about the law here? There was no sense of indignation in (hem at its violation, only evil intent to trap Jesus, and anything would do as an excuse or pretext. What sin was theirs!

101) 8:1-11

Now we consider Jesus' attitude. We are told that He stooped down (6). Some interpret this as His refusal to 'stand' in judgment on her. This may well be. Others think that He stooped to hide the burning confusion of His face and relieved His agitation by tracing patterns in the dust. It is unlikely however that Jesus would have been embarrassed; but it is likely that this attitude represents a turning away in protest, in protest - not from the woman in her sin but from the public exposure of it that these men had made in the streets of Jerusalem. There are some things better not even mentioned (Eph 5:12). Jesus' attitude was not embarrassment; He was not at a loss for an answer. He just would rather not have answered at all such an improper question. But the Pharisees misunderstood his silence, and thought they had Him cornered. And therefore sought to press home their (supposed) advantage. Then came the flashing word in 7. There are several things to be said here. For one thing, there is no warrant in Jesus' words for abrogating the law, nor do they give support for the abolition of capital punishment, by adopting the attitude that only one free from sin could rightly condemn another. This is not the point. It is that Jesus was not an administrator of the law but a moral and spiritual teacher. And he refused to be a judge and a lawgiver over the woman. We need to distinguish things that are different here. These men had no right to condemn the woman. The place for condemnation was the Jewish Council, the properly constituted place of law. Probably they were already on the way to the Council with the woman, and stopped when they saw Jesus, and tried to put Him on the spot. But Jesus was not having any - this is the point that is being made.

102) 8:1-11

The phrase 'without sin' (7) must surely mean 'without this sin'. And it was this that convicted their consciences. It took only one sentence from our Lord to reduce these evil men to confusion, with the bare nerve ends of their consciences exposed, and they slunk away condemned, from the youngest to the eldest. But what did He write on the ground? The suggestions have been many and ingenious, but the truth is that we do not know what He wrote, if anything and it is useless to speculate, in default of any clear indication from any other part of Scripture. It is clear that it is not necessary for us to know, if it is not revealed to us. What is explicit is the Lord's dealing with the woman. It has been said that there is no word of forgiveness spoken in the story, but it would be difficult to conceive of the words Jesus did speak to her in any other way than conveying forgiveness. We need have no fear that He was condoning her sin in any way. How could He? But it is at least worthy of notice that the only One in all the earth who was in a position morally to have thrown the first stone at her did not do it. No word of condemnation passed His lips or entered His thoughts. Doubtless, however the sense of condemnation was very real in her, and that it led to an experience of forgiveness that was very wonderful. In fact, we do not generally need Him to condemn us when we sin; our hearts and consciences do all the condemning that is necessary - indeed we castigate ourselves at times remorselessly, so much so at times that the Lord has to say to us, 'My child, don't go on at yourself like that, receive My forgiveness and be at rest. ' Why can we not simply take Him at His word?

103) 8:12-20

It is very difficult not to associate the wonderful words in 12 with the story of the woman in 1-11. They fit it so beautifully, for Jesus had been light to her in her darkness. There may also be a backward reference to the incident with Nicodemus in 7:50 ff. Here was a man who had been walking in darkness but was now gradually emerging into the light, and perhaps Jesus was thinking to encourage him in his spiritual progress, exhorting him to follow Him. But surely its first reference is to the feast of tabernacles and the illumination of the temple courts during the festival symbolising the pillar of cloud and fire in Israel's wilderness journeyings. Jesus is claiming to be the reality of which that was the mere symbol. This, of course, is a Messianic claim (cf Isa 42:6, 49:6), and the Jews clearly see the implication of His words as being Messianic. The 'I am' would probably carry much deeper significance for them than it does for us. And it is the authority with which He speaks that they question and challenge (13). It may be that they are quoting Jesus' own words at Him here. He had already said in 5:31, 'If I bear witness of Myself, my witness is not true'. But if so, this is a shallow and superficial understanding of Jesus' words, betraying a basic lack of appreciation of Who He is. There is no contradiction. Indeed, He goes on to say that His authority, and the truth of His witness, reside in the fact that He knows whence He has come and whither He goes. On this ground - His eternal Sonship - He claims the right to be heard and believed (14). There is something important here. On the one hand, there is, ultimately, no mere rational proof of our Lord's authority; and on the other hand, once a man perceives His deity and divinity, there is no further question of the authority of His words. This means, we do not prove Christ, but believe in Him.

104) 8:12-20

This was the failure and blindness of the Pharisees: they could not tell whence He came and whither He was going. They were blind to His identity, knowing Him only after the flesh (15), and what follows from 16 onwards serve to emphasise this, and the fact that there was really no point of contact between them. Jesus was not alone (16) - this is the point made in 5:31 ff - for the Father bore witness to Him also, and therefore there is a twofold witness to Him, which fulfills the rabbinical law about two witnesses being required (17, 18). But they ask, 'Where is thy father?' (19) They did not ask, 'Who is thy father?' - that would have shown that there was some gleam of dawning light in their hearts. But they spoke with contempt, thinking his father to be Joseph the carpenter. Not Jesus the mere historical personage, but Jesus the Son of God - this is the point they did not, would not, see. But to see no more in Jesus than a human, historical personage, is not to see Him at all in any significant, spiritual sense. The gulf between them and Jesus is complete.

105) 8:21-30

Jesus' words in 21. 'I go my Way' are a veiled reference. to His death, not to His departing from the feast. How true a prophecy it proved to be, for after His death, blindness in part happened to Israel They would seek Him unsuccessfully and would die in their sins, the sin of having rejected the Son of God and, with Him, their one hope of salvation, Thus, 'whither I go ye cannot come' emphasises the inability of the unbelieving Jews to enter the eternal life offered to believers. The Jews' blindness is further indicated in 22: to think He should have been referring to suicide is evidence of the complete gulf between darkness and light seen so often in the questions asked of Jesus Yet, His life was not taken when He was crucified, but voluntarily laid down. In 24 we have a further comment on 21, in a graphic and dramatic way that the A V. partially conceals. What Jesus said was 'If ye believe not that I am', and 'I am' was the covenant name of Jehovah. This was a clear claim that what Jehovah was to the old covenant people, He was to the new. Even this, however, failed to penetrate, as we see from the Pharisees' question in 25 and the further comment by John in 27. In 28, 29, Jesus makes the prophecy that when He was lifted up on the cross they would know who He was, and this does seem to have got through to some (30), and they believed on Him, But something requires to be said about 30, and will be, in tomorrow's Note.

106) 8:31-47

The cruciality of our Lord's deity for true faith has been a cardinal point not only in the discussion in this chapter, but throughout John's record, and it is further borne out by a distinction that is made in 30 and 31 between the two Greek expressions for 'believed'. The first implies a faith that involves personal reliance, trust and commitment, while the second, in 31, is merely nominal and superficial, akin to that of the disciples in 2:23, where we are told that Jesus was not prepared to commit Himself to them. Jesus' words to the Jews that believed in this way have therefore the effect of sifting them, and exposing the fatal lack in their attitude to Him. Hence their immediate reaction in 33, objecting to the suggestion that they needed to be made free, and their increasing resistance to His radical probing of their basic attitudes (37, 39). What really hindered them from becoming disciples and relying on Him was their reliance on 'other thing', e.g. their traditional welcome for Abraham. This Jesus deals with in 34, 35. Though freeborn, they had become slaves and needed to be set free. But they refused to recognise their need and their plight, and therefore no salvation could be theirs. Only the Son can make men free. And the more He says, the more they reveal their fundamental lack of understanding of the things of God, a blindness due to their unwillingness to receive His testimony concerning Himself (43); until finally belief in Him that refuses to acknowledge His deity is exposed as being of the devil (44). So central is the doctrine of the deity of Christ for true, saving faith.

107) 8:48-59

The accusation of demon possession levelled against Jesus in these verses represents the 'last-ditch' stand the Pharisees can make. And they take refuge in it, with something like desperation. One thing is clear: the Jews were in no doubt as to the kind of claim Jesus was making for Himself. They knew He was claiming Deity; and since this to them was unthinkable, the only possible alternative must be that he had a devil. Only one who was either devil possessed or the Messiah could dare to speak as He does in 51. This is what lies behind the contemptuous question they ask in 53, 'Art thou greater than our father Abraham?' To this Jesus answers two things; firstly, that 'Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad'. This categorically claims His own pre-existence. Jesus means and implies that Abraham's faith looked forward to His own coming, and indeed rested upon that coming: and by implication He indicated that the faith of all the old dispensation was faith in the promise of His coming. Secondly, He uttered perhaps the most profound of all His statements, 'Before Abraham was, I am'. These words not only serve to reinforce the earlier claim in 56, making even more explicit His pre-existence, but also in the use of the sacred 'I am' emphasises His eternal pre-existence and His essential Deity. The assumption of the divine Name of the Old Testament could lead only to worship and adoration on the part of those who believed in Him, and the assumption of blasphemy on the part of those who did not. It was on this ground that they took up stones to throw at Him (59).

108) 9:1-7

On any interpretation this is a master piece of a story. Yet, though simple in its outline and language, it has many undertones which have a real significance, and as we remember John's concern with the symbolic we shall the better be able to grasp them. The context is still the feast of tabernacles: 5 simply reiterates 8:12 which, as we have seen, echoes the theme of light and illumination in the ritual of the feast; while the sending, of the blind man to Siloam becomes a very eloquent symbol when we remember that at the feast the priests went to the Pool there to bring water for their ritual. It was as if Jesus was investing the Siloam ritual with the true meaning it was meant to have, in much the same way as the lame man at the temple gate in Acts 3 was healed. The temple was meant to stand for life, but he was sitting impotent at its gate; and the feast of tabernacle; had become an empty ritual instead of a message of hope to men. And Christ was to change all that. In this connection we should note what is said about Siloam in 7: by interpretation it means 'Sent'. This interpretation has its symbolic associations also: the man is being sent to Siloam for healing, and Jesus Himself is the 'Sent One', the One who has been sent into the world by the Father to be the light of the world. This means that there is an implicit claim in the symbolism that Jesus is the fulfilment of all the symbols of the Old Covenant. 'Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened' said Isaiah of the time of Messiah's coming. Such is the symbolism of the healing of the man; it was not simply a miracle, it was a sign.

109) 9:1-7

It has been pointed out that at no time did the blind man ask help of Jesus, and John means by this to emphasise the sovereign aspect of God's grace. Jesus took the initiative, not the man. In 2, 3, the question posed by the disciples raises real problems. It is a fact that the rabbinic schools used to speculate about the possibility of pre-natal sin, and it would seem that it is something of this nature that the disciples gave expression to in what they asked Jesus here. The relation of sickness and disability to sin is, of course, a real one, and our Lord Himself makes it plain in Mark 2 that sin sometimes does cause affliction and disease in the physical realm, as He does also in the story of the healing at Bethesda in John 5. But it is one thing to recognise the organic connection between the two, and quite another to assume as a matter of course that any particular disease is caused by specific sin in the individual who suffers it. That is a conclusion that we must be very careful about making. But, even more important than that debate, is the fact that in discussing the matter in this way, the disciples were regarding the blind man as simply a theological problem. To them he was a case; but to Jesus he was a person, a soul in need. There is a lesson for us here: we must beware lest our preoccupation with theological issues robs us of the milk of human kindness and compassion for people. Perhaps this is the point that Jesus makes in 4, which the RSV translates 'We must work....' It is as if He were saying, 'Let us have done with armchair theorising and theologising; we must become involved with this man in his need'. A true theology never confines itself to the armchair, but moves men to compassionate action.

110) 9:1-7

Irenaeus, one of the early Fathers, sees in the reference to clay and spittle in 6 a connection with Gen 2:7, where we are told that man was formed from the dust of the ground, and that the thought here is of recreation or new creation. If this is a valid interpretation, then our Lord's action constitutes a claim to be God the Creator, a deliberately chosen symbol for those who had eyes to see, that this that He was doing was a creative act, and that His work in the gospel was akin to that in creation; 'God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' And this is the word of hope that these words bring: There is One who has been sent into the world by the Father, to help us, and He is the great Creator Himself who in the beginning said, Let there be light, and there was light. We should not be hesitant, either, to accept such an interpretation, for it is quite clear that Jesus could easily have healed the man with His word, as He had done on other occasions, and therefore there must have been a particular intention in Jesus' action. In any case, the healing did not take place when Jesus used the clay and spittle, but when the man went to Siloam, and thus it was another case in which the miracle took place without the actual presence of Jesus, but solely dependent on the word that He had spoken (cf 4:46 ff)

111) 9:8-12

It seems rather odd, at first glance, that the neighbours should have had doubts about the man's identity. After all, they had known him all his days; yet he had to assure them, 'I am he'. Why is this? John is clearly suggesting that there was not only a physical change evident in the man, but also a spiritual change so radical that it made him look different. This, indeed, is the main point in the story; it was not merely physical sight that was restored to him, he was given spiritual vision too. The man was converted, and this is the explanation of the change that had taken place in him. John indirectly develops this theme throughout the chapter, as we may see by considering the progressive dawning of inner sight in the man's understanding. First of all, in 11, it is 'a man that is called Jesus'; a little later in 17, 'he is a prophet'; still later, in the controversy with the Pharisees in 33, he is 'of God', and finally, in the second encounter with Jesus, he sees Him as 'the Son of God'. This was surely the greater miracle, and it is a measure of the distortion of our own thinking today that we tend to think of miracles in the physical realm of greater import, and an evidence of greater and more authentic faith, than those in the moral and spiritual realm. In 11 we have a marvelously full and succinct presentation of what we might call the theology of obedience: I went, I washed, I received sight'. If there was more of such simple, child-like obedience in the life of the Church perhaps we would see more of Christ's miracle-working power today.

112) 9:13-25

These verses underline the fierce controversy that was stirred up by the healing of the man born blind. As on previous occasions, there is a note of great sadness in the passage. All the Pharisees saw was a broken law; they did not see the healed life, manifest as it was before their very eyes. The Sabbath controversy is quite central in the events leading up to our Lord's crucifixion. It is not too much to say that this was one of the main issues that led to the Pharisees' plotting to kill Him. In 16 we have the debate between 'the hawks' and 'the doves' among the Pharisees. The hardliners condemned Jesus out of hand, because He broke the Sabbath law; in the others, common sense militated against hard and bitter prejudice -hence the division. But alas, as is so often the case in such situations, prejudice won the day against common sense. First, the man's parents were tackled, and they in their fear of the religious leaders said they did not know who had healed their son. But they did know. How could they not know? The neighbours had heard his testimony (11); is it conceivable that the man had not also said as much as this to his own parents? But we must not be too hard on them, for that would be to underestimate the strength of the bitter and ugly spirit that possessed the Pharisees and with which they dominated their people. What a commentary on the barrenness of their legalism. Perhaps if they had had some experience of the living and liberating power of Jesus' ministry they would have been more prepared to risk a break with the synagogue. No such inhibition bothered the man himself, however; he stood up boldly to the ruthless harrying of the Pharisees, and confounded them with the artless and unequivocal boldness of his testimony in 25: 'One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I can see'.

113) 9:25-34

There is something of very profound and far-reaching importance in what the man said in 25: it is that an ounce of real experience is worth a ton of mere theorising and theologising. A clever man could doubtless easily tie us in knots about our faith, and there are increasing numbers of such clever men in the Church in modern days who seem to conceive it as their task in life to make the humble faith of simple men look silly. But if we are able to say what this man said to the Pharisees, then we can stand in their midst with our heads high and know that we have the better of them, clever and brilliant though they be. If we have had an experience of the risen Saviour, the living Lord of the Church, and if He has touched our blinded eyes and opened them so that we are seeing the world with new eyes, then it will not seriously matter though the cleverest men on earth should come and say persuasively and seemingly conclusively that the resurrection of Christ is not to be taken literally. We may not be able to answer all their arguments, but we have the better of them, for we can always say, 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I can see' And the greatest contribution we can make to the testimony of the gospel today is to say this, and say it fearlessly, to the confounding of the clever men who have become so bemused with their theological wanderings that they have lost and made shipwreck of their faith, though they still regard themselves as the vanguard of the new Church of the seventies. They are deluding themselves, just as surely as the Pharisees were deluded in our Lord's Day.

114) 9:25-34

Having made his confession fearlessly, the man found a new accession of confidence and strength, as we can see from his bold and uninhibited retort in 27 to the Pharisees' questions in 26. Indeed, he is enjoying such freedom that he is able to employ gentle raillery - 'Will ye also be his disciples?' This must certainly have riled them beyond endurance as his continuing comments must also have done in 30-33. His theology was very simple and to the point, but it was so telling that it infuriated them to the extent that they cast him out of the synagogue. It was intolerable to them that one 'altogether born in sins' - observe their interpretation of his original malady - should presume to teach them about the things of God. In this connection it is significant to notice the repeated emphasis throughout the passage on "mowing", - 20, 21, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31. It can hardly be accidental that these words are echoed again and again, and John must be conveying a message to us in them. He is surely underlining once again the conflict between light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance, knowledge and wilful suppression of knowledge. It is clear that the Pharisees were refusing the clear evidence of their senses, and seeking another, less intolerable explanation of the undoubted miracle before their eyes, just as the Sadducees were later to do in Acts 4 in the case of the healing of the lame man. It ever remains true that there are none so blind as those that will not see.

115) 9:35-41

Two things remain for comment in the chapter. The first is the second encounter the man had with Jesus. There is something very fitting about this meeting as it crowns the man's simple and fearless testimony, and gives an excellent illustration of the words 'to him that hath it shall be given', for the gradual and progressive development of his understanding of what had happened to him and of who it was that had healed him finds its natural climax in the attitude of worship expressed in 36-38. This represents the fruition of the work that had been begun in him when Jesus had first smeared his eyes with the clay. The second point has to do with our Lord's final words in 39 and 41, which underline how dangerous it is to possess knowledge if good use is not made of it. The Pharisees claimed to have knowledge, yet it had never touched their lives, and therefore it became their condemnation. 'Judgment' here refers to discrimination or separation into different classes, and this is certainly what the coming of Christ into that situation had done. Light has a twofold effect: it is torture to diseased eyes, but gladdening to sound ones. And the light that had come into the world in Jesus Christ was absolute torture to these evil men. Their disease was that they claimed to see, nevertheless they refused His testimony. Therefore their sin remained and blindness came upon them. Always, then, there is the strange work of God, the work of judgment, alongside His proper work of redemption and blessing and grace. Light comes to both alike: to the one it is healing, blessing and benediction, to the other judgment and condemnation. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

116) 10:1-6

This is one of the famous chapters in John's gospel, containing two 'I am' statements, 'the Door' and 'the good Shepherd'. One tends to read it in isolation, for its beauty and profundity, as a jewel in its own right, but it is worth noting that it flows without a break from what was said at the end of the previous chapter, and in fact arises directly from the excommunication of the healed man by the Pharisees and the welcome given him by Jesus. Indeed, the healed man is a very good example of what Jesus says in 27, 'My sheep hear my voice'. The man recognised the voice of the Shepherd (see 9.35-38), believed on Him, and entered in. In the same way the Pharisees demonstrated by their action how false they were as shepherds. This is the connection of the chapter with what has gone before in chapter 9; we see also the connection with what follows • in 18 Jesus speaks of laying down His life and taking it again. He is thus represented as having authority over death, and this is demonstrated both in the story of the raising of Lazarus in the next chapter, and also in the account of His passion and victory in the remainder of the gospel. To see the context of our Lord's words in this way must surely give added meaning to them and enrich interpretation for us, and this is certainly John's intention.

117) 10:1-6

The word 'parable' in 6 is not the usual New Testament word, and in the Greek signifies 'a proverb' or 'veiled speech', and this is some indication that we ought not to be over-concerned to identify the various 'actors' in it, the sheep, the thieves and robbers, the porter. Calvin very wisely says, 'It is useless to scrutinise too closely every part of this parable. Let us rest satisfied with this general view that, as Christ states a resemblance between the Church and a sheepfold, in which God assembles all his people, so He compares Himself to a door, because there is no other entrance into the Church but by Himself. Hence it follows that they alone are good shepherds who lead men straight to Christ; and that they are truly gathered into the fold of Christ, so as to belong to His flock, who devote themselves to Christ alone.' Let us not, then, be too concerned to identify the porter, but be content with the general picture, for in it the message is quite clear.

The question that 9:34 ff poses is: Who is the true leader and ruler of the true people of God, and who has the proper authority to include or exclude a man from the society of God's chosen people: The Pharisees, or Christ? They had excluded the man on the ground that the thing that had happened to him could not be fitted into their categories of thought, and therefore was unacceptable to them. This was their way of disposing of difficult problems. On the other hand, Jesus had reinstated him. And in this parabolic oblique way, Jesus was saying, 'Which of us has real authority is your action in excommunicating him, or Mine in welcoming him, the authentic one?'

Jesus uses two metaphors or illustrations to convey his message. In the first part of the chapter (1-9) it is Christ as the Door that is in view, and the relation of shepherds, false and true, to the door, which is Christ. In the second part of the chapter (10 ff) Christ is the Shepherd, a different, though related, metaphor. The two ideas must be kept clear and distinct in our minds.

118) 10:1-6

The picture Jesus gives here is one that was familiar to His hearers, and this adds to the graphic way in which He exposes the false leaders of His day. Every true shepherd would as a matter of course make use of the door of the fold, and not climb over the wall or fence. The 'shepherd of the sheep' in 2 does not refer to Himself in this instance - He is the Door, not the Shepherd, in this part of the parable - but to any true and faithful leader, and the meaning is that the test of a true shepherd is his relationship to the Door, that is, to Christ. His work is related to Christ, and for His glory. It is centred on Him, and done in His strength. By this standard, the scribes and Pharisees stood condemned, for they repudiated Christ's authority altogether, thereby exposing the falseness of their own position and claim. This is an important lesson for us too: you can tell a true shepherd of God's people by his attitude to Jesus. If it is Christ-exalting, he is a true shepherd, if it is not, he is not. For the same kind of reason the sheep have an instinct for the right, and know whether the shepherd is true or not. There is something very important here: although, paradoxically, the sheep are silly creatures, they have an instinctive discernment, and when something is put before them they can sense, 'This is good and right' or 'There is something wrong here'. This is not a question of being theologically educated or literate, but of having a spirit of discernment, and this is why plain, simple, humble believers can often 'smell a rat' in teaching that can be plausible and very persuasive.

119) 10:7-10

In these verses we are given our Lord's own explication of the parabolic statement in the previous passage. He is the Door by which men enter into the kingdom of God. This much is clear from our Lord's words. But a difficulty arises if we press an exact association of words, as between 9 and 2, for in the latter verse it is the shepherd that is spoken of as entering by the door, not the sheep (although this would also be implied). Bishop Ryle says that the primary meaning of our Lord's words must be 'I am He through whom and by whom alone true pastors must enter the Church. All such pastors, entering by Me, shall find themselves at home in the fold, and enjoy the confidence of my flock, and find food for the souls of my sheep, their hearers', and that only secondarily the fuller meaning is that Jesus is the way of access to God, and that all who come to the Father by Him, whether pastors or hearers, shall find through Him safety and liberty and possess continual food for their souls. Making the primary meaning of the words refer to shepherds rather than sheep is an unusual, if striking exegesis, and one that has a good deal to say that is of real import and relevance that practically forces itself upon us unless we assume that our Lord changes the figure of speech in some measure between 2 and 9. This is not impossible, indeed, on reflection, it would seem more likely than not, especially in view of the fact that it is better, as Calvin says, not to attempt too strict or exact an identification of the various characters in the 'parable' Jesus uses. If it is a general figure of speech, rather than a point-by point analogy, then the change of emphasis as between 2 and 9 is understandable but on either interpretation the words are tremendous in their import and application, and we must not miss their message.

120) 10:11-18

The metaphor changes once more in 11, and Jesus now speaks of Himself as, the good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep. This is an immensely rich concept, with associations of different kinds. We must see, for one thing, a link with the words of the previous verse, 'I am come that they might have life... ', for it is the death Jesus died that is the source of that abundant life. His coming was a coming to die, and it was by dying that He won life for all His own. It is salutary for us to remember this integral connection between the blessings and enrichments of grace and His death on the cross. All possible blessings have their origin in and flow from Calvary. It is interesting to note that the 'shepherd' metaphor has its roots in the Old Testament Scriptures, where the reference is, not to the priests, or religious leaders, but to the rulers of the people, as is clear in passages such as Ezekiel 34 36, where the failure of the kings of Israel and Judah is the subject of the prophet's censure. This is not, of course, to say that it has no application to religious or spiritual leadership; it is simply that the kings were meant to be spiritual shepherds of their people as well as their political and constitutional monarchs. It was the fact that they were 'hirelings', not having a real care for the people committed to them, that brought upon them the anger and chastisement of the Lord. This is the real point of contact between the Old Testament picture and the scribes and Pharisees of our Lord's Day whose treatment of the man born blind is an eloquent symbol of their 'hireling' status.

121) 10:11-18

Commentators say that in Eastern countries shepherds give their sheep names; they know them as well as that! And just as a sheep will know its own lamb's bleat, in a whole field of animals, so also in this sense Jesus can say that He knows His sheep. He recognises our 'bleat', and is swift to come to our succour. It is significant to discover that frequently in the gospel narratives where Christ saw men as sheep without a shepherd it also speaks of His compassion. This is particularly and essentially His shepherd-work, and we see it in such passages as Mark 1:41, 5:19. Matt 20:34. Luke 7:13. 'He makes the wounded spirit whole, and calms the troubled breast'. Moved with compassion, He healed the sick (Matt 14:14), fed the multitude (Matt 15:32) and taught many things (Mark 6:34) In the parables He told, speaking of Himself, it was His compassion that forgave sin (Matt 18:27), bound up the wounded (Luke 10:33), welcomed the prodigal home (Luke 15:24. And it was when He was moved with compassion (Matt 9:36) that He sent out His disciples to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Still He is the same today; still He bids us forth with messages of grace and compassion, to tell men of the good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep It is interesting to learn that the word translated 'good' in 11 is not the usual Greek word, but one which literally means 'beautiful'. It is the attractiveness of the goodness that is emphasized and particularly in relation to the death that Jesus died. Later, Jesus was to say concerning that death, 'if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me' (12:32). The word 'good' here therefore expresses this power of attraction. This is why, in a way we can never fully understand, when Christ crucified is proclaimed men are somehow drawn to Him. The word of the cross is the (drawing) power of God.

122) 10:11-18

One or two further comments on these verses will be necessary before leaving them. There is great mystery in 15a. What a claim to equality with God is implicit here! Who could know the Father immortal, invisible, only-wise as He is, as the Father knows Him, save only the eternal Son? 'Fold' in 16 should read 'flock'. The reference is to the sheep, not the place they dwell in. It is certain that our Lord was not thinking of denominations here whether Presbyterian, Episcopalian or Roman Catholic, but of the fact that what He was to do on the cross was not only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but for the whole world. The Gentiles are the 'other sheep' (cf Ephesians 2:14 ff). We should not miss the significance of the emphasis in 18 on the entirely voluntary nature of our Lord's dying. We have seen how John has repeatedly underlined the thought that His hour was not yet come, and how, because of this, no man could lay hands on Him. In the most impossible situations, humanly speaking, in which it seemed certain that He should be killed, He escaped from His enemies, because His hour had not yet come. This bears witness to the fact that in the gospel it is Christ who takes the initiative He does not lose His life but voluntarily lays it down. He is the one and only Man in all creation who did not have to die. He chose to die, and laid down His life Himself. It is this that puts Him, and particularly His death, in a unique position, and gives it its incalculable value as an act of atonement for the sins of the world.

123) 10:19 21

Throughout John's gospel we have seen that from the beginning of our Lord's ministry there was division among the people and the rulers about Him, and this is again underlined in these verses. Always there was the conflict between light and darkness; with some being drawn to Him and others reacting more or less violently in opposition against Him. Light, as we said, is a torture to diseased eyes, but a gladdening thing to healthy ones. And those who could see kept seeing more, and those who could not became more and more darkened till the cleavage was complete. The earlier words of 3:19 are very pertinent here. The Jews' words in 20 are very frightening. What was it in what our Lord said that made them feel He had a devil? Surely, the evident manifestation of the supernatural in His words and demeanour. His 'I am's' must certainly have made a terrific impact when they were first heard, and the use of the Old Testament divine Name must have been profoundly disturbing to His hearers. But their reaction marks the measure of the danger in which they stood; for face-to-face with absolute, incarnate goodness they could not see it to be good but thought it was of the devil. This comes perilously close to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The danger point is reached when there is a blurring of the distinction between good and evil, and men call good evil and evil good. The other reaction in 21 is equally significant. Not only do their words show that some discernment was at work in them, but also that they were making an assessment of the situation in rational terms. They were recognising that it was prejudice and hardened bigotry that prompted the judgment that He had a devil; fair, rational appraisal arrived at a very different estimate. For His words rang true and obliged the conclusion that He was what He said He was.

124) 10:22-30

John's reference to the feast of dedication in 22 can hardly be said to be a mere indication of the time of the year. Knowing his propensity for hidden symbolism and for interpreting the feasts as finding their fulfilment in Jesus, we are probably right in assuming that He is saying something here about such a fulfilment. The Feast of Dedication is mentioned here only in Scripture. It originated in the time of the Maccabees and commemorated the cleansing of the temple and altar at Jerusalem by Judas Maccabaeus in 164 B.C. three years after Antiochus Epiphanes had defiled it by setting up the abomination of desolation in it. The temple was therefore, in being reconsecrated given as it were a new beginning. It may be that John is saying here that Jesus is the fulfilment of this feast in a still greater way in that He is reconsecrating the temple, giving it a new beginning: after its defilement by the hireling shepherds who had so signally failed the people. This is probably the connection with the earlier part of the chapter. The Pharisees were the thieves and robbers who had desecrated the temple, and now the good Shepherd had come to replace them. We made an earlier reference to Ezekiel 34-36, where the prophet explicitly promises that God would raise up new shepherds and that there would be a new people. Perhaps John actually has this in mind, for Jesus is certainly reconstituting the people of God, and reconsecrating them as a transformed community of believers who acknowledge Him as the true Christ (cf 36 where Jesus speaks of the Father's consecration of Him to be the Messiah).

125) 10:22-30

A point of deep interest and importance arises from these verses. In answer to the Jews question in 24 Jesus replies that He has already told them that He is the Messiah. It is fair comment to say that the language in which Jesus couched His Messianic claims seems rather less than clear and unambiguous to us. But it is plain from the text of the gospels that His claims were very clear to them. They were in no doubt in 32 and 33 as to what He was claiming. And however ambiguous His language may seem to us, it could not have been ambiguous to them, because they recognised that He was claiming to be God. The 'doubt' therefore in 24 cannot be said to be doubt as to the meaning of His words, but rather, as Jesus Himself plainly indicates in 25, 26; plain unbelief, and refusal to accept what He is saying.

In 22, in words of wonderful simplicity, Jesus indicates the attitude of true faith, and says that those that are His will have no problem as to Who He is or Who it is that leads them. He is God, and His hand and the Father's hand are the same (28, 23), since He and the Father are one. In connection with 27, we should remember that different voices can speak in the human heart, and that not every voice that speaks is the voice of Jesus. One of the major issues in Christian life is to know which voice is which. We must learn to try the spirits, whether they be of God, otherwise deception will certainly ensue to our detriment and cost Satan sometimes speaks very persuasively to deceive people. The assurance of the eternal security of the people of God in 28 and 29 is very wonderful, and full of encouragement and consolation. As Bishop Ryle says, 'True sheep shall never be confounded, Christ has said it and Christ cannot lie; they shall never perish'

126) 10:31-42

The Jews make clear the nature of their objection to Jesus in 33: 'Thou being a man, makest Thyself God'. This to them was the unendurable claim. They recognised it as a claim to Deity. The starkness of the alternatives stand out here, either He was what He claimed to be or He was a blasphemer or devil-possessed or mad. No other possibilities are open to be considered. Our Lord's answer in 34-36 is full of significance. The quotation He makes from Scripture is found in Psalm 82, where the reference is to princes who are set in authority over the people by the appointment of God. Such is the force of the phrase 'unto whom the word of God came'. And they were called 'gods' in this sense Obviously it is a limited use of the word but Jesus takes it up and says, 'If princes who are merely men are called gods, He Who is the eternal Son of the Father can surely not be justly chargeable with blasphemy for calling Himself the Son of God'. Christ's use of the Scripture here is also significant. The whole point of His argument as Ryle rightly points out hinges on the divine authority of a single word. 'And then, having quoted the text, He lays down the great principle; "the Scripture cannot be broken". It is as though He said, "Wherever the Scripture speaks plainly on any subject there can be no more question about it. The case is settled and decided. Every jot and title of Scripture is true and must be received as conclusive."

127) 10:31-42

There is an important association of ideas at work in the last verses of the chapter. Jesus returned to the place where He began His ministry and, it seems remained there till Passover time i. e. from December till Spring, when He was taken, tried and crucified. At this point, therefore, we are only three months away from the cross. It is here that John proclaimed Him to be the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, and now He has returned, many people resorting to Him. It is not merely a sentimental going back to the place where He began to preach and heal but something much more significant. A period of almost three years had passed, three rich and full years in which so much had happened, so many signs performed, so many matchless words spoken. And the people gather round and they are thinking back to that day three years earlier when they first heard John the Baptist speak, pointing them to the then unknown Jesus as the Lamb of God. It is as if they were being given opportunity for reflection, and urged to think back to the days three years previously and retrace their steps up to the present, so as to assess all that they had heard and seen during that time. The association of ideas got through to the people it is clear (41). They thought of John and said, 'John was right when He said this Man was the Lamb of God, and all that he spoke concerning Him has proved to be true; all that we have seen and heard corroborates what John said about Him. 'And many believed on Him there' (42). This is the kind of rational appraisal we spoke of in the Note on 21. They made an accurate assessment of the situation, and on the basis of this they believed on His Name. We can ask and need no more than this as a response to our ministry.

128) 11:1-17

It can hardly be questioned that this is one of the most dramatic chapters in all Scripture. It is a tremendous story. It would be true to say that many of the New Testament accounts of the miraculous have great dramatic content, but this one stands in a category by itself. It is clear from the record that this must have been an eye witness account of what happened, for there are a number of references that add local colour so to speak, - almost incidental touches, which make us say, 'The man who wrote this must have seen it happening'. We need to interpret the story in the context of John's over-all presentation of the gospel, rather than take it by itself and expound it simply as another miracle - though this would yield much fruitful instruction. For John presents it to us as the last of his selected signs which demonstrate the Messiahship of Jesus, and what he is saying is that this is the meaning of the gospel: the raising of the dead to life. This is not to spiritualise away the miracle in the physical realm; it is rather that John sees the meaning of this tremendous act as being the message of the gospel in spiritual terms. It is a demonstration of the mighty power of the word of Christ. John means to indicate to us that the words, 'Lazarus, come forth' (43) are part and parcel of - and a logical sequence from - his earlier statements in chapter 1: 'In the beginning was the Word....and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us....and Jesus said, Lazarus, come forth'. With this as a key to interpretation, we shall now proceed to examine the chapter.

129) 11:1-17

The picture that John gives us is as follows: on the one hand, we have the sickness and death of Lazarus, with all the anxiety, mystification, questioning, sorrow and grief that this involved - a real human situation, that comes soon or late to every door - a parable indeed of the human predicament in this death-ridden, broken world of ours. And over against this - and this is the real message the chapter has for us - the word of Christ, the reality of Christ, God's answer to the human predicament. Consider the following statements: 'for the glory of God' (4); '...he sleepeth....' ('What has happened to him is in my control; death cannot touch him if I say it nay') (11); 'he shall rise again' (evil does not have the last word in the human situation') (23); 'I am the resurrection and the life' (25); 'Where have ye laid him?' (34); 'Take away the stone' (39)'; 'Said I not unto thee...?' (40); 'Lazarus come forth' (43). Over against all the darkness, grief, despair and helplessness of that stricken family, the word of Christ! This is John's point, the Eternal Word, by whom all things were made in the beginning, is made flesh, in order to stand once more as the Creator God in the midst of the dead and call forth life by His glorious power. That this is John's message is surely clear from the details that are recorded in these verses. For when news came to Jesus that Lazarus was sick, He seems deliberately to have delayed going to Bethany for two days (6). And, in the event, when Lazarus died, it was four days before Jesus reached the sorrowing home (17). Is this a normal reaction, from one who was supposed to love Lazarus as a special friend. How otherwise can we explain this except by concluding that He wanted Lazarus to be dead, and unmistakably so, so that He could demonstrate His glory and power in calling him back to life, demonstrate His Lordship over death itself in the miracle He was to perform.

130) 11:1-17

We should note one or two further points before passing from these verses. John seems deliberately to have inserted the observation in 5 about Jesus' love for Lazarus and his sisters, to offset, as it were the 'therefore' in 6. It must have seemed quite inexplicable of Jesus to have delayed going to the help of His friends, but John here emphasises that in spite of the seeming indifference, in spite of the big question mark, that Mary and Martha could certainly not understand, Jesus loved them - in spite of every evidence to the contrary. It is salutary for us to remember this, when circumstances make us prone to doubt His love. He has His reasons now, as He had then, for delay.

Another point to note is that this miracle was performed in the context of an intimate circle of love and fellowship. One lesson we can learn here is that where love and fellowship deepen, Jesus seems to have more freedom in which to work. One recalls how it is recorded in Mark's gospel (6:5) that in his own country He could do no mighty work because of their unbelief. How striking that the mighty Son of God should be limited and restricted by the unbelief of man! But this works both ways. Christ is, as it were, liberated where love is, and where there is an intimacy of fellowship. That is why we should never be surprised, in a close and intimate communion with the Lord where He has knit the hearts of His people together, with one another and with Himself, that wonderful things should happen; for it is precisely in this context that Jesus loves to work.

131) 11:18-26

When Jesus said in 4 that 'this sickness is not unto death', He did not mean that Lazarus was not going to die, for Lazarus did die, but that the sickness was not such that death would have the last word in it, but that God might be glorified in it. And this we now see in the verses before us, which lead up to the climax of the miracle. But a number of questions arise as to why Jesus should have delayed so long in going to His friends. One can only say this: that He was intent on challenging and testing their faith in order to draw them out to believe utterly in Him. To speak as Martha did in 21 - and Mary later in 32 - was very natural -it is the sort of thing that a distressed sister would say. But we should note the presuppositions she is making. Both sisters, being disciples, must have known about the other miracles He had performed - known, for example, that there were occasions when Jesus performed miracles at a distance, and that His presence was not necessary in those cases for the miracle to take place; and yet they spoke as they did. Calvin very pertinently asks what grounds Martha had for speaking thus. How did she know that if Jesus had been there Lazarus would not have died? It is a debatable point. Nevertheless, although it was the literal presence of Jesus that she deemed necessary, she gives expression to a very wonderful attitude of faith in her very next words (22), and it was this doubtless that elicited Jesus' assurance to her in 23. Martha's reply to this in 24 states an entirely orthodox position theologically; she could hardly, however, have expected to hear the words of 25, 26. 'The last day?', Jesus says in effect, 'that day has come, you are now confronted with it, Martha, I am the Resurrection'.

132) 11:18-26

Jesus' tremendous words in 25, 26, have been encased in a kind of reverential awe by our very familiarity with them, and we tend to miss the absolutely tremendous and even shattering thing they are saying to us. Resurrection is not a conception, it is Jesus. And what is being said is this: the last day had suddenly become transplanted into the present. There is a sense in which the whole gospel belongs to this unique kind of phenomenon, and it is this that explains the amazing things that Jesus did. That is why we are not to look for raisings from the dead in the here and now. This was but a token. The fact that Jesus was there was sufficient in itself to ensure Lazarus's being brought back from the dead, and this was the earnest and harbinger of what was one day to be and what one day will be. The 'token-ness' of what happened to Lazarus is seen in the fact that the raising of Lazarus was not a resurrection from the dead as Jesus' resurrection was, but only a resuscitation - not indeed in the sense of reviving someone from unconsciousness, for Lazarus was really dead - that is to say, he was brought back to the status quo, back to the same life as he had known before. But when Jesus died and rose again, He came back a new Jesus, with a spiritual body. And His rising was not a return to the status quo before the cross but rather an advance to an entirely new position. He was now alive to die no more. But this could not be said of Lazarus; and there is no warrant for our supposing that he did not die later on a second time, doubtless in a ripe old age. For him, the real resurrection was yet to be. What he experienced was a token of the coming glory.

133) 11:27-37

Jesus' distress at the tomb of Lazarus is deeply moving and has much to teach us. It is a wonderful assurance, for one thing, to realise that in our human sorrows He feels so deeply and tenderly for us. He is not a high priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities. But the groaning and troubling of spirit mean something else, as well as compassionate sympathy. The words in the Greek indicate anger and indignation. Jesus was indignant, and blazed with anger. What can this mean? Was it because of the unbelief with which He was surrounded? One can almost sense the reproachfulness of those who spoke as they did in 37 - words perhaps spoken deliberately in His hearing so that He might hear them. This could explain the indignation, in part, but there is something much deeper. The true interpretation is that Jesus blazed with anger when He saw what death, the enemy, had done. B. B. Warfield finely says, 'It is death that is the object of His wrath, and behind death, him who has the power of death, and whom He has come into the world to destroy. Tears of sympathy may fill His eyes, but this is incidental. His soul is held by rage: and He advances to the tomb, in Calvin's words, "as a champion who prepares for conflict". The raising of Lazarus thus becomes, not an isolated marvel, but... a decisive instance and open symbol of Jesus' conquest of death and hell. Not in cold unconcern, but in flaming wrath against the foe, Jesus smites in our behalf. He has saved us not only from the evils which oppress us; He has felt for and with us in our oppression, and under the impulse of these feelings has wrought out our redemption. The consciousness of what death had done in the world, and His holy determination to deal with it - is not this a wonderful picture, the Son of God striding over to the tomb, as if to say, 'Let Me get at this enemy that has done this to My Father's handiwork'. In this sense, it is an adumbration, a foreshadowing of the way He went into death for our sakes -not as a victim but as a warrior (cf Isaiah 63).

134) 11:38-44

We should not miss the point and significance of our Lord's prayer in 41, 42. There is a sense in which He was risking His whole reputation publicly on this one miracle He was about to perform. It was as if He were saying to everyone in His hearing, 'Put Me to the test in what I am about to do now. If I cannot call Lazarus back from the dead, regard Me as an imposter. Pay no attention to what I've said or taught these past three years. I venture everything on this.' And He prayed deliberately. He did not need to pray in order to receive power for this, He knew in Himself that He could do it. The prayer was for the benefit of the bystanders.

Some commentators suggest that in 44 there is a miracle within a miracle. He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes - but how could he come forth if he was bound hand and foot? Yet he did, in the same way as the paralysed man at Bethesda stood up on his feet, and the man with the withered hand stretched it out, at the command of Christ. This in itself is miracle. Then Jesus said, 'Loose him, and let him go'; and the loosing was the pragmatic proof to the onlookers that it was no apparition that they were seeing, or spiritist hallucination, but the Lazarus of Bethany whom they knew. They wound off the grave clothes and there he was, no longer decomposed, no longer putrefied, but made whole. The power and tyranny of death was completely vanquished and broken in him. The Prince of life had come.

135) 11:1-44

We turn now to a consideration of the illustration that the whole incident gives of the gospel itself. The connection is not an arbitrary one, for death is the 'sacrament' of sin, the issue and result in human life of man's disobedience and revolt, and the vanquishing of death is the symbol of the vanquishing of sin, and therefore the seal of redemption. There are several points to note. First of all, the fact of Lazarus's death underlines the absoluteness of the situation, and this has something to tell us about the nature of the gospel and its power. The healing of the sick is one thing - there, there is some point of contact between the healer and the healed - but the raising of a man from the dead is quite another, for here there was no point of contact; he was dead, and there was nothing in him that could respond. We should realise what this means. Jesus' word at the tomb imparted life to the dead man. This was one of the reasons for Jesus' delay in going to Bethany to obviate any suggestion that the miracle was simply a case of reviving life that was already there. And this has its lesson for the spiritual realm, for this is how it is in the human situation. The wages of sin is death, and sin is a killer in the life of man. The truth about every man by nature is that he is dead in trespasses and sins. And if this be so, then two things follow-on the one hand, there is no question of a man co-operating or taking part in his own salvation - dead men cannot co-operate in anything. On the other hand, if life is to be, it must be given. It is from God alone, the Lord and Giver of life.

136) 11:1-44

Since the gospel means the imparting of life where life is lacking, we are to learn that there is hope for the worst and most hopeless of men. There is, as the hymn says, 'none too vile or loathsome for a Saviour's grace'. There is no habit or sin, however terrible, however deeply rooted, over which grace cannot prevail.

He speaks! and listening to His voice,
New life the dead receive.

It is true that sin works dreadful ravages in human lives, and that sometimes its visible signs are fearful, when men sink so low that every sin in the Decalogue could be attributed to them - so low that they are scarcely human - yet none sink too low for the life-giving word of Christ. Lazarus dead is meant to represent the worst, the extreme human plight and predicament. And this means that however far gone in sin a man may be, Christ can call him into life. The hardest and the most embittered, the most cynical and the most contemptuous and indifferent of all alike, Jesus says, 'The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God. and they that hear shall live' (5:25). The whole glory of this regenerating work can be seen by bringing three verses of the chapter together, thus.

14 - Lazarus is dead

36 - Behold how He loved

43 - Lazarus, come forth.

The difference between death and life
is - the love of Jesus.

137) 11:1-44

Now we must return to an earlier thought - the Word made flesh. This by itself is not the secret of the life-giving power demonstrated here, for this reason Lazarus dead represents creation gone wrong, fallen, vitiated by sin. And sin is not a defect, but a grim fact, a positive malignity, a power that grips men, an authority that raises up its head against God. And although God, the eternal Word, created the worlds by the word of His power - He spake, and it was done - He cannot, simply by that creative Word, put things right again. A word does not put right the ravages sin has wrought in man and creation. Something else has to happen, which conditions the word that Jesus speaks at the grave of Lazarus, and which will give it its power. The Word made flesh must also be made sin. It is this that ultimately makes the eternal Word a re-creative Word. But for the death He was to die, His word could have had no power at all. Only by virtue of this could Jesus call forth the dead to newness of life. But see the implications of this the crucified Saviour, the Word made sin, was raised again, victor over death. And He ever lives, to die no more. 'I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for ever more, and have the keys of hell and death'. The keys: 'To open the graveyards of sin, and call men forth: This is what He is abroad in the Church by His Spirit for - to do just this, to call men into life: This is the gospel, and this is the hope of men'.

138) 11:45-57

In these verses, which follow the account of the miracle we see what has now become, characteristic in John's record - the fact of division, with some believing, and others reacting adversely against Jesus. Some, who had come to mourn with Mary, found faith and believed on Him through the miracle, but others reported the miracle to the authorities, with obviously malicious intent (46), to cause a reaction among the Pharisees. In this they succeeded, as we see in 47, 48, which seem to express the genuine fear the Jews had that their place and their nation would become extinct if Rome were provoked to action by the upsurge of a popular movement following a Messianic figure. We need not doubt that this was a genuine fear on their part, even though it was prompted by all sorts of unworthy motives and passions - did they not hate Jesus because He had challenged their religious authority and supremacy? - For the temple and the land meant everything to them. But in the event, their decision to avoid such consequences by disposing of Jesus itself led to the very misfortunes they were seeking to avoid. There is something very grim about the irony of this situation and there is even more irony to come, as we see in 49, 50. Caiaphas agreed that to allow Jesus to go on in this way would probably lead to the extinction of the Jewish nation; was it therefore not more expedient that Jesus Himself should die than that all the people should suffer. Thus, words spoken in opposition against Jesus and in an attempt to destroy Him in order to save the Jewish temple and nation actually turned out to have been true prophecy. Did Caiaphas know what he was saying? Was he echoing contemptuously some 'substitutionary' saying of Jesus, which seemed to claim that He would die for the people, one of the 'ransom' sayings, for example - 'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many'. Were Caiaphas' words a blasphemous mockery, as if to say, 'Let us fulfil His own words for Him', not realising that this in fact was what was going to happen (cf Acts 2:23)? John's comment in 51, 52 serves to confirm such an interpretation.

139) 11:45-57

Caiaphas' words seem to have settled the matter, for from that point the plan to put Jesus to death began to be crystallised. The die was cast, and they were now past the point of no return. And Jesus, we are told in 54, walked no more openly among them - not for fear of them, but because His hour was not quite come, and He did not choose as yet to die. Doubtless, this time of withdrawal was one full of wonderful fellowship and teaching for the disciples, as they waited for the coming of the Passover season. We may gather from 55 that the raising of Lazarus must have taken place quite near to the Passover, and it would seem, from the eager debate among the people in 56, that there could well have been in their minds some thought that the miracle had something to say in relation to the Passover. After all, the Passover did speak of new life - new life for the people of Israel on coming out of Egypt and across the Red Sea, and a covenant relationship with their God. It could well be that the thought of the miracle of Lazarus, the giving of life to the dead, may have borne a message to those who were going up to the feast. At all events, the fact that John mentions the Passover here and that the people were eagerly seeking Jesus is an indication that there was a tremendous sense of the dramatic in the air, and of momentous things happening and about to happen. The scene was being set for the supreme drama of all history.

140) 12:1-11

It will not be out of place to consider 9 -11 before we take the story of the anointing in 1-8, since there is a connection with the events of the previous chapter. We are told that the crowds congregated at Bethany not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead. There is something very important for us to learn here. A man raised from the dead is an enormous attraction, and this is just as true in the spiritual realm as in the physical. It is the evidence of new life where no life has hitherto existed that make telling impact on society. It was so in the early Church, and it is so in our materialistic and bankrupt society also. And if Christian people are 'different' enough, and not hiding their light under a bushel, it stands to reason that some impact must be made on the lives of those with whom they come in contact. That is one point to be noted from these verses: if we have been raised from the dead, people will hear of it and want to see us for themselves. The second point is that, through his association with Jesus, Lazarus incurred the hatred and opposition of the Pharisees also. This is something that is paralleled in spiritual life: knowing Christ in the power of His resurrection means sharing in His sufferings also (cf Phil 3:10). This is precisely what Lazarus entered into. But there is one great reality that offsets all the hazards that this could ever involve, and it is expressed in 2: 'Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him'. Fellowship with the Son of God, with all the warmth and intimacy that this implies! If this be our portion, it will not matter what danger there may be outside, for it more than compensates for everything.

141) 12:1-11

At the outset of our study of this lovely story we should note the contrast that John presents between the last verses of the previous chapter and the beginning of this. There, almost on the eve of the Passover, the Jews were plotting the death of Jesus; here, John tells of someone else's attitude to Him at this time - that of Mary of Bethany, with heart overflowing with love for Him. In the days of preparation leading to the great festival and memorial feast of the Jewish faith, commemorating the mighty acts of God in their past history, this is how they - and she - were thinking in their hearts: Surely this prompts the question, 'How do we come to God's house on His day? With hearts prepared, and going out to Him in love and worship, or with hearts filled with bitterness against someone, with evil or grudging thoughts?

It is, of course, in relation to our Lord's approaching death that we are to understand and interpret Mary's action here, not merely from the point of view of His consciousness that He was about to die, but also Mary's consciousness of that fact, and her discernment of at least something of the meaning and purpose of that death. This is the wonderful thing about the incident, for it was surely her love for Christ that gave her such discernment. The anointing was obviously a spontaneous and even impulsive gesture on her part, the expression of her love and adoration for Jesus. But we can also say that it was love for Him not merely as a Teacher and Friend, but as One about to become, by His death, her Saviour. We can hardly escape the implication of the context here, and our Lord's own words about her act, that it had to do with the death He was going to die, and that she anointed Him, as if to let Him know somehow that she understood at least in some measure what He was about to pass through. We shall continue this thought in tomorrow's Note.

142) 12:1-11

If the interpretation in yesterday's Note is correct, we are obliged to believe that Mary, more than any of the disciples and, if we are to believe the testimony of the gospels, alone of all the disciples, had an intuitive appreciation and discernment of Christ's death and what it meant as an atonement and sacrifice for sin. They say love is blind, but at least in the spiritual realm this is not so. Love brings discernment, and is the key to everything of final importance in the Christian life. We should remember that this is the Mary that sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. Here, then, is a valuable lesson for us: if we want really to learn in the things of God, and to penetrate the mysteries of the Faith and the deep things of God, we must allow our hearts to go out in love to Christ. Long ago, Thomas Boston said, 'The best commentary on the Holy Scripture is a heavenly state of mind', and this may be amplified to be understood as a state of mind, which is towards Christ in love and devotion.

Another point should be noted in this connection. Mary's heart went out to Christ, and her love was expressed in action. Ultimately, love is proved only by being shown and demonstrated. This opens up a big subject: the expression of feelings towards those we love. So often we are afraid to let ourselves go! But we are made for love - to give it and to receive it. Why should we be so unwilling to show it? Perhaps because to show love is to be vulnerable, and to run the risk of being hurt - even if the hurt is only that of being criticised, as Mary was, for being extravagant. But this is a risk that we must at all costs run, even if it means that our hearts are broken in the process. Better to have a broken heart than that our hearts should become hard and unbreakable!

143) 12:1-11

Anointing in ancient times was used in the act of separating something or someone to God; priests were anointed with oil, as were prophets, and kings were designated and installed by the same anointing. Above all, in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word Messiah means the Lord's anointed one, as does Christos in the Greek. All this has significance in Mary's action, for she was thus acknowledging Jesus as her Messiah, as her merciful and faithful High Priest, and as her King and Lord. It was an act of homage on her part in which she proclaimed to Him and to the world that He was King of her life. But notice what Jesus said about her action: she had anointed His body for His burial. Here is a remarkable association of ideas- kingship and burial. He was to receive His authority and power through death. Did Mary see this? Perhaps she did. The scholars sometimes question just how much awareness there was in her mind, but we may believe her discernment penetrated very deeply, seeing things that were apparently hidden from all the others.

But there is still more in this symbolism. Mary had the ointment (or oil) of spikenard in a cruse or bottle. One of the other gospels tells us that she broke the bottle and emptied the contents upon Him. And whether she realised it or not - and who will be so bold as to say she did not? - She was in that act proclaiming to them all, 'Look, this is what He is about to do; His precious body will soon be broken, and an odour of salvation will pervade the whole world, as the perfume of the spikenard is filling this room. The fragrance of His self-giving love will be for the healing of the nations'. This is surely what Christ saw in her action- a pre-figuring of His own Passion, and the kind of effect it was to have upon the world He loved. And it was because this is true that her consecration expressed in this way was lovely and acceptable to Him, and an inspiration to us.

144) 12:1-11

The R.S. V. translates Matt 26:10 which we take to be a parallel record, thus: 'She has done a beautiful thing to Me', and our Lord's language gives some indication of what He felt about what Mary did. How glad He must have been to have received at this point such homage and devotion, and to realise that Mary was at one with Him in spirit in what He was about to go through. In a very true and real sense it could be said that Mary had fellowship with Him in His coming sufferings, and was identified with Him in the cross He was about to bear. To share fellowship with Him in His sufferings, then, is one of the most beautiful things in the world, and it is from this that sweetness and grace flow out to men. When one thinks of the lives that have been a blessing to others, one finds that the virtue that blesses has come from the fellowship such lives have had in the sufferings of Christ. We know too, in our own experience, that it is when our lives most approximate to this that they become a blessing to those around us. It is the one, incontrovertible law of fruitfulness.

145) 12:1-11

Two further points are to be made. The first is this: In Christian life, the great need is - love to Jesus. This is the meaning and purpose of redemption, to be brought to this place. For this we were made, and redeemed. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. It is only thus that we realise our true destiny. We are made for God and for fellowship with Him. Nothing could be clearer than the way in which Christ shows up the relative merits of love to Him and service for Him. This is first, He says, and all else that is good - kindness to the poor and any other good work - flows from it. Nor will the poor ever suffer for love having been given first to Him: The second point is this Jesus said, 'Ye have not always (with you)'. In one sense, of course, and indeed the most important sense, this is no longer true for us, for the heart of our faith is that we have the risen Saviour always with us. But there is a real sense in which we can take these words, and it is this. We shall not always have the opportunity to make sacrifices of love for Him. In the glory, this is something that is denied the Church Triumphant. Sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and abandoning oneself in glad self-sacrifice, are things that belong to the life below, the Church Militant. And to go to glory, without ever having abandoned oneself to Him like this - it is a solemn thought: 'My son, give Me thine heart', He says. And when we give it, in glad surrender, He will give it back to the world, to the poor, and it will bless many a home, and many a broken life, bringing hope and encouragement, and a sweet-smelling savour.

146) 12:12 19

Both Matthew and John tell us in their gospels that what took place in our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem was a fulfilment of an ancient messianic prophecy, "Behold, thy king cometh" (Zechariah 9:9), and this is the best key to an understanding of the significance of what took place. The 'king' motif in the Scriptures is a cardinal one, for the King who is the subject-matter throughout them is One Who is spoken of in connection with an uprising and revolt that has challenged His rule, and the story of the gospel is the story of the "reign of sin" begun at the Fall being overcome by the "reign of God" and by His rightful King, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament messianic hope, then, sets the scene for the New Testament revelation. It was a king who was to come, and it was a king who did come, the King. When He was born in Bethlehem, the wise men from the east came and said, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" At the outset of His public ministry Jesus was baptized. But this baptism was not an ordinary symbol; it was His anointing for service, for when He came up out of the water, a voice from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son...." The importance of these words lies in this, that they quote from the Old Testament Scriptures, and one of their sources is Psalm 2:7, the coronation formula for the kings of Israel. What took place in that solemn incident was the anointing of the King for the service He had come, and was appointed, to fulfil. It is significant that, immediately following this anointing Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, i.e. He was brought face to face with the usurper, the rebel against the rule of God, as if to confront him with the reality of God's counter-attack. When He began to preach, He proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand; and everything that followed served to confirm the truth of His word, for it as a King that He is presented to us in His public ministry. More of this in tomorrow's Note.

147) 12:12-19

King of creation, Lord of disease and death, ruler of all dark powers, King of men - this is how He is presented to us. Yet there was opposition to Him and to His teaching and claims: He came to His own and His own received Him not. There was a great blindness upon their minds. It was in this twofold context - that of His claim to be King and that of the blindness of so many as to Who He was - that He deliberately and of set purpose came to Jerusalem, and rode into the city on an ass. It was a true description of His act to apply to it the words of Zechariah the prophet "Behold thy king cometh". It was the coming of the King, then to His own offering Himself to them as their King and hope of salvation His plea to them to recognize Who He was. And the offer was refused. The display of enthusiasm was simply something that had repeatedly been made to do duty for heart belief in Him. It did not deceive Him. Indeed so little did it deceive that in Luke's version of the story, Jesus went on to weep over Jerusalem (Luke 19:42). In the terrible fatal blindness that darkened their minds and understanding His people were soon to lead Him away to be crucified repudiating His claim to reign over them, saying, "We have no king but Caesar". That is one significance of the triumphal entry; but that is only one of the lessons, and there are others of just as great importance. We turn to them in tomorrow's Note.

148) 12:12-19

We have spoken of how the gospel writers have presented a King to us in the story of Jesus. Well, here is the King not only offering Himself to His people but also coming to do battle against sin against the sin that had marred the face of God's creation. Jesus had set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem for this very thing. In this connection, there is a tremendous irony and pathos in the fact that it is precisely here - in His own people's rejection of Him - that He comes in contact with the most awful and terrible aspect of sin - the deliberate blindness on the part of a people who would have known Who He was and welcomed Him. This is the heart of the mystery of sin. One senses nevertheless, the attitude almost akin to pride and joy with which the gospel writers display this King going forth to battle as if to say "Behold Him, this glorious Figure, Who has shown His kingship in such an unmistakeable way. Is it really possible that sin and death should survive such an onslaught and still retain their reign and rule in the world?" Thus John and the others go on from this point to show Christ accomplishing the death of death in the death He died. It is surely here that we see the inevitability of the resurrection of Christ. Peter said on the day of Pentecost "It was not possible that He (Jesus) should be holden of it (death)". Not possible indeed: For He is the High King of heaven come down Himself to put things right. Furthermore, His kingship is demonstrated supremely in the fact that in their very refusal of Him He was still in control, notwithstanding, and did His biggest and greatest work, accomplishing through their refusal of Him His glorious redemption, turning the wrath of man to praise Him. This is how Kingly He is: But there is something else to be said. The dark side of grace is judgment; when the King was refused, the kingdom was taken from the unbelieving Jews. It is not all the same in the end what men do with the King. To reject Him is to reject all hope or possibility of peace.

149) 12:20-26

It is interesting to see what leads into this reference to the Greeks. In 19, the Pharisees had said, "Behold the world is gone after Him". And John sees a deeper fulfilment of these words than they themselves could have realised, in the coming of the Greeks - the Gentiles - to Jesus. But more. If we compare the parallel passages in the other gospels, we see that immediately following the Entry there is recorded the incident of the cleansing of the Temple, and Jesus' quotation from the Old Testament, 'a house of prayer for all nations'. Here, in John, the 'all nations' view of the Temple is beginning to materialise in the coming of the Greeks to Jesus. John is indicating that even in the midst of the crumbling of the old order, the new order is about to emerge, and even then was emerging. Jesus, then, sees in them a symbol of what was to be. The Greeks were of the "other sheep" which He had (10:16); they were of the "much fruit" He speaks of in 34. By the words "the hour is come" (23), Jesus means that the enquiry of the Greeks heralded the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles. He sees in their coming the first blade of the coming harvest. But for this, He recognizes that the seed must first be planted in the ground. The death must be gone through before the world-wide ministry can be established. The condition of fruitfulness is death. This is the principle that is enshrined in the well-known words in 24, which we shall look at in detail in tomorrow's Note.

150) 12:20-26

Jesus first of all states the truth in natural terms (24) - "except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die..." This may well be the verse from which Paul gets his similar illustration in 1 Corinthians 15. Next, He applies the principle to the life of discipleship, in 25 and 26, while from 27-32 He applies it to His own experience and interprets the death He is to die in these terms. Some commentators think there is implicit here a condemnation of the Jews for their failure to do just this in the world in order to be a light in the world. Israel should have been the corn of wheat, but failed to be this; Jesus is the new Israel, and He - and His followers - will fulfil God's calling. This is why Jesus says, in 25, 26, "This is what it means to be a disciple of Mine. If any man serve Me, and claims any allegiance to Me, let him follow Me in this principle; let this be the principle of their lives, as it is the principle of Mine." This is the first meaning of the words "where I am", but it does not exhaust them, for there must also be a reference to sharing His glory. This can be understood in two ways - not only in the sense of "the glory that should follow" His sufferings, but also in the sense that since doing the will of God was the passion of Christ's heart, and therefore His delight, those who share His sufferings by being the corn of wheat that falls into the ground and dies, are given to share something of that delight also. It is this note that explains why the first disciples in Acts not only did not shrink from bearing the cross and sharing His sufferings, but also actually rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for His Name. They gloried in the cross. It is "the joy that seeketh us through pain", as Matheson puts it in his hymn, and it is something which as disciples we dare not close our hearts to.

151) 12:27-32

It is very interesting to note that the words of Jesus in 27 are so similar to those that Matthew, Mark and Luke all use in their record of our Lord's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. John does not record Gethsemane at all, probably because from his viewpoint the whole earthly life of Jesus was His Gethsemane. But, it may be that here we have his echo, so to speak, of that scene. One commentator suggests that the words "save Me from this hour" mean "help Me to come safely out of this hour", and what follows should be understood as meaning, "I came to this hour for this very purpose, that I might be saved from this hour, that is, "the going into, and exhausting this hour, this cup, is the very appointed way of My glorification". It will be useful to pause here before going further, to look at the pattern John unfolds in this chapter. The first incident (1-11), the anointing at Bethany, referred to Jesus' death, the second (12-19), the triumphal entry, referred to His kingship - death and resurrection, in that order. It may be that John is trying to illustrate the meaning and truth of our Lord's words by reminding his readers that this is the case, and that the only way He could establish His kingship was through death. And the result? "The whole world gone after Him (19) and the coming of the Greeks (21), symbolic of the drawing of the Gentile world to the Saviour - the universal appeal of the gospel. This is the pattern John is giving us.

152) 12:27-32

In 28 we have another emphasis that is peculiar to John, in the reference to the glorifying of the Son. Both John and Jesus identify glorification with death. It is not that the glorification follows death, but that the death is the glorification. The words "I have... and will" mean that the name of God has already been glorified in the signs and wonders Jesus has done, and it will be also - and supremely -in His death. One of the implications of this is that His life and death are a unity, not separate entities. The "now" in 31 surely has reference to the theme of the passage, namely the death Jesus was soon to die, and He means that in that death the judgment of the prince of this world would take place. We should remember in this connection that the entrance of sin into the world is described in Genesis 3 in terms of an attack on mankind by Satan. What is meant here is that by His forthcoming conflict with the dark powers Jesus was to reverse that appalling tragedy, and undo the effects of evil by judging and dealing with its author, the prince of this world. The result of that costly dealing was to be the releasing of the prisoners and the drawing of all men to Him. It is helpful to refer 32 back to the incident recorded in 20 -23, the coming of the Greeks to Jesus. It is as if Jesus were indicating to the disciples what was the real reason for their coming to Him; it was by virtue of the death He was soon to die. Even then, in an anticipatory fashion, the cross was exercising its drawing power. The Pharisees had said, "Behold the world is gone after Him", and Jesus is now saying, "Yes, but at a price: I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me".

153) 12:33-41

The solemn words of this passage tell us two things: one is that there was a basic blindness upon the hearts of the people. They could not grasp what was being said. Their eyes were "holden" that they could not see. The other thing is that, aware as they undoubtedly were of the prophetic Scriptures - the Messianic promises of the Old Testament they obviously had never put two and two together, or realised that the glorious King Who was to come and the suffering Servant in Isaiah were one and the same Person. This is made very plain in 34 It is in this light that we must understand Jesus' words in 34, 35, spoken in reply to them. They constitute in fact His final appeal to the Jews. One can sense our Lord's urgency as He realised they were still blind in face of all that had been given them and all that had been revealed to them. It is as if He had said, "The sands are running out for you, and there is not much time left be up and doing, it is later than you think " The last words of 36 are unspeakably solemn in this light, for they speak of His withdrawal from them. It is striking to note that from this point onwards, there was no further public ministry to them. This passage represents the final exposition of the words we have in the Prologue: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not". The next chapter begins the second division of the gospel, our Lord's ministry to His own, who did receive Him. John quotes Isaiah confirming this solemn situation - a passage quoted also in the Synoptics, in relation to the parables of the kingdom. First they would not believe (37), in spite of all the signs and wonders they had witnessed; then finally they could not believe (39). The judgment on refusal to believe is finally inability to believe. How solemn!

154) 12:42-50

We are told in these verses that there were many among the rulers that did believe on Jesus, but who, for fear of the Pharisees, could not face what taking a stand for Him would inevitably mean. They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. What an indictment this is, and how often it is true even today, when hearts consent to the truth of the gospel and the rightness of the testimony, yet will not make the decisive break that true faith demands. The last few verses of the chapter (44 ff.) must be regarded as a summary and synopsis of Jesus' teaching - we have already been told in 36 that Jesus had withdrawn Himself from the people, and could hardly be thought to have begun teaching again. The chapter ends chronologically at 36. Marsh, in the Pelican Gospel Commentary says, "Then follows a series of statements meant to summarize the situation at the end of the ministry. Jesus has come. He affirms, as light into the world. The light enables some to 'see' and those who thus become believers are not 'in the dark'. To reject the teaching of Jesus is not to incur condemnation from Him, for His whole purpose is to bring salvation. But, to be faced by Jesus Christ is to be faced with judgment, and what the judgment is, becomes known by a man's acceptance or rejection of Christ. In the final issue it is the response of men to the claims of Jesus that will determine their standing. This could not be true if Jesus were to speak and make His claims on His own authority; then He would be but another claimant on the loyalties of men. But Jesus does not speak on His own authority, but on that of His Father. It is His words that Jesus speaks. So the words of Jesus are, as Peter had said, eternal life. This gift Jesus offers to men at the Father's bidding. The word that Jesus has spoken, then, will be man's judgment at the last day. It is what he has done with that word that is of final importance. If it has found lodgment and response in his heart, all will be well; if it has been resisted and repudiated, it will judge him at the last day. In view of this, it is little wonder that Jesus spoke with such urgency in 35c

155) 13:1-12

With this chapter we come to the second division of John's gospel. Chapters 1-12 have expounded, as we have seen, the first part of 1:11, 12, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not", and now John turns his attention to the second, "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name". What follows, therefore, in the remainder of the gospel may be said to deal with disciples entering their sonship in Christ. It is pre-eminently our Lord's ministry to believers, and the emphasis is on fellowship with Christ and the gift of the Spirit. To anticipate a little, it will be useful to look at the pattern of teaching that is to be unfolded. In 12:24, a word that has already been spoken to the disciples, Jesus has unfolded the law of spiritual harvest, "Except a corn of wheat fall in to the ground and die...." Then here, in the feet-washing incident, Christ speaks of an example given to His disciples that of "coming down, dying to live", and this is the secret of spiritual authority. Then comes the teaching of the Upper Room in chapters 14-16, as if to underline the source of power for this kind of living - the Holy Spirit, and Abiding in Christ. Such is the pattern that this second division of the gospel unfolds.

Some commentators suggest - and with some justification - that the first verse of the chapter is introductory to the whole section, not merely to the story of the feet-washing, and that it should be detached from the latter.

156) 13:1-12

It is interesting to see how John's words in 1, "His own", echo those in 1:11. The scholars suggest that the reference here is to the little group of disciples to whom Jesus now turns His attention, but it may be that John is saying that even though "His own" (1:11) rejected Him, He still loved them, and was going to the uttermost limit (i.e. to His death) to win them. It is also pointed out that there is a certain parallelism, and even recapitulation, between the first and second parts of John's record. For example, the baptism of John parallels the feet washing, with both emphasising cleansing; the feeding of the 5000 leads to the exposition of Christ as the bread of life, and the institution of the Last Supper leads on to the exposition of Christ as the Way, and the true Vine; the death of Lazarus is followed by the words "the world is gone after Him" and this is paralleled by the death of Christ, with the apostolic commission, "Go ye into all the world". It is possible, of course, to make too much of 'hidden meanings' in John's writings, but we must beware of dismissing them impatiently as of no value or significance. We should also note the reference to 'His hour' having come. This phrase has cropped up repeatedly throughout the gospel, and we have seen that it has had reference to God's plan for His Son, and that therefore nothing could overtake Him till that hour was come. There are two readings in the Greek for "being ended" in 2. The verb is not clear, and it could equally be translated, "supper being in progress". It is immaterial which is adopted, but we should bear in mind that the supper referred to is in fact the Last Supper. John does not even mention the institution of the Supper as a memorial of Him, and it is hardly possible to avoid the conclusion that for the Apostle the sacrament was of secondary importance. Bishop Ryle pertinently remarks: "The omission of the Lord's Supper....was especially intended to be a witness for ever against the growing tendency to make an idol of the sacraments. The mere fact that in his gospel John leaves out the Lord's Supper altogether and does not even name it, is strong proof that the Lord's Supper cannot be, as many tell us, the first, foremost, chief and principal thing in Christianity. St. John's perfect silence about it can never be reconciled with this favourite theory."

157) 13:1-12

At first sight, the incident recorded here seems intent on teaching the lesson of humility; and this appears to be borne out by references in Luke 22:24 to the contention between the disciples about who among them was greatest. None of them would stoop to the menial task of acting as servant to the others. In this respect, our Lord's action would have been very humbling for them all, and would "cleans" them of bitter, resentful pride. But Jesus Himself goes on to speak of cleansing for them, that is to say, the washing of their feet was a symbol of spiritual cleansing. The whole incident was a symbolic action, an acted parable, and the real point of John's very deliberate emphasis in 3, "He was come (down) from God and went to God", is the theme of "The love that stoops to serve". It is John saying in pictorial, dramatic language what Paul says theologically in Philippians 2:5-11. It is the self-emptying of the Son of God, and the meaning of the Incarnation that John is concerned to underline. Jesus laid aside His garments - as He laid aside the garments of His glory; He tied a slave's apron on Him, as He took upon Him the form of a servant, assuming our flesh and nature; and as the Good Shepherd, laid down His life for the sheep (10:11, 15, 17). The story is therefore infinitely more than a lesson in humility, for in it we are taken to the fountainhead of all humility; this is the arch-type of humility, this is where humility was born, in the humiliation of the Son of God, in His coming down from the glory to the world of men.

158) 13:13-17

Peter's protest at Jesus' action was perhaps typical of his impulsive and generous nature, but on the deeper level it was due to the fact that he saw in what Jesus did only an act of humility, and not its relationship to the cross. "Let this mind be in you...", Jesus was in effect saying, and it was this that Peter was really refusing, hence the sharp rebuke Jesus administered to him. Peter did not understand then, just as the disciples did not understand at the time what Jesus was really doing when He cleansed the temple. The challenge and the blessing are pointed in 17 - "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them". Our Lord's words in 13ff. are significant. He speaks of His being their Lord and Master; but the whole implication of the story is that it was precisely by doing what He did - humbling Himself -that He became their rightful Lord and Master. His Lordship, His authority, derived from His humiliation, as Paul's words in Philippians 5ff., already quoted, make clear. It was because He became obedient unto death that God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name. So that, in symbol, He rose from His feet to become their Master and Lord. This is the lesson He wished to convey to His disciples - the secret of spiritual power and authority. This must be the subject of tomorrow's Note, but, in the meanwhile, it will be good to think of the following: Someone has said, "No Christian need go far to find feet that need washing." There are feet stained with the ways of sin; it may be ours to cleanse them, and let our loving action be a sacrament that will heal their souls. There are feet bleeding with the path of suffering; it may be ours to minister compassion and love to them in their time of need. There are feet weary with the path of sorrow or loneliness, and it may be ours to minister comfort and grace to help time of need.

159) 13:13-17

What is the nature of the spiritual authority of which Jesus speaks in these verses? Jesus was obedient unto death, He submitted to the divine will for His life, and it was this that gave Him divine authority. There is a wonderful illustration of this principle in the story of the centurion in Luke 7:1-10 who came to Jesus about his sick servant. The point in this story is that the centurion discerned the secret of Christ. "I also am a man under authority", he said, implying, in the use of the word "also" that Jesus was in exactly the same position. And he realised that because he was under authority, he was given authority over others, and therefore it must be the same also with Jesus. He knew that because Christ had submitted to divine authority, authority had been vested in Him, to enable Him to perform His mighty works. This is the principle Jesus illustrated in the feet-washing incident, giving His disciples an example to follow. We must remember that these were the men who were to wield and exercise authority in His Church, and they above all, must learn the true secret of authority. Jesus had said, "I will make you fishers of men", and this was the deepest and most critical lesson they had to learn. It is an extension and elaboration of the words, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die...." It is a lesson that all who would follow Christ in discipleship need to learn, to submit to authority, to bow down, to stoop low. In the Christian life we die to live, and we have to submit to authority before any authority can ever be safely vested in us. There is a death that Christians must die, a submission they must make to the Lord, and to His sovereign will for their lives.

160) 13:18-38

This is the passage in which both the betrayal of Judas and the denial of Peter are exposed and prophesied. It can hardly be accidental that both are mentioned. Someone has suggested that they are thus recorded to teach that we may not assume that denial is impossible to the ordinary Christian, or that, once denial has taken place, there is no further hope of restoration. Be that as it may, what we need to recognize is that both the betrayal and the denial stand as stark alternatives to "dying the death" of which Jesus has been speaking. Refusing to make this submission, this humbling, can be critical and deadly.

Let us think first of Judas. We need to recognize at the outset that there is something here that cannot be ultimately explained - the age-old relation between predestination and free-will. What did Jesus mean when He said "I know whom I have chosen" (18)? Some of the Reformers take it as referring to the eternal election and office of the disciples who were true believers, as if to say, "I know that Judas is not one of My chosen ones". Others think it simply means, "I know the inward character of those men I have chosen as My disciples and know that one of them is rotten at heart." On either interpretation however, the problem remains. One recalls a word in another gospel, "Offences must come, but woe to that man by whom they come" - this serves to accentuate the problem, for if there was a predetermining factor which ordained that Judas was the one by whom the offence must come, it is not easy from a logical point of view how it can be just to go on to say "Woe to that man by whom they come". But then, we are in a realm here that transcends logic, and this is one of the places where we must bow in worship and submission and recognize that here is something we shall never fully fathom. Any attempt at arriving at a solution will drive us to the one extreme or the other. One thing is clear: we cannot think of Judas simply as a pawn in some celestial game, but as a real personality, with real powers of choice. It is just not possible to believe that Jesus looked up into the face of the traitor as He washed his feet, as if to say, "I am appealing to you, but might as well save My breath because you are fore-ordained to be My betrayer". Responsibility there must be, for Jesus to have said "Woe to him by whom the offences come".

161) 13:18-38

The downward progression of Judas's experience makes terrifying reading, culminating in the words "it was night" (20). But we should remember the basic cause of this - Judas had never really submitted himself to the Lordship and authority of Christ. How often Jesus had tried to win his allegiance The feet-washing and the sop at the supper table were the culmination of the appeal, but these final appeals seemed to drive him frenziedly to his doom. Once resist the claims of Christ, and continue to do so, and there will eventually come a time when a man can no longer stand them, and he goes to the opposite extreme. Peter had also refused the cross, disciple though he was. And the tragedy is that he did not realise where this was leading him He was sincere in his protestation in 37, but he did not realise that by his refusal to submit to the obedience of Christ, he was undermining all resistance he had to the powers of darkness. And when the crisis came, he went down with a terrible crash. When we look at Peter and Judas in this light, we see that they shared a common sin, and that it is to miss the mark concerning them to suppose that somehow Peter's was less heinous than Judas's. Peter is not forgiven because his sin was less heinous or terrible than Judas's, but because he repented. Peter went out and wept bitterly; Judas went out and hanged himself - that is the difference between the two men. Matthew records that Judas also said, with the other disciples, "Lord, is it I?" when Jesus spoke of His betrayal by one of them. This adds drama to the scene, for when Jesus gave Judas the sop at the supper table - a token of favour, and usually given to an honoured guest - it was a message from Christ that, in spite of the murder in his heart, he was still loved. To realise that Christ knew what was in his heart, and nevertheless still loved him and could call him friend - it was in this context that Judas deliberately turned away and went out to betray Him. This was darkness indeed, and the point of no return.

162) 13:18-38

With the departure of Judas from the Upper Room, the atmosphere immediately changed. Jesus now speaks purposively (31), not merely in the sense that with Judas's going the wheels are now set in motion for the final act of the drama to be consummated, but also in the sense that He Himself calls the tune. It is He Who says to Judas, "That thou doest, do quickly" - the initiative lies in His hands, not in Judas's. The time - divinely- appointed and ordained - of His glorification has come. Once again we see the characteristic Johannine emphasis on the cross being the glorification of the Son. We see also the essential oneness of this teaching with later apostolic theology, for if the Son is glorified in the death He died, and God is glorified in the Son, this means that God Himself is at work in the cross - which is the point Paul makes in 2 Corinthians 5:19 - "God in Christ was reconciling the world unto Himself." But there is a third glorifying mentioned here (32), "God shall also glorify Him in Himself" - that is, He will give Him a name that is above every name (cf. Philippians 2:5-11).

The change of atmosphere after Judas's departure does not, however, mean a change of subject, as we see in 34,35, for the new commandment - to love one another - is something that is possible of fulfilment only on yonder side of the great submission to the divine will. Love is a possibility only when self-love has been deposed from the centre of life, and when a true submission to Christ's authority has been made. George Matheson's hymn says,

Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free.

Free - to love. Love is the fruit of the Spirit, and the Spirit is given by God to those that obey Him, who yield Him the unhesitating, unquestioning obedience of their hearts. Love is the byproduct of the death we must die. When we mourn our lack of love, we need not blame temperament or personality. It is simply that love has been crowded out of our hearts by self-love.

163) 14:1-3

Our very familiarity with the wonderful words that begin this chapter tends to obscure a good deal of their significance, and it is good to study them in their immediate context, namely, our Lord's words to Peter in 13:36-38 and, indeed, the general theme of the previous chapter. In the Greek, there is an important connecting particle, omitted in the AV which could fairly be translated "Nevertheless". This makes the passage read thus: "Peter, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice. Nevertheless, let not your heart be troubled...." This is a dramatic association of ideas, and when we further put 14:1 alongside the final words of Jesus in the Upper Room, in 16:33, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world", a very wonderful message stands out. For it means that over against all human failure - Peter's denial, Judas's betrayal - Jesus sets His own coming victory in death and resurrection. It is as if Jesus were saying, to His disciples then and to us today, "You are conscious of your sin, your weakness; there is the Judas in every one of you, there is the Peter in every one of you; but I am greater than all your weakness and sin. I have overcome the world, and through faith in Me you shall overcome also." This is the basic, central message that is spelt out for us in the discourse that now follows, with its emphasis on the coming of the Spirit and the believer's union with Christ, and it is in this light that we must seek to interpret and understand Jesus' words.

164) 14:1-3

Jesus' words in 1 have been a comfort in sorrow to countless saints down the ages in their griefs and woes, but, as yesterday's Note made clear, they have a more particular connotation in their true context, which indicates that not only comfort, but strength, is the keynote of the chapter. Here, then, is the first great answer to human frailty and failure, the word of grace to men who have failed and denied their Lord: "Believe in Me, I am the source of strength. I am the faithful, trustworthy One. " But we may discern another great answer to shiftlessness and inconsistency in 2, 3: "In My Father's house are many mansions....I go to prepare a place for you". It is the hope of glory. In Hebrews 6:19, we read which hope we have as an anchor of the soul. Peter needed an anchor that day! We are taught here that, in times of temptation and struggle, we are to fix our eyes steadfastly on the hope set before us. This is undoubtedly what gave perspective and a sense of dignity to the life of the early Church. Their roots were in eternity, and they could not be moved. And the prospect of Christ's coming (3) is everywhere in Scripture held out as an incentive to holy and steadfast living (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:5). We should not miss, in passing, the wonderful teaching about heaven and the hereafter in these verses. Someone has pointed out that most of the teaching about heaven in the scriptures is couched in negatives (cf. Revelation 21/22, "no more death, no more pain, no more tears"), but here it is very positive. Heaven is "the Father's house", it is "home". This is the great testimony of the Scriptures. They portray mankind as strangers and pilgrims upon the earth. "Man goeth to his long home". It is this that explains the sometimes inexplicable and unbearable yearnings in our spirits for we know what. It is the homesickness of the soul for God and home. "Believers are in a strange land and at school in this life; in the life to come, they will be at home".

165) 14:1-3

William Temple suggests that "mansions" should be rendered "resting-places" or "stopping places", and that the reference is to places where pilgrims stop on their journey. But this must surely be a misunderstanding of our Lord's words here. He is not speaking about a journey but about a destination. The RSV differs from the AV in 2b "If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you," and this, it seems, is the better translation. We need to be clear about what Jesus meant by the words "I go to prepare a place for you". It does not mean that, having gone through death, He goes to heaven to prepare a place for us, but rather that it is His death itself that prepares the place. But for the cross, there would be no place for any in the Father's house. There are three suggested meanings given to the words "I will come again". Some take it to refer to the resurrection, some to the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, and some to the Second Coming. If the sentence merely read, "I will come again", it could conceivably refer to Christ's resurrection, but what follows, "and receive you unto Myself" can be understood only in the context of the Second Coming, and certainly have no meaning in relation to Pentecost. We should therefore take them, especially in conjunction with the words that follow, 'that where I am there ye may be also' to the ultimate union between believers and the Lord, the final gathering of the saints in the consummation of salvation.

166) 14:4-11

Alexander Maclaren suggests that in 4 Jesus is very gracious and forbearing in so speaking to the disciples, giving them more credit than perhaps they deserved, as we see from what Thomas says in 5. The latter simply literalises what Jesus says in 4, making nonsense of it. We have seen this literalising of Jesus' words repeatedly in John - in the story of Nicodemus, "How can a man be born when he is old, "; in the story of the Samaritan woman, "that I thirst not", in the crowd when they said "Evermore give us this bread". There was not much to choose, apparently between the disciples and these others; they were just as uncomprehending. But Jesus gives to their bewilderment a wonderful answer of peace in the ineffable words of 6, "I am the way, the truth and the life..." On any reading these words are tremendous, but it is when we take them in their context that their full import is seen. Jesus is about to go to His death, and it is in this connection that He says "I am the way". It is as if He were saying "My death is the way home to God and into peace". Taken thus, the whole passage becomes illuminated and is seen as a unity - "Let not your heart be troubled" (1), "Peace I leave with you" (27). Here, then, is the basic ground of peace - peace with God through the blood of the cross, and all true experience of the peace of God flows from this. The rest of the chapter unfolds the possibility of a life delivered from unrest and anxiety - a well-ordered spiritual life - and is summed up, as we shall see, in a threefold emphasis: the presence and work of the Spirit, the reality of fellowship with the Father and the Son and the life of prayer.

167) 14:4-11

Jesus' words in 7a are parallel to those in 1b, and we should see the stupendous claim that He is making in so identifying Himself with the Father. Philip's confused question in 8 makes it clear that Jesus must spell this out to the bewildered disciple, and this He proceeds to do in 9. What Philip meant, of course, was that he wanted some kind of theophany, such as given to Moses at the burning bush. But Jesus wanted him to realise that he had been given something infinitely more satisfying and convincing did he but know it. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father", He said (cf. 1 John 1-1 - the apostles certainly "got the message" later on, after Pentecost!). These are words that can, and ought to be pressed as far as they can be. It is as if John were saying to us, "Think of Jesus cleansing the lepers, pardoning the fallen, having compassion on the multitudes, healing the sick, raising the dead - that is what God is like. Think of Him - and you're through to the Father". This is the import of Jesus' words. It is significant also that in 11 Jesus is referring Philip and the disciples to the twofold testimony that we have seen right through John - His words and works. This is the consistent emphasis throughout - the appeal for faith and belief on the ground of Jesus' words and works. And it is true faith that sees that this is a much more substantial ground of belief than any kind of theophany however striking and convincing.

168) 14 12-17

In the last Note but one, we spoke of the unfolding of the possibility of a life delivered from unrest and anxiety in a three-fold emphasis -the presence and work of the Spirit, the reality of fellowship with the Father and the Son, and the life of prayer. We begin to see this unfolding in these verses. Two introductory points must be noted. The first is that Jesus gently and purposively leads the disciples in their bewilderment into a discussion in which He speaks of them as sharing in His work (12). This, in fact, is the beginning of their commission and it is enormously encouraging. Philip in his confusion, Thomas in his doubting Peter in his denial - this is what they were like, yet He summoned them to faith giving them the assurance that they would do greater works than He - the thought is perhaps more of spiritual works than miracles, for although the disciples after Pentecost did perform miracles, it is even truer to say there were far greater in gatherings of disciples into the kingdom than in the days of Jesus. Jesus recognized in Luke 12:50 that there were things He could not do in the world until the baptism of His passion was fulfilled, and this is implied in the statement before us in 12. The basis on which they were to be able to do these greater works was His going to the Father. This refers not merely to His return to the Father, but to His being elevated to an official position of power, at the Father's right hand. It is on the basis of His exaltation to the position of supreme authority that the disciples can do "greater things". The second point to note is that, while in the first 12 verses of the chapter the almost exclusive emphasis is on believing in Jesus, from 13 onwards believing merges into loving -and the test and content of both believing and loving is, as we see in 16, obeying. To know Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to obey His commandments. If we remembered this, we would be delivered from a great deal of confusion in spiritual life.

169) 14:12-17

The test of love to Jesus, then, is not our protestation of love, but our obedience to His commandments. We need not be afraid of any kind of legalism in this matter. The slightest mention of keeping commandments is enough to bring the charge; "That is legalistic" from some people. But we should bear in mind that it was Jesus Who said, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments". Are we to accuse Him of being legalistic? There is, of course, a slavish keeping of the commandments of God, but law and legalism are not the same things, and ought not to be confused in our thinking. It is at least implied in 15,16 that the keeping of the commandments by the disciples is the condition of our Lord's praying the Father and of His giving another Comforter "that He may abide with you forever". The force of the word "another" is that the Spirit was to be to the disciples all that Christ Himself had been to them during His earthly life. The difference was that, whereas Jesus had been with them, the Spirit was to dwell in them. "Comforter" is better translated "Advocate", one who stands by us to plead our cause and attend to our affairs and needs. There is a twofold advocacy implied in these verses. Christ goes to the Father (12) to be our Advocate at the Father's right hand, pleading our cause in heaven and the Spirit comes to the believer to be Christ's Advocate in him, and He comes to interpret Christ, reveal Christ, represent Christ, to teach the disciple the significance of His death for their lives. "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you" (Acts 1:8). Not comfort, therefore, but power, is the theme of our Lord's teaching here; and it is because the Spirit is this that our hearts need not be troubled (1). If the Spirit's coming can be spoken of in terms of the words in Joshua 5:14, "As Captain of the Lord's host am I come", then nothing should trouble us again!

170) 14:12-17

Held together, the two thoughts of advocacy teach that Christ's in heaven had to do with our standing before God, and the Spirit's in our hearts with our spiritual state. Our standing is unalterable and unchangeable; our state alters, but it may and can be consistent, for if we continue in obedience, the Spirit will lead us more and more into the truth that makes men free. Obedience is ever the touchstone of spiritual progress. And when we remember Who it is that dwells within us - the Spirit of power, Who helps our infirmities, the Spirit of holiness, assuring the life of holiness as a practical possibility, the Spirit of truth, Who takes of the things of Christ and reveals them to us - we realise just how centrally important our yieldedness to the Spirit's control is, in obedience to the divine will. We can hardly ask for more of the Spirit -He cannot be quantified in this way - but He asks for more of us. On the earthly, human level, a solicitor or advocate can deal with only as much as we commit to him; if we do not give him all the facts, if we withhold information, his hands are going to be tied, and it is we who have limited his help. It is so also in the spiritual realm-the more we commit to Him, the more His mighty advocacy proves effectual in us and for us.

171) 14:18-31

The second great reality unfolded in these verses (see end of Note for Sunday, 2nd) is that of fellowship with the Father and the Son. It is hardly possible to separate this from what has already been said of the indwelling of the Spirit, for it is the work of the Spirit, as we have seen, to take of the things of Christ and reveal them to us. Ultimately, therefore, to be filled with the Spirit is to learn to love Jesus more and more; and it is His office - and delight - to promote the intimate fellowship the believer has with the Father and the Son, as expressed in Jesus' words in 21 and 23. The secret intimacies of this fellowship are not easy to describe to those who have not experienced them. The love of the Father for His own in 21 is clearly something distinct from - and, we may say, deeper and fuller than - the love God has for the world, in this sense, that it is love responded to and returned. There is an experience of divine love which the world does not and cannot know, but which believers know when their hearts respond in love to the Father and to the Son. We sometimes sing -

The love of Jesus, what it is
None but His loved ones know

this captures the sense of Jesus' words here. In this connection, we may anticipate something said in chapter 17, where in the great intercessory prayer Jesus prays "that the love wherewith Thou has loved Me may be in them and I in them". The intimacy of love between the Father and the Son spoken of in these words is one of the most mysterious and awe-inspiring themes in all Scripture - it is this that believers are given to share - and we shall continue to think about it in tomorrow's Note.

172) 14:18-31

Perhaps one of the most significant places where the intimacy of the fellowship between the Father and the Son can be discerned is the story of the Transfiguration. At least part of the meaning of this mysterious experience is that it speaks of the blazing forth of the Son's passion for the Father's will. The Old Testament words, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God" (Psalm 40:8) well describe His attitude even when that will involved for Him the bearing of the cross. And on this occasion, that delight in, and passion for, the will of God, which animated all His conscious life, was such that on the slopes of Mount Hermon it blazed forth and transfigured His whole being, making His whole being shine as the sun. And the glory that came down in the cloud was God's answering passion of love for the Son. And it is one of the most wonderful and awe-inspiring beatitudes of life that it should be permitted to us mortals to gaze upon it. Even more wonderful than this, however, is the realisation that we who name His name should be given to share in it and incorporated into it. For Jesus says (21, 23), "We, the Father and the Son, with the ineffable burning glory of love that exists between us, will come to you and dwell in you, and it will be yours to enter into and share in that love". In one sense, it is of course impossible for a third party really to share a love that exists between two other people - except in one set of conditions, namely if the third party happened to be the child of the other two; in such a situation, there would be no diminution of love, and the third would be incorporated into the ineffable relationship. That is a faint illustration of what Jesus is saying here, and it constitutes an open invitation to all who name His name to press in to discover something of the preciousness of Christ. The whole secret of life and peace and joy lies here, in love to Him.

173) 14:18-31

The third great reality unfolded in these verses has to do with the life of prayer. In 12, our Lord's words about going to the Father to be our Advocate have a significance for prayer. It is because of His advocacy that our prayers are answered. Not for our much pleading, but because Jesus died, are our prayers heard. His death is our only plea at the throne of grace. In the book of Revelation Jesus is represented as adding incense to our prayers to make them prevail, and that incense symbolises the merits of His blood and righteousness. Prayer is heard not for the good in us but for the good in Him. It is this that lies behind the idea of praying "in His name", a phrase occurring frequently in the Upper Room discourse (13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24, 26). What do the words mean? A name, in Biblical thought, is the revelation of personality (cf. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins"). To pray, therefore, in His name must necessarily mean to pray in line with what He represents. And since Jesus came into the world with a redemptive purpose in view, then prayer in His name is possible only when we are at one with Him in that purpose, and in what He was concerned to do in the world. Since this is so, it becomes clear that the important thing is not what we pray, but what we are when we pray what we pray. Everything depends on whether we are morally and spiritually aligned with Christ and His redemptive purposes; if we are, we shall pray in His name, if we are not we cannot, even though we speak with the tongues of men and of angels. This is perhaps the biggest lesson we can ever learn about prayer - to have discovered that what matters is what we are, not what we say.

174) 14:18-31

What was said in yesterday's Note serves to explain what is a very real and perplexing mystery in the teaching of the Scriptures about prayer. There are, for example, the statements such as we have in the Upper Room discourse, in which prayer is made to seem so very simple - "If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it". What could be more effortless. But we know that prayer is not simple like that; we think of other passages, some of them spoken by Jesus also, in which prayer is represented as importunate, agonising, and full of the spirit of wrestling - Abraham wrestling with God for the doomed city of Sodom, Moses agonising for sinning Israel, Daniel fasting and weeping for God's blessing on his people. How does this square with the other, simple version, as in 14; the answer lies here: The wrestling, the battling, the importunacy, the agonising, all are part of the discipline that brings us into alignment with God's redemptive purposes in the world. And we often have to fight and battle with ourselves and certainly often with principalities and powers that are intent upon drawing us away from God's redemptive purposes. And it is when that battle is won - often at tremendous cost - that we are through to praying ground, where we can look up into the Father's face, and ask simply and know that our prayer will be heard. It is all a question of relationship and character - and the battling and wrestling serve to bring us into substantial alignment with Christ's will and purpose, and make us into a certain kind of person. In the life of prayer, as in so many other departments of human experience, it is character - what we are - that tells.

175) 15:1-6

Before continuing with our Lord's teaching in this chapter, it will be useful to look at the last words of 14:31, "Arise, let us go hence". Some have thought that Jesus and the disciples must have left the Upper Room at this point, and that what follows was spoken elsewhere. But it is not necessary to make this assumption. C.H. Dodd points out that the Greek verb translated "let us go" implies, in normal Greek usage, "let us go to meet the advancing enemy" and that the sentence should be construed with what is said in 30 about the prince of this world having nothing in Jesus. No physical movement is therefore indicated here, simply our Lord's spiritual determination to go forth to challenge the prince of this world, in obedience to the Father's will. "Let us march to meet him", Jesus means. And, in this connection, the context here gives the words a remarkably graphic emphasis, for it is only as we are in fellowship with the Father and the Son (this has been the subject matter of much of chapter 14) that we can engage in the Lord's service. This also means that obedience is the touchstone of effectiveness for, as we have seen, obedience is integrally related not only to the possibility of fellowship with the Father and the Son, but also to the presence and work of the Spirit and to the life of prayer. Satan may well tremble when he is confronted with an utterly obedient disciple, for this means that all the power of the Godhead is lined up against him.

176) 15:1-6

What our Lord goes on to say in this chapter is in some senses a further explication and elaboration of the theme of fellowship with God, for abiding in Christ is simply another way of describing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He abides in us, we abide in Him. A good deal has already been said about the tremendous reality of God in three Persons indwelling our poor hearts, and now Jesus speaks of the other aspect of the same reality, as if to underline the source of power for living in the way He wants His disciples to live. To do so, He uses the metaphor of the vine and the branches. It may be that Jesus sensed that His teaching about the Spirit's indwelling was something strange and unfamiliar to His disciples, and hard for them to grasp. It is as if, seeing the struggle for comprehension on their faces, He were saying, "let me illustrate what I mean, by putting it this way I am the Vine, ye are the branches." And if the teaching about the Spirit was unfamiliar, that about the vine must immediately have struck a chord in them, for they were men deeply taught in the Old Testament Scriptures, and this was a very familiar picture, rich, fruitful and significant, and one whose import they would immediately grasp. The vine figured in Old Testament writings as the national emblem of Israel. Israel had been planted of the Lord, but had become a degenerate vine (Isaiah 5), bringing forth wild grapes instead of true fruit, In other words, Israel had failed in her God-given and God-appointed task and function to be a means of life and light to the world, of salvation to mankind, when Jesus, therefore, said "I am the true vine", He was explicitly indicating that He had superseded the nation as the instrument of divine revelation and blessing. He, along with His disciples, was the new Israel of God - the vine and the branches -and the appointed medium of salvation to the nations of mankind.

177) 15:1-6

This is not the first time in John's gospel that this truth - about Jesus being the new Israel of God - has been underlined. In the story of the marriage at Cana of Galilee, one of the points made was that the waterpots represented the purificatory regulations of ancient Jewry and these - which were all that was left of a living testimony - were shown to be ineffective and barren of life, and were now being superceded by Christ, the true vine who provided the "fruit" that was to nourish the people, By using this parable, Jesus therefore confers upon His disciples a new dignity, and a solemn responsibility as bearers of light to the Gentiles. It is rather like His words in the Sermon on the Mount, "Ye are the light of the world....Let your light so shine before men...." (Matthew 5:14, 16). The significance of the chapter, therefore, is that it speaks of the responsibility of fulfilling this function of being instruments of revelation in the hand of God for the blessing of the world. Where could we find the demands and conditions of effective discipleship unfolded more strikingly or challengingly than in these wonderful words? We shall study them in this light.

178) 15:1-6

The work of the husbandman in tending and pruning the vine is with a view to fruitfulness. All God's dealings with us have this supreme concern, to make the vine fulfil its true function. In this connection, we should note the progression: fruit, more fruit (2), much fruit (8) this is the divine ideal for the life of the disciple. It has been pointed out that, horticulturally, the vine is a very unprepossessing looking plant; its wood is good for nothing, one cannot make furniture or implements with it, as with oak, beech, or teak; its sole justification for existence is that it bears fruit when it is purged. How does this pruning take place? By the Word. "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (3). The word translated "clean" is the same as that translated "purgeth" or "pruneth". The chief means, then, of making a believer's life fruitful is the ministry of the Word. Provided he is prepared to expose himself to the disciplines of the Word, be responsive, obedient, submissive to it, taking its challenge, its sharp cutting edge, he will not only grow in grace, he will become fruitful. It would be well for us to take our Lord's teaching here at its face value, and recognize that this is the divinely- appointed means of fruitfulness in spiritual life. We do not have to look far to find the real answer.

179) 15:1-6

There are two things in particular to notice in relation to the principle of fruitfulness unfolded in these verses. The first is that the undeviating emphasis in Scripture for the bringing forth of life is through death. To the ignorant onlooker, the slashing of the pruning knife seems madness, destroying all the look of the plant. Some of the best-looking and most hopeful parts are sacrificed, cut off. But this is in fact what leads to fruit-bearing. The Vine itself was cut and bled at Calvary, in order that it might fulfil its function in the world. The other thing is that the pruning knife of the Husbandman is the Word itself. It is its self-destroying disciplines that purge our souls and fit us for the business of fruit bearing in the world. It is when we neglect His Word, and when we refuse to allow it to do its gracious work in the deep places of our spirits that we become rank and wild, and degenerate and unfruitful. It is worth remembering this. So often, believers look for, and hanker after, exhilarating experiences in spiritual life that will lift them up and make them fruitful overnight, when what is needed is a common or garden, honest-to-goodness attitude of obedience to His Word, sitting under it and letting it make men and women of us.

Another way of putting this is given us in 4, 5 - abiding in Christ is the condition of fruitfulness for the branches of the vine. The metaphor is still at this point horticultural. In any grafting operation in which branches are grafted into a tree, there are two main risks – a dry branch may be loosened, or it may run to wood and leaves. The second of these dangers is answered, as we have seen, by the careful pruning of the husbandman's knife. The first is spoken of in the words "abide in Me". In the horticultural sense, "the graft is not only tied to the tree, but the point of juncture is cased in clay or pitch or wax, so as to exclude air, water or any disturbing influence. So also, in the spiritual sense, if the soul and Christ are to be really one, nothing must be allowed to tamper with the attachment".

180) 15:7-16

The nature of the union that is effected between Christ and the believer is likewise implied in the words "abide in Me", for henceforth, life consists of taking the life-giving nourishment of Christ to ourselves. This is expressed in various ways in these verses, as continuing, or abiding, in His love (9, 10), and as being 'friends' with Jesus (15) Love to Christ, friendship with Him, that kind of abiding that kind of union. It is this that should help us to understand the true nature of our relationship with Christ, and how it is maintained. For in any friendship, it is not the protestations of friendship that keep it going, but the moral attitudes and actions involved in it. We are loyal to our friends; we see "eye to eye" with them in the major issues; there is a community of spirit between us; we have things in common. Thus Jesus says in 10. "If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love." Obedience is the heart and touchstone of abiding. That is to say, "abiding" is a moral question, rather than a mystical one. We do not say. "I feel as if I am abiding in Christ" or "I do not feel as if I am abiding in Him". We are, or we are not dependent upon our obedience to His commands

We see here the connection with the idea of the cleansing and pruning action of the Word. The Word summons us to obedience, and when it is having its way in us it produces obedience to Him and this is how abiding is maintained. To walk in unbroken fellowship with the Son of God is to walk in obedience to His Word. Abiding in Him, and His Word abiding in us (7) are correlatives. They belong together being two sides of the same reality.

181) 15:7-16

All as we have said, is with a view to fruitfulness fruit, more fruit, much fruit thirty-fold, sixty fold, an hundred-fold. Only thus, by bearing fruit, is the purpose and destiny of the vine and its branches fulfilled. What, then is the fruit of abiding in Christ? What is a fruitful life? We tend to think of this in terms of soul winning, and this is of course true spiritual fruit. In this sense, Paul was truly fruitful in the service of God and the gospel. But, while this is true; in this passage it must be thought of only as the consequence of fruit-bearing not as the fruit itself. There is a twofold fruit mentioned here, and it is when this twofold fruit is evidenced that the fruit of soul-winning appears. Love and prayer are the two realities that Jesus underlines. First, to abide in Christ is to abide in His love (9, 10); and this bears fruit in love to one another (12, 17). The fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22, 23). In the Galatians reference, as D. L. Moody once put it, love is the comprehensive term; and all else in the words of Paul are expressions of it: joy is love exulting; peace is love in repose; longsuffering is love on trial; gentleness is love in society; goodness is love in action; faith is love on the battlefield; meekness is love at school; temperance is love in training. "Behold how these Christians love one another", they said of the early Church love means trust and security, and how desperately the world needs these today. And is not the Church of God, and the Christian Fellowship; the one place on earth where we should be able to trust one another? Is there a spirit of love and trust and caring among us? If not, then we are not abiding in Christ. Let us strive to catch the vision here of being a fellowship to which people may be drawn - needy people, hungry people, hurt and sensitive people, shy and retiring people, who find it difficult to communicate, drawn because they feel that the Church is and ought to be a place where they are loved for themselves, not because of any usefulness they might have for others, but for their own sakes.

182) 16:7-16

The other, and complementary aspect of love is prayer. To abide in Christ and to bear fruit to pray. Prayer is fruit-bearing. This is the function of the vine and the branches, and the destiny appointed for them by God, is fulfilled and realised through prayer. This is the most fruitful thing a Christian can ever do, far surpassing any other kind of service. And, abiding in Christ, we are brought into a realm where prayer is authoritative and categorical. "Ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you" (7). The word in the Greek translated "done" could well be tendered "generated" for it has the force of creative work being done. For prayer will then become the alignment of heart and will with the heart and will of the Father, it will be thinking His thoughts after Him, a complete identification with His redemptive will in the world "To be at one with Him in his redemptive purpose, to share His sufferings, and never for a moment to be clear of that generous, self-emptying love, our thoughts always upon this great end and our lives regulated to the fulfilling of it" (D.M. Macintyre). Is there a spirit of prayer among us? If not, we are not abiding in Christ.

To love and to pray this is the fruit of abiding in Christ and it will lead on to the other kind of fruit also, that of leading souls to Christ. For it is the impact of what we are in love and prayerful concern upon those outside that is determinative in effectual witness- it is evangelism of character.

183) 15:7-16

We cannot pass from these wonderful words without noting what Jesus says in 15 and 16. The disciples are no more to be called servants though to be so called when Jesus is Master would be benediction enough! - but friends. The nature and quality of this friendship is now indicated in 15b - "all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" - which means that in this friendship that Jesus offers His own there will be no secrets, He will tell all His heart. What an astonishing, even overwhelming, thing for Him to say, and what beatitude for those to whom He says it: But more. In 16, Jesus indicates that behind our choice of Him as our Saviour, behind our decision to follow Him, lies His choice of us, His decision concerning us. There is both encouragement and challenge here. The encouragement is surely obvious, for it is His might hold on us that gives us such security, and this is what can steady us in the midst of all manner of storms and pressures, doubts fears and even despair. He has a purpose for our lives, bring with promise, which nothing will be allowed to frustrate or finally hinder. As the old Puritan once said, "Why should I start at the pruning knife of my Lord, He purposeth a crop". The challenge is no less plain. We are called and chosen that we might bear fruit: we must therefore give diligence to make our calling and election sure, by showing forth the fruit of love and prayer in our lives through abiding in Him. For every branch that beareth not fruit He purgeth and taketh away.

184) 15:17-27

A marked change in emphasis is very evident in these verses, and the note of persecution becomes prominent. This extends right into the next chapter. There is a twofold connection with what has gone before. On the one hand, there is the association between fruit-bearing and suffering. Fruit-bearing always involves suffering; and, significantly, in this connection, the power of effective prayer will be an essential for the Disciples of Christ, for in their witness they will be confronted by a hostile world. On the other hand - and even more important - the outward suffering as spoken of in 18-25 stands in exact parallel to the inward disciplines of obedience, dying to sin, and the cutting of the pruning knife leading to fruit-bearing, which the first part of the chapter deals with. Taken together, these two factors reveal a very important pattern, for they speak of the inward and outward aspects of the believer's sanctification. "The pattern of dying with Christ has to be worked out in our Christian life both inwardly and outwardly. There is an inward process of mortification - a dying to self - of which Jesus in His perfect surrender to God's will and His complete self-control is the perfect example. But Christ not only mortified His self-will, He laid down His life on the Cross and bore excruciating physical and outward suffering in body and estate and reputation. There is therefore also for the Christian an outward process of mortification to be undergone in union with Jesus Christ...Our dying with Christ is therefore always twofold. Calvin emphasises this in different ways. He speaks of a "twofold mortification", one aspect of which relates to "those things which are around us", the other aspect of which is inward - the mortification of the understanding and will. He speaks also of a twofold likeness of the death of Christ and of the necessity of our being conformed to Him outwardly in reproaches and troubles, as well as inwardly in the dying of the old man and the renewal of spiritual life " (R S Wallace). These two things are necessary accompaniments of the Christian life. If there is no inner discipline, no inner pruning by the Word, or no outward reaction from the world, we may well ask ourselves whether we are Christians at all in the New Testament sense of the term.

185) 15:17-27

The hatred of the world (18) is invited and invoked by the believer's separation from the world, for as a believer he is alien to the environment (19). Furthermore, the world's opposition is to the Christ in the believer, not to the believer in himself. It is interesting to see the context of the words Jesus quotes in 20 - here is a significant application of what He had earlier said, in 13:16. We may gather from this that the association of the servant with his Lord is not to be confined to the one example of feet-washing, but applied to the whole of life. Not only must the disciple show the same spirit of self-emptying humility as our Lord did in washing the disciples' feet, but show also the same attitude as our Lord did to the persecutions and contumely of the world. In 22-24 Jesus analyses the attitude of the world to what He has said (22) and what He has done (24) - His words and works. Once men have heard God's word, Jesus means, it places them in a far more critical position than they would have been if they had not heard it. Having heard what Jesus had said, and deliberately resisted and refused it, they are thereby left without excuse. This, we should note, defines sin not so much as doing bad things as standing in a wrong relationship to Christ. The same can be said about His works far better, says Jesus, never to have seen Me raising Lazarus, or cleansing the lepers or giving sight to the blind, than, having seen all this, still remain in unbelief, for this makes them far more accountable in God's sight. The works He did claimed deity for Him, and it was this that they refused. It was unbearable for them to acknowledge that He was God manifest in the flesh.

186) 15:17-27

The words in 25 "without a cause" are so true: How little justification anyone has for rebelling against the God Who has given them life and blessed them in all things day by day: All rebellion against God is fundamentally irrational and inexcusable – but if there is irrationality in it, there is the element of the demonic.

In face of this intractable intransigent opposition and hatred, believers might well think their task of bearing witness to be a hopeless one and doomed to failure from the start (often it is just that, from the human point of view; and how many sore and broken hearts there are in the work of God through his ministers "up against it" with implacable opposition to their ministry and message, missionaries "up against it", deadly situations of barrenness and worldliness, where the state of the church has become such a hindrance to faith in God). But over against this human hopelessness, there is the reality of the Holy Spirit. And He shall testify. Over against human despair in believers, broken-hearted with the implacable nature of the opposition there is this wonderful word of Jesus: "When the Comforter is come, He shall testify of Me". This is what changes everything, the glorious fact of His powerful and prevailing testimony. And not only so: because He shall testify we also shall testify (the word in the Greek is the same in each case), the implication being that His testifying will be the enabling in ours. The Comforter and you! What a team, what an alliance! Because of this there, cannot ultimately be despair. We must keep believing in the darkest and most hopeless situation, the unseen yet all-prevailing Spirit of God is bearing witness in and through us.

187) 16:1-7

The chapter division here is artificial, and the thought of these verses continues that of what precedes them, in 15:17-27. The warnings that Jesus gives the disciples are grim and forbidding indeed, and it is well that He has already set over against them overwhelming reality of the Spirit's help and grace (15:5), else they might well have lost heart because of the very severity of the pressures that were to come upon them. The words of 4a are of wide application. The kind of pressures of which here speaks may not be our particular problem at the moment, but none of us knows when they will be, or when we shall urgently need the grace He promises. But He gives us these assurances in advance, so that, in time of need, we may be recalled to them by Him who brings such things to our remembrance at the critical moment. In 7 there is one supremely important consideration to be grasped. The expediency of Christ's going away is not so much that the Comforter, the Spirit, is greater than Christ – that could not be, for He is the Spirit of Christ – as that His going away completes, so to speak, His saving work in the world begun in His Incarnation and brought to its climax in His death and resurrection. His going to the Father is His exaltation, His assumption of power at the Father's right hand, and it is on this basis that the gift of the Spirit is made to His people. Until this was accomplished, He was inevitably straitened. "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how I am straitened till it be accomplished". He once said. What He meant was that, until the baptism of His passion there were things He could not do in the world; He could not fulfil His destiny as the world's Saviour. The expediency of His going lay in the fact that, in going, He would be going unto death, and through death as Victory and hence to the Father's right hand, and that then the Spirit could come and make real in the hearts of His people all that He had wrought for them in His saving work

188) 16:8-11

These verses contain one of the greatest sayings of Jesus about the Holy Spirit. What is said is, in effect an exposition in some detail of what He has already said about the Spirit's coming in 15:26. The first point to note is the Spirit is promised to the disciples, "I will send Him unto you (7)" but His work is in and to the world. The meaning is that the convincing or convicting work that is spoken of in 8 is to be through the disciples. They are to be the vehicles of the Spirit in the world. The first part of the Spirit's threefold work is to convict the world of sin "because they believe not on me". That is to say, the focal point or sin is revealed and exposed as the refusal to believe in Christ, The more one thinks of this, the more one realises the depth of its penetration, because the root of sin lies in the desire men have to live their lives in self-centred independence, disowning any allegiance to Him who is the rightful Lord of their lives. We have seen throughout John's gospel that this is what he has been intent on exposing. He puts the Pharisees and Sadducees on the spot, so to speak, and draws all their sin to this one central point: their opposition to Christ. But this is true not only of the Pharisees and Sadducees, but in the most general sense also. Pilate's dilemma at the trial of Jesus shows this very clearly: "What shall I do, then, with Jesus which is called Christ?" The real heart and centre of sin is not a question of what sort of life we are living but whether or not we have believed in Christ. For this is sin; to be in the presence of goodness incarnate and not love it; to see Christ and see Him with unmoved and unloving hearts; to hear Him call without response; to recognize the beauty of holiness and yet turn away to lust and self and the world.

189) 16:8-11

The next phrase, "Of righteousness, because I go to the Father", is rather difficult. The meaning may be as follows: having been convinced of sin, man's need is for righteousness with which to appear before God. The Spirit convinces men that the only righteousness is Christ's righteousness, that Christ is our righteousness. It is the exclusive work of the Spirit to convince men that nothing they can do can make them acceptable to God, Others think Jesus means that the Spirit convinces men that all He said and did was right because He will have been vindicated by returning to the Father. The words, "because I go to my Father" surely have a reference to His finished work. It is because Christ ascended to the Father that righteousness became available for men; He was raised again for our justification, and He ascended to the right hand of the Father as a sign that He had been vindicated by God, and that His righteousness is acceptable to God on our behalf. Calvin says: "Next to the conviction of sin, this is the second step, that the Spirit should convince the world what true righteousness is, viz, that Christ, by His ascension to heaven, has established the kingdom of life, and now sits at the right hand of the Father to confirm true righteousness." What need there is today for such a work of the Spirit, to reveal the true and alone ground of salvation and justification! It is certainly true that when spiritual awakening has come to a community or a nation, this is the message that is seen to be of paramount importance.

190) 16:8-11

The third aspect of the Spirit's work mentioned by our Lord concerns judgment (11). The meaning of the words has been interpreted variously; it may refer to condemnation, in the sense of bringing the reality of eternity and judgment to the hearts of men, and of being an unequivocal assurance that all evil will be brought to the bar of God, since the cross was Christ's victory over Satan. This means that the authority of Satan has been overturned, and that evil has therefore lost the initiative in the world. The coming of the Spirit is "a true restoration by which all things are reformed, when Christ alone holds the kingdom, having subdued and triumphed over Satan....Having vanquished the prince of wickedness, Christ restores to order, those things which formerly were torn and decayed" (Calvin) i.e. when the Spirit is come, He will establish the divine order in his Church and in the world. We could also, however, put it like this: From the human standpoint, the death of Jesus was the failure of a mission (to use a common phrase); it was the end of the road, and this undoubtedly is how the disciples originally thought of Christ's crucifixion. For them, it was a disaster, that knocked the bottom out of their world. But the Holy Spirit informed their minds and hearts that that death was not a disaster but a triumph, and that, in that death, the prince of this world was judged and brought down. This was, in fact, the full significance of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, for the disciples. For then, they realised that His rising from the dead was not simply a return on His part to the status quo obtaining before the crucifixion, but something infinitely more wonderful, and that He had been raised from the dead to die no more - i.e., that death itself had been vanquished, and the long reign of darkness was forever over. Have we really allowed the Spirit to teach us this glorious truth, in the deep places of our experience?

191) 16:12-15

The immediate context of our Lord's next statement about the Spirit (13) is what He says in 12 about the disciples not being able to bear all that He could tell them at that time. This means, for one thing, that there were some truths that Jesus could not communicate to the disciples till after the cross and resurrection and ascension. These mighty acts had to be accomplished before real understanding could come to them. For another thing, it underlines the essential unity of the New Testament writings, and asserts their inspiration. For what He implies is that the "many things" (12) which He could not then teach them He would teach them afterwards by His Spirit, and these things are embodied in the New Testament epistles written by the apostles under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit propositions therefore emerge here; firstly, the epistles are Christ's teaching to the Church; and secondly, the writers of the epistles wrote under the same inspiration as Himself, for, in both cases, the Spirit of God was the Inspirer.. The epistles are therefore just as authoritative as the actual words of Jesus. These are very important propositions, for they show that the teaching of the apostles is an extension of His own teaching, a development of it, a logical and spiritual outcome of what He had said, and an authoritative interpretation of what He had done on the cross. It is the continuing work of revelation by the Spirit that our Lord has in mind. This does not mean that we can assume that the Spirit will ever continue to reveal new truth; there is a givenness about the Biblical revelation that is complete within the historical canon of Scripture in the sense that there is no more to be revealed. And all new or further revelation now can be nothing more than the elucidation or illumination of what has already been given once and for all in Scripture. The Spirit is the great Interpreter of the Word.

192) 16:12-16

In 13, the words "he shall not speak of himself" are probably better rendered "he shall not speak from himself", and the reference is not so much to speaking about himself as speaking on his own authority, independently of the Father and the Son. This conjures up a striking image of the council of the Trinity, with the Father conversing with the Son and the Spirit listening and communicating what He hears to God's people. The "things to come" could refer to prophecy such as, for example, we have in Revelation, but the phrase could also mean that the Spirit would show the meaning of things that were yet to happen i.e., the cross and resurrection. This corresponds also with the phrase "into all truth" in 13a, for it is His office and prerogative to lead Christ's disciples into full knowledge and understanding of the doctrines of the gospel, illumining, guiding and informing their minds and hearts.

The Spirit's ministry is further described in 14 as one of glorifying Christ, that is to say, He makes much of Christ and puts Him central in the Christian's experience. This has a necessary implication, as Alford points out; namely that any religious teaching that does not exalt Christ has a fatal defect about it; it cannot be from the Spirit, This is a consideration of wide application, and it provides us with a sure and reliable test of any teaching. For any teaching that detracts from the glory of Christ - any reservation about His essential Deity, for example - is immediately suspect, and cannot be of the Spirit. Our Lord's words are nothing if not practical.

193) 16:12-16

In 16, an interesting use of words pinpoints a profound truth that emerges in the discussion of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The word "see" occurs twice. Reading the words in the AV makes them sound like a riddle or puzzle. But the real force of what Christ is saying is seen in the fact that two different words are used in the Greek. The first means to "behold", in the obvious, literal sense. The second, however, involves the idea of experience. What Jesus meant was: "In a little while you will not see Me, for I am going to the cross; but in a little while you will see Me in a new way, see Me with new eyes, because I go to the Father". This, again, is the sovereign work of the Spirit. He interprets Christ to men's hearts, so that they see Him in a new way. This is one of the things Paul means in 2 Corinthians 5:16 when he speaks of no longer "knowing Christ after the flesh", i.e., no longer seeing Him as a mere historical figure but as He is, the Lord of glory, a living, unseen, eternal and unchanging Presence. It is all a question of "seeing the significance" of Jesus, and, in this connection, one appreciates more fully His words in 7 about the expediency of His going away, for it is as if He had said, "If you do not stop seeing Me in this kind of way (i.e. as a mere historical figure), nothing is going to happen; but if you see Me in the new way the Spirit will make possible, this will open the door for you into a new world". As indeed it did; for when the Spirit came to them to indwell them, they became new creatures, and a new world became theirs (2 Corinthians 5:17).

194) 16:17-24

The disciples were clearly puzzled by our Lord's words in 16, and He therefore elaborates them in 22 ff. in terms that confirm the interpretation that was suggested in yesterday's Note. The sorrow (20, 21) is involved in no longer seeing Him in the old way, and flows from their lack of understanding of the meaning of His death; the joy comes through seeing Him in a new way - this was their experience of the resurrection. But this contains a principle of much deeper application for the spiritual life, and this is the real lesson of the passage for us. Jesus speaks of the travail of a woman bringing her child into the world, and in this we have an allegory, an illustration of what it costs to live for Christ truly as disciples. Paul speaks in Galatians of travailing in birth till Christ was formed in them. It costs to beget men and women unto newness of life, and travail is an inseparable constituent of true service. But there is no joy like the joy that flows from it. It is with this paradox in spiritual experience in mind that we shall understand the better our Lord's great and wonderful words in 33, when we come to them in a later Note. In the meantime, however, we must look at the seeming riddle in 23 and 24. The AV conceals the fact that two different words in the Greek are both rendered "ask". What Jesus means in 23a is that "in that day" they would have no more questions to ask, because everything will then be clear to them. This may refer either to the coming of the Spirit, or to our Lord's Second Coming, or both; the one does not exclude the other. The context, however, might seem to indicate that the reference is to the Spirit's coming; certainly, it is when the perplexities and questionings are cleared away that we are in a proper condition to ask in His Name (23, 24) for then our confidence in Him is what it should be.

195) 16:25-33

The time referred to in 25, in which Jesus is to speak to the disciples plainly of the Father is surely the Pentecostal era - i.e. the time in which the Spirit will be given then. It is all the more surprising, therefore, that when He utters one of the profoundest and, in some ways, most mysterious truths in the whole Upper Room discourse (18), the disciples can say, "Now speakest Thou plainly....now we are sure....by this we believe...." Many, to us, simpler statements had appeared to puzzle and mystify them, yet this profound utterance concerning the real meaning of His coming into the world (28) seemed, somehow, to "click" with them, and they got through to a place of spiritual awareness and faith. This bears witness to the mystery of the Holy Spirit's working. There are times when we may be listening to the Word and comparatively straightforward truths go right past us without our seeming to have the spiritual equipment to grasp them. Then, suddenly something of a new dimension of depth is uttered, and, without warning, the whole thing glows and fills our mind, illuminating and enriching us, and we are through to a position of faith and assurance. This is how it was with these men, and it is an evidence of our Lord's earlier word about the Spirit guiding them into all truth. Even then, before our Lord had gone to be with the Father, the Spirit - though not yet given in the fullest sense - must certainly have been at work in that gathering, to bring such an illumination to their minds and hearts. As such, it is analogous to Peter's experience at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:16 ff.) when, in an amazing flash of illumination, he burst out with his confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God.

196) 16:25-33

Now, we must look at our Lord's final words, in 33. It is usually the second half of the verse that occupies our attention: "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" - and, undoubtedly, this offers encouragement and hope for the believer. But, in its context, it is a much richer statement, and it is in its context that we must examine it. And what we must see first of all is the paradox, the contrast, that is presented here: in Me -peace; in the world - tribulation. It is interesting to note, in passing, that the word "tribulation" here is the same as that translated "anguish" in 21. The thought is obviously the same throughout. Several points emerge. In the first place, Jesus indicates that the believer belongs to two worlds. As to the one, he is "in Christ"; he is a member of the new order, and for him old things have passed away; he has entered into the glorious liberty of the children of God, He has newness of life in Christ. But he is still also in this world, and he has to live that new life in the old order, in this old, sinful world. It is this fact that explains the paradox of tribulation and peace in our Lord's words. It will always be so. In this sense the Christian life is never a simple one, but complex; and this is reflected in the teaching of the New Testament as a whole (cf Ephesians 1:1, "saints at Ephesus, faithful in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 2:21, Romans 6 etc.). This is something so important for true Christian experience that we must spend a day or two looking at it more deeply.

197) 16:25-32

Jesus said "In Me peace". But peace is the fruit and the consequence of other things, the end product and result of other things, and we need to look at the teaching of the New Testament as a whole on what it means to be in Him to appreciate fully this peace. It is not a negative thing, the mere absence of disturbing factors, but something positive and vital. And this is where the ministry of the Spirit comes in, for it is He Who leads us into all truth illuminating our minds to understand the wealth of our position in Him. It is this, in fact, that Paul prays for in Ephesians 1:15ff. The meaning of the phrase "in Him" is expounded for us in the epistles of the New Testament as a whole (it is perhaps significant that Jesus says: "These things have I spoken unto you" - all the teaching about the Spirit Whose office it is to lead us into all truth). It is the knowledge of what we are in Him, and what is ours in Him, that is our great source of peace for a true realisation of our position in Christ that makes a man unassailable. This is what the Psalmist glimpsed in Psalm 46: "God is our refuge and strength therefore we will not fear tho' the earth be removed. " It is a great exercise of faith to recognize where we are and what we are, and where God has placed us in Christ, to know as Paul says in Ephesians 1 the exceeding greatness of the power that is to us-ward who believe. This is "the rest that remaineth for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9). To dwell habitually in that atmosphere is the secret of Christian victory (see Revelation 1, where tribulation and peace go together in a remarkable way: in exile in Patmos, and under such considerable pressure, John was nevertheless able to sing in exultation: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood and hath made us kings and priests unto God..."). The knowledge of his position in Christ ushered him into royal living. This is the true peace of God. 16:25-33

We must now look at the other side of the paradox: in the world - tribulation. Tribulation has a twofold source, inward and outward. The inward source of tribulation comes from the fact that over against our position in Christ there is the reality of the battle with the flesh. There is the fight of faith, the mortifying of the deeds of the body. This is battling and tribulation indeed, the daily dying to sin and self, the daily taking up of the cross and denying oneself to follow Christ. There is a cost attached to such faithful living, as we may see from a study of the lives of Biblical giants like Abraham, Moses or Paul; the battle for inward purity, for truth and honour and integrity, the battle for character is one that necessarily involves much tribulation. The outward discipline of tribulation comes through one's faithfulness to the testimony of the gospel. The opposition and persecution that come for Christ's sake and the gospel's constitute a real tribulation as witness the sufferings of the

early Church in Acts and not a few twentieth century martyrs, in South America, China and elsewhere. It is inevitable that it should be so, it always will be so.

But the paradox of peace and tribulation is not an equal one, and the two sides are not in equal tension. The balance is decidedly in favour of the new order. There is the "much more" of grace (Romans 5). Jesus has overcome the world and because this is so, we are more than conquerors through Him and nothing can ever separate us from His love (Romans 8:39)

198) 17:1-5

The 17th chapter of John has been called, not without justification, the holy of holies of the New Testament. It records for us our Lord's great high priestly prayer for His people. As Bishop Ryle comments: It is wonderful as a specimen of the communion that was ever kept up between the Father and the Son during the period of the Son's ministry on earth; it is wonderful as a pattern of the intercession which the Son as high-priest, is ever carrying on for us in heaven". It can be usefully studied in three parts: 1- 5, Prayer concerning Himself; 6-19, Prayer for His disciples; 20-26, Prayer for the Church universal. Before, however turning to this detailed study, some general comments will be helpful. First of all looking at the passage in the perspective of the Upper Room discourse as a whole, we may note that having taught His disciples by the Word, Jesus now seeks to confirm that Word by prayer. This teaches us something of vital importance. It is that the preaching of the Word needs to be undergirt by prayer. It is prayer that gives edge and thrust to the preaching of God's truth. This may be some indication why the preaching of the Church today seems to have such negligible impact and effect in the life of the people. There is not enough prayer. Prayer is the neglected grace among the people of God Our Lord Himself shows us here the real priority. But this is also a word of challenge to all who preach and teach the Word to pray the Word home to those who bear it. It becomes perilously easy to trust the power of the Word itself, but unless we learn to pray it in, it will not bear the fruit God intends it to.

199) 17:1-5

The idea and function of the high priest is well illustrated by the Old Testament institution, as we see it described in Exodus 28:9-29. In the detailed ordering of the high priestly garments, two things stand out in particular: one, the two onyx stones on the shoulders of the ephod; the other, the breastplate in which twelve precious stones were set. The onyx stones bore the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and in this symbol the children of Israel are represented as resting on the shoulders of their God. It speaks of the power of God to uphold His people, to carry them through every stress and strain, and over every difficult road. They are on His shoulders, and therefore underneath them are the everlasting arms. In the second piece of symbolism, the precious stones set in the breastplate each bore the name of one of the tribes of Israel, and this signified that their names lay near to the heart of their God. All are precious to Him, each with a different preciousness. Here, it is the tender love of God for His people that is revealed in a wonderfully graphic way. These are the pictures that we ought to be reading into our Lord's high priestly intercession in this chapter, for here, in words that are ineffable and certainly much too deep for our full understanding. He expresses the love that He has for His people.

200) 17:1- 5

"These words" in 1 may refer to the whole discourse of the Upper Room - this is an obvious conclusion to draw - but it may be that they have a special connection with the last verse or two of the previous chapter (16:32, 33), i.e., the prayer that follows is set in the context of the victory He is about to accomplish. This illuminates the thought of "the hour" - a phrase often occurring in the earlier chapters of John, as we have seen - and that of "glorifying Thy Son", for it indicates that the glorification of the Son takes place in and through the cross, a thought that has already been before us in John's record (cf. 12:23, 24; 13:31). The prayer for the glorifying of the Son is repeated in 5. It is in fact the only petition our Lord makes concerning Himself, for the intervening verses (2, 3, 4) are statements of fact. This underlines not only the central passion of our Lord's heart as being the death He was to die as obedience to and glad acceptance of the will of God, but also an important association of ideas between that death and the thought expressed in these intervening verses about eternal life and knowing God. For it is through the cross, and the cross alone, that eternal life is possible for any man. We know Him through the cross, for the cross is the open door back into fellowship with Him. The commentators point out that our Lord's intercessory prayer in John stands in parallel with the other three gospels' record of Gethsemane (which John does not record at all). It is perhaps significant for us to see that Jesus prayer "Glorify Thy Son" corresponds to the Synoptics "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt". In other words, in praying, "Father, glorify Thy Son" Jesus is in fact asking God to thrust Him into the death that would bring glory to the Father and the Son and blessing to the world.

201) 17:1-5

Bishop Ryle interprets the meaning of the words "Glorify Thy Son....glorify Thee" as follows: "Give glory to Thy Son, by carrying Him through the cross and the grave, to a triumphant completion of the work He came to do, and by placing Him at Thy right hand, and highly exalting Him above every name that is named. Do this, in order that He may glorify Thee and Thy attributes. Do this, that He may bring fresh glory to Thy holiness, and justice, and mercy, and faithfulness, and prove to the world that Thou art a just God, a holy God, a merciful God, a God that keepeth His word. My vicarious death and my resurrection will prove this, and bring glory to Thee. Finish the mighty work. Glorify Me, and in so doing glorify Thyself. Finish Thy work, not least, that Thy Son may glorify Thee by bringing many redeemed souls to heaven, to the glory of Thy grace". This may be thought an over-elaborate expansion of our Lord's words, but who shall say that in their general tenor they are not the simple truth. We may also see a connection between these words in 1 and 2 and what the Apostle writes in Hebrews 2:8, 9, where the crowning with glory and honour are clearly linked with the suffering of death. It may well be that the Apostle had Jesus' prayer in mind when he framed his statement.

Christ's second petition, in 5, is not a mere repetition of the first, in 1, because in 4 He speaks of glorifying the Father on earth, whereas in 5 it is a heavenly glorifying. In other words, Christ is asking for a return, as it were, to the glorious position which He had with the Father before the Incarnation. But this is not so much to be regarded in terms of a restoration to the heavenly "status-quo" before all worlds, as an incomparable "burnishing" of the eternal glory, through the glorifying on earth. The glorification is not exhausted in human history, but has repercussions in eternity. And if it be true that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God in heaven over one sinner that repents on earth, how much more is there blazing brightness in eternity with the fulfilment of the Son's all-glorious work on earth.

202) 17:6-8

In 6-19, the central section of our Lord's intercession, we have His prayer for the disciples. His words are full not only of instruction but of encouragement for all who seek to follow Him, It is surely clear that to have listened to them, as the disciples did in the Upper Room, must have made an indelible impression on their hearts. It would not be misleading to paraphrase the opening phrase of 6 thus: "I have introduced them to Thee; let them know what Thou art like". Philip's cry in 14:8, "Show us the Father and it sufficeth us" was deeper than he knew, for to see the Father, to know Him, to have His name manifested, is to have eternal life. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee" (3). This is what Christ has done in manifesting God's name to them. The manifestation of the name is a revelation of the character of God. And this He has done by His teaching to show Him to be the God of love, by His miracles to be the God of power and might, and by Himself to show God as full of truth and grace. The whole of the gospel record can be read into these words, for this is what He came to do, and this is what He did do. We should particularly note 8a (which is further underlined in 14), which indicate that it is through the Word that Christ manifests the name of God and gives us eternal life, In this, the pattern is always the same: the Word is given, received, known and believed; this is ever the way of enlightenment.

203) 17.6-8

Bishop Ryle makes the following comment on these verses: "These are wonderful words when we consider the character of the eleven men to whom they were applied. How weak was their faith: How slender their knowledge: How shallow their spiritual attainments: How faint their hearts in the hour of danger...! Yet, these very weak servants were the men of whom the gracious Head of the Church speaks here in honourable terms. The lesson before us is full of comfort and instruction. It is evident that Jesus sees far more in His believing people than they see in themselves or than others see in them. The least degree of faith is precious in His sight. Though it be no bigger than a grain of mustard seed, it is a plant of heavenly growth, and makes a boundless difference between the possessor of it and the man of the world. Wherever the gracious Saviour of sinners sees true faith in Himself however feeble, He looks with compassion on many infirmities and passes by many defects. It was even so with the eleven apostles. They were weak and unstable as water, but they believed and loved their Master when millions refused to own Him. And the language of Him who declared that "a cup of cold water" given in the name of a disciple should "not lose its reward" shows clearly that their constancy was not forgotten (Matthew 10:42)

The true servant of God should mark well the feature of Christ's character that is here brought out, and rest his soul upon it. The rest among us must often see in himself a vast number of defects and must feel ashamed of his poor attainments in religion. But do we simply believe in Jesus? Do we cling to Him and roll all our burdens on Him? Can we say with sincerity and truth as Peter said afterwards. "Lord, Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that I love Thee?" Then let us take comfort in the words of Christ before us and nor give way to despondency. The Lord Jesus did not despise the eleven because of their feebleness, but bore with them and saved them to the end because they believed. And He never changes. What He did for them He will do for us.

204) 17:9-10

Having taught His disciples, our Lord prays for them. Christ manifests the Father's Name to His chosen ones through the operation of the Word on their souls bringing them to living faith and trust in Himself. Then - and this is the ultimate assurance - He prays for them, making constant intercession for them. The full meaning of these words for us lies in the reality of His continuing intercession for His people at the Father's right hand. This is the great stabilising factor in Christian experience "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous ", says John in his first epistle (2:1), and the writer to the Hebrews adds "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them". It is on the basis of the continuing intercession of the Son that continuing salvation is possible. If we have been saved today and kept in a saved condition, there is only one explanation that is adequate, and it is that the Son of God has prayed for us. Even when we say to one another (as we ought) "I have been remembering you in my prayers", this is still true in the larger context, because our prayers have meaning and significance only in relation to the mighty intercession of the Son. Our prayers are fed so to speak into His intercession, and His Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26). In connection with our Lord's prevailing intercession we are reminded of the picture in Bunyan of Christian in the house of the Interpreter, being shown the fire on which the evil one kept pouring water to put it out. But in spite of all his efforts, the fire kept burning more brightly. And the reason was that behind the fire there stood the figure of the Lord pouring oil on it to make it burn. This is the constantly fed fire of grace that nothing is able to extinguish; Christ's intercession is all-prevailing.

205) 17:11-12

These verses give us the content of our Lord's intercession for His people. They assure us that He is able to keep us from falling in all the pressures and hazards of the life of discipleship. But it is a prayer not only that the disciples might be kept from sin, in the negative sense, but also in a positive sense; that they might be kept true to God's redemptive purpose in the world. The "name" of God, as we have seen reveals His character and "in his name" means "in line with His character as Divine Redeemer" For the disciples therefore to be kept in His name is for them to be kept true to God's redemptive purposes in the world - identified with Christ in His death and resurrection sharing His sufferings and dying to sin. And what need there is for such a keeping power when we know our own hearts and know how easy even within the context of Christian discipleship itself, to become deviated from the central purpose of our calling into attitudes that not only fall short of that redemptive purpose, but actively militate against it'. Well might our Lord pray such a prayer for His people!

206) 17:13-17

The need for Christ's keeping power is seen particularly in these verses in the constant antagonism and hatred of the world against all who follow Him. God's Word separates us from the world (14) calling us out from it and setting us in irreconcilable opposition to it. The whole of the book of Acts reveals the truth of this, that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. To be a believer means to be against the stream of the world, and our Lord's keeping power will always be needed here. Not only so, as we saw earlier, there is an inward conflict as well as the outward one. Christ's keeping power is needed there too, and it is provided in the words of 17. The sanctifying power of the Word works in the believer's life in answer to the prayers of our Lord, and "keeps" him, stabilising him and stabilising him in grace. As the Psalmist says, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word" (Psalm 119:9). This serves also to underline the nature of His keeping power. The disciples of Jesus are kept in the world, in the midst of all its tensions and pressures. They are not "of the world" but they are also not "cut of the world", but immersed in it, involved in all its brokenness and alienation. The nature of Christ's salvation is that believers have peace in the conflict. This is the amazing paradox of Christian experience. We are not promised freedom from conflict – "in the world ye shall have tribulation" - but by God's grace we may know His peace in the midst of it all.

207) 17:18-19

These verses tell us why the consecration and sanctification mentioned in 13-17 is so very necessary. The operative words in 18 are 'as' and 'so'. How was Jesus sent into the world? In the path of humiliation (cf Phil 2:5-8). This also is how He sends His own into the world. It is for this that we receive His Word and know His sanctifying power, and are kept 'in the world but not of it'. Indeed, we are commissioned to be like Christ, and aligned with His sovereign purposes. One has only to look into the Acts of the Apostles to see how inevitably and unerringly this pattern of self-giving repeats itself in the experience of the early Church. One thinks also of some of the autobiographical passages in Paul's writings, such as 1 Cor 4:9ff, 'I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death; for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels and to men... We are fools for Christ's sake... we are weak... we both hunger and thirst... being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat...' It is the pattern of Christ all over again. The basis of our service in the world is the path that Jesus trod in the world. In 19 we are shown that everything in our sanctification, everything in our experience, rests upon the self-giving of the Son of God. It is because of His sanctification on the cross that the Word has power to sanctify us. His sacrifice is the great foundation of all that is effected in us. And by this same token, it is the sanctification of the disciple that becomes the foundation of all meaningful outreach in the world. Calvary is 'reflected' in us, and by this others are drawn to Christ

208) 17:18-19

We can usefully pause at these verses for another day to consider some of the things that are said elsewhere about the service we are to render Christ. We have seen that discipleship means embracing the cross as the principle of our lives, and this is borne out in the way in which Christian service is described in other parts of Scripture. Jesus once said, for example, to the disciples: 'Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men'. The basis of service here is the personal relationship we are called into with Christ. It is not a question of possessing natural, or even spiritual gifts, but of submitting ourselves to the iron discipline of the cross, letting its heart-bruising message plough deep furrows in our hearts and lives, allowing Him to shape and fashion us and mould us into usefulness. Elsewhere, He speaks of our being labourers in the harvest fields (Matt 9:38). The terms of reference here are very significant. Jesus was moved with compassion, seeing the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd, and it was on the basis of this that He said, 'Pray ye the Lord of the harvest'. Compassion, prayer - these are the needs, seeing humanity with the eyes of Christ. But we cannot do this unless we are where He is, unless we are in fundamental harmony with His heart and spirit. Only thus can we labour in His harvest fields. To stand among men in their needs, and to close one's bowels of compassion against them, is not to be in the world as Christ was in the world. Then, again, in 2 Cor 5, Paul speaks of our being 'ambassadors for Christ'. Here, the great constraint and the great controlling power is the love of Christ. We are to go as ambassadors of a great reconciliation, beseeching men to be reconciled to God on the basis of His costly atonement for our sins. This is how Christ sends us - under the constraint of His love, living no longer unto ourselves but unto Him. In all these the one common factor is: 'bearing in the body the marks of the Lord Jesus'. This is the condition of service, and unless it is fulfilled, service will be in vain.

209) 17:20-26

We come now to the final section of our Lord's intercessory prayer, in which He goes beyond His disciples to the larger horizons of the Church of God down the ages of history. It is a very moving thought to realise that our Lord's prayer reaches out to, and spans, all Christendom, and that in that solemn and hallowed hour He was praying for a Church as yet unborn, yet fully formed in the mind and purpose of the Father before all worlds. The prayer for unity in 21 is one that is much and often in the minds of Church leaders in our time and much - too much, indeed, in the wrong way is made of it. Unity is of course a greatly to be desired thing, because disunity between believers is a problem and a scandal. But there is no kind of warrant in our Lord's words here or anywhere else for pressing for organisational or denominational union willy-nilly, at any cost, because unity can never be at the expense of truth. Truth is the only adequate basis of unity. Our Lord is speaking here of unity among believers of the same thoughts, aspirations, attitudes and desires, and it is simply wresting the Scriptures to suppose that His words here could be legitimately applied to unity between those who believe the fundamental doctrines of the faith and those who deny them. One recalls a statement made by the late Professor Renwick of the Free Church of Scotland warning people of the danger of making too facile an interpretation of the sequence in 21 - 'unity... that the world might believe'. He pointed out that in the Middle Ages the Church was one; there was no disunity then; there was one, great, monolithic Church. But did the world believe? Of course it did not believe; it lived in gross darkness - and for this reason: the unity of the one, great, monolithic Church was not a unity that was built on truth. It is through truth, not unity, that the world believes. Apart from truth, unity is not only irrelevant; it is deadly dangerous.

210) 17:20-26

It is useful to compare our Lord's words here on unity with Paul's in Ephesians 4:1-6. It is significant that the point at which Paul speaks of unity is following the marvellous prayer in 3:14ff in which he prays that God's people would be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith... that they might be filled with all the fulness of God. Given this, unity becomes a possibility. But so often today, unity enthusiasts have got it the wrong way round. They say that given unity, the other will become a possibility, and the Church will be revived. But this is simply the antithesis of the Biblical order, an order which is implicit in our Lord's words in these verses. What Jesus is praying for is unity as the fruit of a spiritual reality. This is why those who labour honourably and earnestly for the recovery of the true values of the faith are promoting the cause of true unity as much as - indeed, far more than - those who strive for unity at the expense of truth. And they should indignantly repudiate the charge of being either divisive or uncooperative where truth is at stake. When the Spirit of God is poured out on the Church once again, when reformation and awakening take place, we shall then find a unity such as is envisaged in our Lord's words here. It is no use starting the other way round.

211) 17:20-26

We must next consider why our Lord was so concerned that His disciples should behold His glory (24). There are several things to be said here. One thinks, for example of Paul's experience on the Damascus Road, when the glory of the Son of God broke upon his soul and conscience. 'I could not see', he said, 'for the glory of that light'. This is a parable as well as being literally true, because Paul never saw the world in the same way again- he saw it with new eyes, and he was blinded to anything save the things of God. This is one reason why Jesus so prayed. Another reason can be discerned in 2 Cor 3:18: to behold the glory of the Lord is a life-transforming experience, and for disciples once to see His glory is for that change to begin to work. Yet another New Testament reference can help us; in Hebrews 11:27 it is said of Moses that 'he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible'. We need to read this into our Lord's prayer here. How deeply the Apostle Peter needed this! It was precisely because he had not beheld the glory of Christ as he needed to have done that he ultimately denied the Lord. But how are we, the disciples of today, to behold His glory? The simple answer is: in the Word of the Scriptures. By our reading and study of the Scriptures our eyes are going to be blinded to this world's empty glory and we will catch a vision of something that will bear us through the whole of life; by that reading and study our lives are going to be changed from glory into glory, and made strong and steadfast. This is what our Lord means when He prays so earnestly that His disciples may behold His glory. Wonderful, wonderful thought.

212) 17:20-26

We have already in earlier verses discussed the meaning of 'declaring God's name' (26a) But what does Jesus mean when He adds, 'will declare it'. He can only mean that He will continue to declare the name of God to His disciples through the Holy Spirit, because He was about to go to the Father. Any further revelation, therefore, must necessarily be through the Spirit, Who would lead them more and more into all truth. We should notice also the association of ideas between 26a and 26b. The Spirit will reveal the name of God to the disciples, leading them into truth, and that will be transformed into love This is the great safeguard. It is not simply a question of the acquisition of truth as such, but an acquisition of truth and knowledge that will bring the love of the Father ever more deeply into our hearts. Is this the effect that Bible study has upon us? We must beware of tackling the business of Bible study in a technical or intellectual way, merely amassing knowledge. There are many people well versed in the Scriptures, who are nevertheless spiritual pygmies. The man who grows in grace is the man who, receiving the truths of God finds them somehow transformed into a deepening love in his heart for the Father and the Son.

213) 18:1-4

Following the Upper Room discourse and the great intercessory prayer, John now begins the record of the arrest, trial, sufferings and death of the Son of God. We should note first of all that, of all the gospel writers, John alone omits any reference to Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. This is so striking an omission that there must be some reason for it. Two things may be said. The first is that to John, the whole of our Lord's life on earth was one of suffering, in the sense that right from the beginning the question of the cup He was to drink, and the hour for which He came into the world, were with Him in His consciousness. For John, that the all-glorious Son of God should have come down into human life at all was humiliation, of which the agony of Gethsemane was but one expression (cf Phil 2 5ff). The second thing is that John's point and purpose in his gospel is to show Christ as a glorious Figure. Indeed, in more than one place His death is spoken of as being His glorification. In 1:14, he says, 'We beheld His glory'. It is the glory of the Son that he is stressing, and this fact runs through the whole of this passage before us. John portrays not so much a suffering Figure as a purposeful, glorious Victor going into battle. This is seen in the wording of 2:4. After the Upper Room, Jesus went into the Garden (1), this was manifestly not to hide, for Judas, who had gone out to betray Him to the soldiers and the high priests knew the place, and knew therefore where to find Him. It was the last place He should have chosen in which to hide, if that had been His purpose. And this is further substantiated in 4 'Jesus knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth'. He knew they were intent on arresting Him and that Judas had betrayed Him; He knew He would be arraigned before the high priests and Pilate - and, knowing all this, He deliberately, and with set purpose, went forth to be taken. The implication is plain. He was not arrested as an unwilling Victim; He put Himself in their hands. It was He, not they, Who was in control in that dramatic situation.

214) **18:5-8a**

What was said at the end of yesterday's Note is further demonstrated in 6. Jesus openly revealed Himself to the soldiers, but at the words 'I am He' they fell back, stunned by something in His manner. The situation is really extraordinary; it is as if He were almost playing with them, demonstrating to them - and to us - how utterly helpless they were to lay hands on Him until He should, by some inner, hidden control, give them leave. But there is a deeper significance still. What made the soldiers fall back as if they had been struck? It can, we submit, only have been a supernatural manifestation, showing forth the glory of Christ, uncovering for a moment what was always there but hidden from the eyes of men. We recall Wesley's famous lines,

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail! the Incarnate Deity.

And now, for a moment, the veil was drawn aside, and the glory that shone forth brought them down to the dust, as it did on a later occasion on the Damascus Road with Saul of Tarsus. This, some commentators think, is the force of the words 'I am' - for these were the words that described the name of Jehovah, the great I AM. This is important from the point of view of John's presentation of his message, for it has the effect of showing us Who it was Who was thus going forth to die, and entering into human sin and woe to deal with it, the Lord of glory Himself. Such is the force of John's record here: it is a Mighty One going forth to do battle for us men and for our salvation. And, writing from the standpoint of the resurrection as he was, John is hinting at its possibility - for with such an One going into death, the outcome could not but be victory. As Peter said on the day of Pentecost, 'It was not possible that He should be holden of it' (Acts 2 24). Viewed in this light we see how mistaken it is to think of Christ's death as a tragedy or martyrdom of the failure of a mission. He was on the initiative, on the offensive against sin and death.

215) 18:8b-11

There is another highly suggestive and instructive thought in 8b 'If therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way'. Few words could illustrate more clearly what is called the substitutionary aspect of our Lord's sufferings and death. Jesus expressly makes His capture the condition of His disciples' freedom. This alongside the idea of Christ as the mighty Victor, gives a broadly comprehensive picture of the meaning of the cross. Peter's action in attacking the high priest's servant was characteristically impulsive, but we can say something more about it than this: it was an irrelevancy. The more one thinks about it, the more one sees that it belonged to a different world from that in which Jesus was then operating. This was not how salvation was going to be accomplished, this was the arm of the flesh, and He was operating in a spiritual realm. The reference to the cup in 11b should be compared with the other three gospel writers' references to Gethsemane. There is no real contradiction between the two seemingly different viewpoints in Matthew, Mark and Luke, the cup is viewed as representing death as the wages of sin, the cup of the divine wrath, and it was from this that the Son of God shrank in the Garden, as He saw all the fateful implications of drinking it. In John, however, the cup represents the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, of which Jesus says, 'I delight to do Thy will'. And He was not prepared to allow Peter's sword, or anything else, to interfere with His embracing that will which was the passion of His life. All this we must read into the event which was His arrest by the soldiers in 12.

216) 18:12-14

John's comment in 14 about Caiaphas is surely significant here, in relation to all we have been saying about the Divine initiative at work in the solemn event of our Lord's arrest. This, John means, is not a matter of a poor, defenceless victim being taken to His death, but the outworking of a sovereign plan. When Caiaphas said (11:49ff) that it was expedient that one man should die for the people, John added in effect that he had spoken more deeply than he knew, because he was giving voice to the whole plan and purpose of God. It is this that he now reminds us of, in 14. This, he means is the outworking of that. He has no intention of allowing us to think of the death of Jesus in the wrong way even thus early in the account of the trial and crucifixion, he obliges us to think of what was happening in terms of what God was doing, rather than what men were doing. In this respect, he is simply echoing the uniform teaching of the apostles as we see it in Acts and in the epistles (cf Acts 2:23). We must never forget that the gospel narratives recording the events leading up to the crucifixion were written from the standpoint and in the perspective of the resurrection - i.e. from the standpoint of the Divine initiative fulfilled and the victory won.

217) 18:15-27

This is a long passage, but the purpose in looking at it in one reading is to note something that John seems intent on underlining for us. He sets the account of Peter's denial in the story of the trial of Jesus, and this teaches the very important lesson that man's sin is exposed in the Scripture in the context of the Saviour's atoning and substitutionary-work - i.e. , human failure and despair are set in the light of God's love and power to redeem. That is the first lesson John teaches us in the story of Peter's denial. The second is this: how are we to explain the extraordinary contradiction that is Peter, a man who at one point is bold with the sword, and at the next is making cowardly denial of his Lord? We often hold up Peter and make him the butt of criticism, saying some very hard things about him - this is right and necessary in learning spiritually, for the Scriptures are given us for this very thing. All the same, what we say about Peter's failing should not blind us to the fact that he was a big man in every way, a notable, impressive character, bold and venturesome, and not at all of the cringing, miserable type. And the fact that it was such an one that fell so shamefully not only argues a depth of weakness in his heart of which he was entirely unaware, bearing witness to a contradiction in human nature that is very great and radical indeed, but also reminds us that this was the crisis hour of history building up to its awful climax. Dark malignities were abroad that night, and cosmic currents were flowing with sinister flood-tides. It was in their dark vortex that Peter was caught and involved. Small wonder that he was swirled about like a cork in a raging stream. Not that this excuses his fall, but it serves at least to explain how such a disastrous fate overtook him. Christ has seen it coming and knew that Peter, being the man he was, would never stand. Only a spiritual giant could have done so, one who was utterly crucified to self, and therefore having access to spiritual power and grace.

218) 18:15-27

What are we to say, then, of Luke 22.31, and Christ's intercession for Peter? Did it fail then for Peter? No; Christ did not say that Peter would not fall. Indeed, the way that Christ preserved Peter's faith was to allow him to fall here, because he had to be brought to an end of himself. When Christ really takes us in hand, we need to watch out there is something very firm - even ruthless- about His tender dealing with us. And, as P.T. Forsyth once said, He is strong enough to resist pity till sorrow and shame and penitence have done their gracious work in us. It was down there, in that abject place of moral failure and collapse, that Peter learned the truth about himself at last, and that the foundations for the new Peter were laid, Peter the rock, the man of the cross. His faith did not fail, only his faith in himself; his faith was purged and purified and reborn, as it were, and emerged a new thing. But we must think also of the sequel, to anticipate the last chapter of John's gospel. In the highly dramatic encounter on the shores of the lake, it becomes clear that it was not Peter's faith, but his love, that was called in question. The lesson this teaches us is that if we love, we shall be faithful. To love means to be loyal, even to our own hurt. It is the personal relationship that matters, and is indeed paramount.

219) 18-15-27

Next, we consider our Lord's arraignment before the high priest. This John deals with only briefly; the ecclesiastical aspect of the trial does not occupy John nearly as much as the civil or political -we shall turn to that later. One point here, however, raises a problem. In 13 it says that Jesus was sent to Annas first, and the trial might seem to have been conducted before him not Caiaphas, whereas in the other gospels it is clearly before Caiaphas that Jesus was arraigned. But 24 seems to belong to 14, and if this is so, the order would be that Jesus was led away first to Annas who then sent him to Caiaphas, before whom the events recorded in 19ff took place. With the high priests, it is the deliberate malignity of sin that is stressed, as against the waywardness and weakness in Peter, and it is some indication of the depth and penetration of John's understanding that he should paint so telling and comprehensive a picture as he does. If we look on to 28, we see what terrifying hypocrisy was included in this malignity: 'lest they should be defiled' - to think that ritual defilement through association and contact with the Gentile judgment hall could even begin to compare with the moral defilement of what they were intent on doing to Jesus: What terrible 'bentness' this reveals in them!

We note once again that although asked in 19 about His disciples, Jesus said nothing about them. He had already indicated (8) that He was standing in for them, taking their place. They therefore had no part in this matter.

220) 18:28-40

We come now to Jesus' appearance before Pilate. We have seen in our studies of the other gospels that there were two sides to our Lord's trial, there was the religious, or ecclesiastical charge of blasphemy, and there was the civil or political charge of treason. The Jews were very cunning in their manipulation of these charges. They wanted Jesus put to death because He had claimed to be God - this they regarded as blasphemy. But blasphemy was not an indictable offence in Roman law, and Pilate would not be interested in punishing or putting anyone to death for being a blasphemer. So when the Pharisees and chief priests went to Pilate, it was a charge not of blasphemy but of treason that they preferred against Him. And treason being an indictable offence, Pilate was obliged to take notice of it. We noted, in our studies in Matthew, the parallel between this twofold charge and the charge that could be levelled against Adam in the Garden of Eden -the blasphemy of wanting to be 'as gods, knowing good and evil' (Gen 3 5) and the treason of rebelling against God's rightful rule. The significance of the trial is precisely that Jesus stands in for guilty man, to take to Himself this twofold charge, and meet the consequences of assuming it as His own. The very question Pilate asks Jesus (35), 'What hast Thou done,' is the question God asked of Adam and Eve in the Garden (Gen 3 13). Here is the second Adam taking the place and assuming the guilt of the first, as Redeemer and Sin bearer. Christ once suffered, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

221) 18:28-40

What Peter's denial illustrates is likewise illustrated by the case of Pilate, from a different viewpoint. In Peter it was the waywardness of sin, but here it is something uglier. Pilate was confronted with truth. He knew it. He knew what he ought to do - release Christ. But other considerations weighed heavily with him. Ambition, questionable diplomacy, and the like, made him convince himself that to agree to the Jews' request would be the political thing to do. Here, then, is an example of the deceitfulness of sin. The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the evil heart of unbelief, and it is seen in Pilate so very clearly. He asked, 'What is truth?'; he was blind to the reality of incarnate Truth standing before him, but it was a willing blindness. How we deceive ourselves in human experience! Well might Jeremiah say, 'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked'. There is nothing about which we are not capable of deceiving ourselves, if we are determined enough on a particular course of action.

When Pilate said to the Jews that they must judge Jesus according to their own law, they said it was not lawful for them to put any man to death (31). This raises an interesting issue. On the one hand, being under Roman jurisdiction what they said was true; but even if they had been able to, the penalty for blasphemy was death by stoning. And John adds, in effect in 32. 'This could not come about, because God had planned, and Christ had testified, that He would die by being lifted up from the earth' - yet another indication of how sovereignly the divine will was in control of all that was happening. But something else emerges in this matter. We read in Acts that Stephen was put to death by stoning, on a similar charge of blasphemy. This makes us wonder whether in fact the law was quite clear to them. It may be that they were intent - even though conscious that they could have put Jesus to death in the way Stephen was - on forcing the Roman authorities to take the responsibility for what they were doing. This could mean that they had some dim sense of the terrible thing they were doing, and wanted to load the responsibility on Pilate. If this be so, there is a grim irony at work in the story, for we are told elsewhere (in Matthew) that this is also what Pilate tried to do, when he washed his hands of the whole matter. Not thus easily, however, could either he or they absolve themselves of their dastardly and impious crime.

222) 18:28-40

It is noteworthy to see how throughout the record of the trial John's emphasis is so consistently on Jesus' claim to be a king: see 33, 36, 37, 39; also 19:3, 12, 14, 15. His point and purpose must surely be to show us that it is a king who is going to the cross. And this is the message: only one who is a divine King could ever be able to deal with the gigantic and terrifying problem of sin as we have seen it unfolded in this chapter. Only He could deal with such intractable issues.

The dialogue with Pilate is charged with drama. One wonders what made the governor ask the question he does in 33. Where did he hear the phrase, 'the king of the Jews?' Did he know about Jesus' Messianic claims, or had the high priests, in a brief interval, explained what they were charging Jesus with? Jesus' answer in 34 can be interpreted in two ways (i) simply as a challenge from Jesus to expose to Pilate that He knew the high priests had falsely accused Him to the governor - as if to say, 'You could hardly have thought that up for yourself, Pilate?'; or (ii) perhaps Jesus was saying, in effect, 'Are you really getting some true glimmer in your inmost heart as to Who I am? Have you discerned this yourself, Pilate?' - as if, even in that crisis-ridden situation, Jesus were seeking to draw him to faith. Our Lord's disavowal of any earthly pretensions as a rival to Caesar must have sounded strange and perplexing to this calculating Roman, and it seems clear that he was conscious of being out of his depth in the discussion. This seems to be the force of his puzzled question in 37a, and our Lord's answer in the rest of the verse is pregnant with challenge for him as if appealing to something that had awakened in his heart and conscience. That was the critical point for him; and almost before he realised it, it was past, and cynicism won the day in him (38). He turned from the agonising personal encounter to abstract speculation and, having done so, he conceded the battle for his soul to the dark powers that took the ascendant in him. We shall look at the reasons for this in tomorrow's Note.

223) 18:28-40

If Pilate had only said what he said in 39 in a different way, a great deal might have been accomplished even at that late point, humanly speaking. He was uneasy, of course; he knew that he had no cause for sentencing Christ to death, apart altogether from his own personal situation. He knew that Christ had done nothing worthy of death, and he wanted genuinely and sincerely to release Him. But he was temporising, and he wanted to please everybody. He did not want to antagonise the Jews; to get in the wrong with them might mean a bad report to Tiberius in Rome, and this could jeopardise his prospects career-wise. But he also did not want to penalise this, as he knew, innocent prisoner. So his mind, agile as an eel, thought of this solution. This is the Passover time, and I sometimes release a prisoner in amnesty. Let us just release Jesus, and that should satisfy everyone. Pass the sentence, say He is guilty, then we will release Him. Such was his reasoning. But when you retreat from the gates of the kingdom of God you have already mortgaged yourself to the evil one, and you are no longer under your own control, but his. And so what Pilate said in 39 was given a subtle twist from the evil one. What he had meant to say was, 'Will you therefore that I release unto you Jesus of Nazareth?' It is just possible that in so saying he might have carried the people with him. But instead, the perverse principle now gripping his heart made him say the one phrase calculated to inflame the Jews' ire - 'Shall I release -not Jesus of Nazareth, but the King of the Jews?' It was like waving a red rag before a bull. And they cried, 'Not this man, but Barabbas'.

224) 19:1-9

The reason why Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him was probably twofold - (i) he may have thought that scourging Jesus might satisfy the Jews, and that seeing this bleeding backed figure might put them in a frame of mind in which they would say, 'Let us call it a day, He has got His deserts, and that is enough'. Pilate was thus still temporising, trying to satisfy everyone and save his own face at the same time and quieten his own violated conscience; (ii) they had charged Him with treason; He was claiming to be a king, and now the governor had Him dressed up in robes of mockery and derision, took the bedraggled, bleeding Figure before the crowds and said, "Behold the man!" A King? Is this your king? - as if to convince the Jews that they must be mistaken in thinking that such a contemptible figure could ever have claimed to be a king, or be a serious rival to Caesar. But they were not to be thus easily put off. So far as they were concerned, the die was cast; they were determined to have Him put to death. We note that twice in these verses, and once earlier (18.38) Pilate testifies that he could find no fault in Jesus. One wonders whether John is setting this threefold testimony to our Lord's innocence over against Peter's threefold denial. It is perhaps significant, in view of Pilate's testimony, that the Jews switch once more in 7 to the charge of blasphemy, abandoning the other - treason - since it is clear that the governor is refusing such a charge. It is also highly significant that he is no longer contemptuous, as he was in 18:31, at the mention of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, but afraid (8). For now he had met and spoken with Jesus, and his whole soul had been challenged to the depths. And now (9) he is asking the profoundest of all questions, the question that John has been at pains to evoke throughout his entire gospel. So great was the impact Jesus had upon this unscrupulous Roman!

225) 19:10-15

Pilate's words to Jesus in 10 constitute from the human point of view a self-condemnation, for they indicate that he knew very well what he was doing: He had power to release Jesus. And our Lord's words in 11 do not contradict but rather underline this. It is true that the sovereignty of God was at work in these awesome events - this John has been at pains to emphasise over and over again throughout his record, and especially in the later chapters - and that Pilate was fulfilling the Divine will, but this must never be interpreted deterministically or fatalistically in such a way as to excuse him of responsibility: Indeed, the verses which follow make it very clear that - the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God notwithstanding - it was mixed motives and ulterior considerations that swayed the governor and dictated his final decision: He was confronted with truth, and he knew it; he knew what he ought to do. But other circumstances weighed heavily with him, and expediency rather than principle won the day. It was his refusal to stand out on principle against the scheming of the Jews, when standing out was going to cost a great deal, that was his downfall. In spite of the awakening glimmer in his conscience, the growing awareness of the innocence of the Son of God, the consciousness that here was a supernatural figure standing before him, and the pressing conviction that he ought to release Jesus, all these things were set at a discount when he heard the words 'If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend' (12). In such a situation it is always an 'either/or' with which men are confronted, never a 'both/and', as Pilate tried desperately to make it. And in that 'either/or' Pilate chose wrongly, tragically.

226) 19:16-30

We come in these verses to the climax of John's record of the gospel, the death of Christ. We have often pointed out that the real significance of that death lies in the interpretation put upon it by the New Testament writers, and that it is the interpretation that constitutes it a gospel. It is sometimes objected that it is Paul's epistles that give all the heavy theological interpretations of the death of Christ, smothering in doctrine what is essentially a simple and moving story as we have it in these verses. 'Look at the gospels', people say, 'there is no theology there, only the plain record of Jesus' death: Can we not be content with that, and leave the theology about sin and salvation on one side?' At first glance this seems to be a plausible viewpoint; but it does not bear close scrutiny and investigation. For John is not in fact presenting a simple story of the death of Jesus; he is presenting a theology, a message, a gospel, just as pointedly as Paul does. He has been consistently setting out a message throughout his record, a message - as we said earlier in our studies - concerning the difference Jesus makes, a message of newness of life through the death He was to die. And, as one commentator puts it, it is as if John, having sufficiently set forth the meaning and significance of the death and resurrection of Christ through the signs and wonders he has recorded, turns now to his readers saying, 'And now I will tell you what actually happened, and you will see that the facts themselves bear out my interpretation of them'. It is important for us to see that this is what John is doing. Every sign he has recorded for us, every significant statement in Jesus' teaching, has been an exposition of the gospel; the meaning of Christ's death for John is to be seen in all the references he has already made to it (cf 1:29, 2:19, 3:16, 6:51 10:11, 11:50, 12:32, 15:13, 17:19).

227) 19:16-30

What was said in yesterday's Note could not, of course, be said if the four gospel writers had simply been biographers. But they were not writing biography, but bearing witness, and there is a qualitative difference between the two things: And that difference is this: John is writing from the standpoint of the victory of Christ, and interpreting the entire story from Bethlehem to the Easter morning in the light of that victory. This is how we see John's meaning in his gospel, for he has been showing us the picture of human need and woe in the impotent, the blind, the fallen, the hardened and the broken-hearted - and between us, in our need, and despair and eternal loss, he sets the cross. That is the difference Jesus makes, by the death He died. This is why none of the gospel writers required to interpret the story of the cross - they had already interpreted it. With this conception in our minds, it is easy to see a hidden meaning in the title written on the cross by Pilate: "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews". It was written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, the representative languages of the ancient world. And what we are meant to gather from the inscription thus written is that the eyes of all the ancient world are directed toward the King, the world of which John speaks earlier (3:16) as one that God so loved that He gave His only begotten Son - the Hebrew world, representing religious culture, the Greek representing philosophy, the Roman representing commerce, power and rule (cf also 11:52 with its worldwide implication). King of the Jews, yes, for salvation is of the Jews but Saviour of the world; and the spiritual, moral and intellectual worlds of His day have their eyes focused upon this lonely Figure. This is John's point. The vastness of His conception is staggering.

228) 19:16-30

John makes repeated reference in this passage to the fulfilment of the Scriptures in connection with the death of Christ. The reference in 24 is to Ps 22:19, in 28 to Ps 69:22, in 36 to Exo 12:46, and Ps 34:20, and in 37 to Zech 12:10. We must not miss the significance of this. John is showing that the death of Jesus was not a mistake, or an unforeseen event, but something that had been foreseen and predicted in the Scriptures and pre-determined by God. This is just as surely to place a particular interpretation on Christ's death as Paul does. True, on the surface the story seems to be a simple, unadorned account of the death of Christ, but it is loaded with theological insight; it is as if John were saying, 'Ah yes, but this simple story has a hidden significance, it is Fulfilling Scripture, it has been foretold in the prophets and in the Psalms. It was God's plan that He should die. John is therefore proclaiming here what Paul also said, in 1 Cor 15, that "Christ died for our sins accord to the Scriptures'.

There is a chasteness about John's language, nevertheless, and indeed a reticence, which characterises the other gospel writers also, in this sense, that there is little description of the actual crucifixion of Jesus. It is almost as if they felt that this was too sacred a thing to recount in detail. This may be an indication to us that we also should not probe too deeply into the physical and gruesome details of the crucifixion scene; the gospel writers draw a veil, so to speak, over it.

229) 19:16-30

Three of the seven 'words' that Jesus spoke from the cross are recorded for us by John. The first of these is in 25ff, 'Woman, behold thy son' and 'Behold thy mother'. This may be simply interpreted as our Lord's loving concern, even in His suffering, for His mother and for His specially loved disciple. It is as if He had said, 'Look after John for Me' and 'Look after My mother for Me'. It is interesting - although perhaps idle - to speculate why Jesus should have committed Mary to John's care, rather than to His brothers. They, of course, at this point were not believers, as John was, and it was perhaps an indication that Mary was to find her comfort and her rest in a fellowship deeper than that afforded by purely natural ties. One recalls in this connection what He once said (Mark 3.34ff) about whom He regarded as brothers, sisters, and mother: He was in fact pointing out that not natural relationships of blood, but the spiritual relationships of discipleship mattered most.

The second 'word' from the cross is in 28 'I thirst'. John alone of the four gospel writers records this word. Is it an accident that it is he who also records so much of our Lord's words about living water, and of His gift of the water of life to those who trust in Him? Here is the fountain of life - and He says, 'I thirst'. Do we see John's point here? Jesus gives of Himself, until there is no more to give, draining Himself for our sakes. But perhaps there is more than this in the word. Thirst is the symbol of deprivation and loss, as the parable of Dives and Lazarus in Luke 16.24 makes clear. It is the burden of the world's sin that Jesus is bearing here, He is standing in for man the sinner, and He is saying, as it were, 'I am tormented in this flame'. 'In my place condemned He stood' - and said, 'I thirst'.

230) 19:16-30

The third 'word' from the cross recorded by John is in 30. 'It is finished'. How are we to understand these words, they could be, and doubtless have been, interpreted variously, but we must seek to understand them in the context of the gospel as John has presented it. We may recall our Lord's words in the great intercessory prayer in 17:4, 'I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do' - that was the spiritual principle stated, and here is the concrete outworking of that principle in the death of the cross. It cannot therefore be construed as a cry of distress or resignation, still less of failure; rather, it was a shout of triumph, and the Greek original probably bears this out far better than the English versions do, for it consists of only one word 'tetelestai', and rings out from the page of the Greek with a great note of victory. What then, was finished? The work of redemption was finished; the great task of bearing away the sin of the world was finished; the work of reconciliation and atonement was finished; sin was finished, and Satan was finished, as powers in the lives of men. The picture John gives is one of a great wrestling with sin and evil, and in this cry Jesus stands back, as it were, and says, 'It is done': Or, the picture of Jesus standing before a massive door, straining to open the lock: at last it springs open and He cries, 'It is done'.

He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in.

Full atonement accomplished in the blood of the cross -His was a finished work!

231) 19:16-30

The implications of what was said in yesterday's Note are considerable. For one thing, it is clear that to John the victory lay in the cross, not in the resurrection of Jesus. The event of the first Easter morning was simply the evidence of the victory that had been won in the death He died. The victory was won in His dying. In this connection, we should note how John describes that dying: 'He bowed His head and gave up the ghost' (30). The commentators point out that all four gospel writers describe our Lord's dying by the use of active verbs rather than passive. It was something He did, rather than something He suffered. The following comment from a modern commentary is thought-provoking. 'Even at the moment of dying John uses active verbs: There is no 'passion' in John; even death is an act for Jesus....But it appears that John's account can be both nearer to the actual facts of death by crucifixion as well as more noticeably indicative of Jesus' initiative: It appears that in crucifixion the condemned person found that as his body tired he was increasingly unable to keep his chest in a position in which breathing was easy and effective. The tendency was to be increasingly unable to press upwards from the feet, so as to keep the chest in a position where, by holding the head upright, breathing could be properly carried on: It was possibly for these reasons that the legs of criminals crucified were broken: once that were done the crucified could no longer press upward from his feet, and his body would sink down and make breathing impossible. What John's account seems to indicate is that Jesus did not succumb passively to death by crucifixion, but rather deliberately chose the moment of his death by bowing his head, thus restricting his breathing, and causing life to become extinct. So even in his physical death he was an agent, as he certainly is set forth as the agent of his death in a wider sense and frame of reference. Again, if this be a feasible comment, the reader has benefit 'from John's uncanny eye for the symbolic incident to light up an historical occasion with its proper meaning' (Marsh).

232) 19:31-37

The reference to blood and water in 34 brings us to a knotty problem. Some have regarded the reference as a legendary accretion. But it seems very odd that it should have been mentioned at all: unless in fact it happened. One commentator writes, 'The most recent medical discussion known to the present author is to be found in a paper, "How our Lord died" read to the third International Congress of Catholic doctors at Lisbon in June 1947 by John Lyle Cameron, M.D. F.R.C.S. After pointing out that the unexpectedly early death of Jesus is a clear indication that a fatal complication had suddenly developed, he asserts that "the insatiable thirst and the post mortem treatment of the body described in John 19:34 substantiate the conclusion that this complication could only have been acute dilation of the stomach." He then adds, "the soldier was a Roman he would be well-trained and proficient, and would know his duty. He would know which part of the body to pierce in order that he might obtain a speedily fatal result or ensure that the victim was undeniably dead. He would thrust through the left side of the chest a little below the centre. The broad, clean cutting two-edged spearhead would enter the left side of the upper abdomen, would open the greatly distended stomach would pierce the diaphragm, would cut open, the heart and great blood vessels, arteries and veins now fully distended with blood....and would lacerate the lung....Blood from the greatly engorged veins, pulmonary vessel and dilated right side of the heart, together with water from the acutely dilated stomach, would flow forth in abundance. The whole event as described by St John must, indeed, have happened, for no writer could have presented in such coherent detail so recognisable an event, unless he or someone had actually witnessed its occurrence."

233) 19:31-37

We may be sure, however, that John saw something more than a medical phenomenon in the blood and water that flowed from Jesus' side. He immediately recognised the symbolic significance of the blood and the water, for of course they are two of the principal themes he has been at pains to elaborate in his gospel record. The shed blood signifies that salvation has been accomplished and procured (cf Heb 9 22, 'Without the shedding of blood there is no remission'); and the water is symbolic of the newness of life that comes to men as the gift of Christ through His death. One thinks in this connection of the wonderful words in 7:38,39, which speak of life-giving water given in connection with the glorification of Jesus. Here, then, is the fountain head of that living water, the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness (Zeh 13:1). Redeeming blood, life-giving water - in the language of theology, as one scholar puts it, both justification and sanctification are direct results of the crucifixion of Jesus. John indeed quotes Zechariah in 37 (perhaps the thought of the 'fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness' prompted, or was prompted by this other reference (Zech 12:10) and brought John's inspiration into focus and perspective). It is true that the Jews, who looked upon the crucified Jesus, did not look in the way that the prophet means in his words; but presently, when Pentecost was come and the Spirit wrought mightily in their hearts, the spirit of grace and supplication came upon them in fullness as they turned in penitence and faith to the Lamb of God.

We see, then, in this so-called simple and unadorned account that John gives here a hidden symbolism at every turn: theology, and the proclamation of a gospel in every verse.

234) 19:38-42

The last verses of the chapter recount the burial of Jesus. We should bear in mind that when Paul expounds the basic message of the gospel he also lays emphasis on the burial of Jesus (1 Cor 15 4). The burial comes into the gospel, as if to underline the fact that Jesus really died, and that when He was raised, it was not a resuscitation but a resurrection that took place. There is a strange sort of paradox in 38, Joseph was a secret disciple, for fear of the Jews. Yet one would have thought that this was the most dangerous action of all for him to have taken at such a critical juncture. To declare himself openly as a disciple then, of all times, was surely perilous in the extreme. Yet the death of Christ drew him right out into the open, for weal or woe. This is yet another evidence of the truth of Jesus words in 12:32, 'if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me'. We see the same power at work in the case of Nicodemus (39). He who came to Jesus by night, now comes in broad daylight, declaring his interest, and showing the abandonment of his heart to the crucified Saviour in the lavishness of the provision he makes for the burial. So great is the power of the cross to change men's hearts and draw them to open and unhesitating commitment to the Son of God!

235) 19:38-42

The commentators underline that the garden tomb was a very lavish burial place and, although John does not say so, he might well have added, 'That the Scripture might be fulfilled, He made his grave:...with the rich in his death' (Isa 53 9). One writer makes the suggestion that the garden tomb has symbolic significance for John, in that the fall of the first Adam took place in a garden, and that it was in a garden that the second Adam redeemed mankind from the consequences of Adam's transgression. It was from this garden, on the third day, that the Son of God emerged as the forerunner of the new humanity in the new garden paradise of God. Finally, in 42, John's reference to the Jews' preparation seems to indicate that Jesus was crucified at the time when the Passover lambs in Jerusalem were being slain for the festival. Paul takes this up when he says in 1 Cor 5 7, 'Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us', initiating thus the new covenant, sealing and ratifying it in His blood. This is surely what would be in John's mind, as he doubtless recalled our Lord's words in the Upper Room. Some think that the language of 42 suggests that the arrangements for Jesus' burial were only temporary, and that the mission of the women on Easter morning is thus understandable. But it may simply be an indication of the providential guidance of the Spirit that the tomb was nearby Calvary, so that Jesus could be laid to rest before the end of the day, which would not have been possible if the tomb had been at some distance from the scene of His death.

236) 20:1-18

The account of the resurrection of Jesus is of course the climax of John's record of the gospel. There is so much significance in it that it is difficult to know what particular aspect with which to begin. We shall seek to interpret and expound it in the context of John's presentation of the message of the gospel. It would be possible to take the chapter verse by verse, as a story taken out of its context, but we would lose by so doing, for John has been building up a coherent picture, and its structure and framework hold together in such a way that we are obliged to think of the resurrection in relation to all that has gone before it. In one of our earliest Notes at the beginning of this study we suggested that John's point in recording the various signs is to display and underline the difference Jesus makes to life. This, in fact, has been the key to John's thesis, and all the miracles he records exemplify this idea. Now, in the message of the cross and the resurrection, John traces this spiritual dynamic -the difference Jesus makes - to its source, as if to say: 'This is why Jesus makes such a difference to life: the power which makes the difference resides in the death He died and the victory He accomplished.' The cross and the resurrection belong together; the one is really meaningless without the other; indeed, we could go so far as to say this: the power of the cross is the power of the resurrection, and these are not two different entities. Here, then, is where we see the climax of the drama John has presented to us, and the full significance of the gospel. The power that makes such a difference to human life is a power that has broken through death and destroyed all death's power in human life, breaking the tyranny which since the Fall has coloured and oppressed the whole life of man,

237) 20:1-18

To say that Jesus has destroyed death is a tremendous thing to say, for death is the comprehensive term which sums up all human woe - the waywardness of human nature, its failures, frustrations, tragedies and sorrows; all these are the shadow cast by death upon human life, and when Jesus destroyed death He destroyed the basic reality which causes all these things. He has lifted the curse from mankind - this is what the resurrection means. This is why we can speak of the message of the gospel in terms of the difference Jesus makes to life, and it is little wonder that in the history of the Acts of the Apostles, when they preached Jesus and the resurrection, worlds were turned upside down; a risen, ever-living Christ came into their lives, transforming them, making them new. It is in this light and against this kind of background that we need to understand what John has recorded for us in the last two chapters of his gospel.

We look, then, first of all, at the difference the resurrection meant for Mary Magdalene. Mary is one of the secondary figures in the gospel story, never really in the foreground until now. Her story is a fascinating one. Not much is recorded of her, but what we do have gives an adequate picture. Contrary to general assumption, she was not an immoral woman. There is nothing in the record to substantiate this idea. What is said of her is that Jesus cast seven devils out of her. We can read the story of the man called Legion (Mark 5) to understand what this meant. She was a woman of substance, and one of those who subsidised the itinerant ministry of Jesus, and ministered to him on his journeys. She was probably what we would call today of a 'county' family.

238) 20:1-18

Somehow, tragically, Mary had become devil-possessed. If the story of Legion is any guide, we can well imagine the lonely torment of her soul, the restless agonies she passed through as forces within her that she could neither control nor understand pulled her almost to pieces. And Christ healed her into rest and peace. Just as He had stilled the storm on Galilee, He had stilled her storm. And from that point she had companied with Him in adoring devotion, conscious that nearness to Him was her only safeguard for continued wholeness. And now, her Lord had been crucified, and it was a lonely, tragic figure that could be seen wending its disconsolate way to the garden tomb on the first day of the week, with two emotions gripping her heart, one her grief, the other great and terrible fears. The calm of His presence was now no more. What if the old malady were to return, to lead her again into torment. We can imagine the tears that had convulsed her whole being during these dark and desolate hours as she realised that her one hope, her one guarantee, of deliverance from the fearful tyranny was now gone. Utter loneliness, despair and fear. And then the wonderful experience on the morning of the third day. 'Weeping endureth for a night, but joy cometh in the morning'. He came to her, and with one word, He spoke her into rest and peace. 'Mary', He said, that was all. It was sufficient. The Lord was risen from the dead!

239) 20:1-18

To continue with Mary's experience further, we must seek to understand Jesus' subsequent words to her in 17, 'Touch me not...'. The scholars tell us that the Greek gives the suggestion of stopping something she had begun to do. It would seem that Mary had fallen down before Him in adoring worship and begun to clutch at His feet, and that Jesus was saying, 'Cease from touching me'. The significance of this - not to deal with the question of the Ascension at the moment - is that Jesus is thereby indicating that a new kind of relationship was henceforth to come into being. It is as if He had said, 'No, Mary, it is not quite like it was before; it is not physical contact now, that is not going to be the important thing, there is something more wonderful for you'. This is important in relation to what was said in yesterday's Note. She had reckoned that deliverance for her was associated precisely with this kind of physical relationship, with a Jesus she could see, whose feet she could touch. And Jesus was gently indicating to her that from henceforth it was to be a relationship in which His risen presence, though unseen, was to do for her more than His former fleshly presence could ever do - a relationship of which He says, 'will never leave you nor forsake you'. When we read this into our risen Lord's first recorded words in 15, 'Why weepest thou?', we see something of their real force and import. For this is the real message of the resurrection: weeping days are over, and joy has come with the morning. This is the Divine answer to all human woe. Jesus is risen. This is the difference Jesus makes. Sorrow is turned into joy.

240) 20:1-18

We turn now to a consideration of the other two disciples mentioned in this passage, Peter and John. What happened to them at the tomb is full of significance and importance. The question John is dealing with in recording their reaction is: How does the message of the resurrection come home to our hearts, and how does 'the difference Jesus makes' happen to us? The simple answer to this question, according to John, is that there must be a personal apprehension of the significance of the gospel. And we are given a glimpse of what this means in this passage. It will be noticed that the word 'see' occurs frequently (cf 1, 5, 6, 8, 12, 14). The important point to realise is that the Greek word is not the same in each case. There are in fact three different Greek words used, and each has a different shade of meaning. When Mary came and saw the stone taken away (1), the word used describes simply the physical act of seeing. She noticed the fact. And this is the word that is also used in 5, of John. But when Peter saw the linen clothes lying (6), a different word is used, and it is one which suggests that Peter's attention was arrested by what he saw. The sight to him was unusual, and it made him look again. One can almost see a puzzled look in the word. This word is also used in 12, when Mary saw the two angels; it registered with her as something unusual. The same word is used in 14. But there is a third word, and it is used in 8: John saw and believed. Here the Greek word is one that involves an experience. It means perception, knowledge, understanding; it is the word that denotes spiritual illumination. In this 'seeing', everything became clear to John, and he believed. His eyes were opened, he was illumined by the Spirit of God. This is the point at which blessing comes to us, and salvation is sealed to our hearts.

241) 20:1-18

To grasp the significance of the facts - this is the real issue, and this is why doctrine and theology are so important in John's gospel. It is the interpretation of the facts that constitutes them a gospel. It is for this reason that it has been so important to go into the doctrine and theology John has been presenting to us in his record. As he says in 20:31, 'These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name'. It is an understanding of the things written about Christ that leads to faith and salvation. This is the importance of seeing aright. We may recall how Paul speaks in 2 Cor 4:3, 4: 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not.....' Until the scales are taken off the eyes of men, until their inward eyes have been opened, they cannot see the gospel, they cannot understand, they cannot be saved. This emphasis is not peculiar to John, for it is present in the other gospels also. John does not record Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, but the others do, and it is in this incident that we see the same emphasis made. Everything depended on the disciples' reaction to Jesus' question, 'Whom do ye say that I am?' He had wrought His mighty works, and now He was asking them, 'What do you see in all this? Have you seen what you were supposed to have seen, have you 'got the message?' And Peter's magnificent burst of faith, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God' was met with the rejoinder, 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee....' - i.e. 'You have not seen this with the eyes of the flesh; your inward eyes have been opened to understand'. This is the point John makes here.

242) 20:1-18

An interesting point emerges here, in comparing the respective experiences of Mary and John. Mary met the risen Jesus and found joy and peace; John came to faith not by seeing the risen Lord, but by discerning the significance of what had happened. Are there, then, two different ways of coming to faith? No; it is not a matter of seeing the risen Jesus with the eyes of the flesh - in point of fact, when Mary saw Him she thought He was the gardener. It was only when He spoke her name and willed her to see, that she saw Who He was. In other words, her recognition was an inward illumination. It was not the literal, physical seeing of the risen One that brought rest and peace to her heart, but a spiritual perception, just as much as John's was. In that sense, she had the same kind of experience as John did. Later in the chapter (24-27), this lesson is further reinforced, in the experience of Thomas. He averred that unless he saw the nail prints in Jesus' hands and feet, he would not believe. But in the event, all that he needed was for Jesus to speak to him. This called forth from him the wonderful confession recorded in 28, 'My Lord and my God'. And John is at pains to make it clear that the physical sight and touch of Jesus' hands and feet were not necessary. It is not thus that faith is produced. There is a lesson here for us. There are those who are convinced that if only they can have special, even supernatural experiences, this would deliver them from all manner of doubt. But this is never so. It is the illumination of the inward eye that brings faith and develops it.

243) 20:1-18

We look now at one or two points of detail in the passage. In 1 we are told that Mary saw the stone taken away from the sepulchre (note the 'we' in 1 - she was not alone, but had at least one companion with her). Matthew tells us explicitly that it was an angel that rolled the stone away. But the stone was not rolled away to let Jesus out of the tomb, but rather to show the world that He was already risen. It is God the Son Who was raised from the dead, and it would not exercise Him to pass out of the tomb without having the stone removed, any more than it exercised Him to appear in the midst of the disciples, the doors being shut and locked, for fear of the Jews. This is also the significance of the grave clothes lying folded in the empty tomb, with the head napkin lying separately. They were not taken off Him by human or angelic hands. He passed through them miraculously, leaving them unruffled, untouched. This is the point that is being made. And it is meant to convey something quite specific to us: on the one hand, the gospel writers are at pains to assert to us that it was their beloved Master that was come back from the dead, in bodily resurrection. On the other hand, however, they are equally definite in their insistence that their Jesus was now different, imperceptibly, incontrovertibly different. For He no longer appeared to be conditioned by the laws of nature in the way He had been before His crucifixion. It was undoubtedly their beloved Jesus, but He was different. It is this that, as we have already seen, is suggested in His words to Mary, 'Touch me not....' - 'It is not going to be quite the same as before, Mary; a new kind of relationship, more wonderful by far, is about to begin.' And Mary herself appears to have borne witness to this in the way she addressed Jesus: 'Rabboni, Master.' The scholars tell us this word is used in the context of Hebrew worship, and used almost exclusively in address to God. For Mary therefore to have called Jesus 'Rabboni' means that she was confessing Him as God. In other words she - along with Thomas and John - recognised that all He had been claiming in His teaching was the simple truth. He was God, and they saw, and believed, and worshipped.

244) 20:19-31

Two further appearances of the risen Lord are recorded for us in these verses, full of instruction and significance in a variety of ways. In the first place, in 19-23 John gives a clear indication about the significance of the Lord's Day. He particularly emphasises that it was on the first day of the week that this happened to the disciples (the appearance to Thomas was on the following Lord's Day, 26). It is evident that he is underlining the importance of this day as one of particular blessing, joy and peace. It is true that every day is a day in which Christ blesses His people, but Sunday, which commemorates His resurrection, is meant to be a special day, a day set apart, in which He comes to us with messages of grace. This incident is therefore a parable of the Sabbath rest of God. We are told in Genesis 3 how that Sabbath rest was broken and shattered by sin, and since that time until this, there had been, in a manner of speaking, no rest for either God or man. But now the work of Christ was complete, love's redeeming work was done, to use Wesley's words, and the curse that had so rudely interrupted the rest of creation was now removed and peace restored. This is not fanciful interpretation; we have seen throughout John's record that he has hidden meanings of this nature in his writing, and it undoubtedly is this that the Lord's Day is meant to signify, celebrate, re-enact and convey to our hearts. This is what Sunday should mean to us: Jesus coming and standing in the midst, Jesus bestowing peace, Jesus showing His hands and side, Jesus bringing gladness to His disciples' hearts; Jesus coming to fear-stricken hearts (19), to burdened and bewildered souls, transforming the situation in an instant, and giving peace. Is this what our Sundays are like?

245) 20-19-31

There is almost a whole theology in 20. Not only do John's words constitute a clear evidence that our Lord's resurrection was a bodily one, not merely spiritual, but it also points us to the ground and fountainhead of peace. It is the risen Saviour that gives peace; but it is the death that the risen Saviour died that wins and provides it. This is the distinguishing mark of all true worship - the risen Christ in the midst of His people, reminding men of the death He died for their salvation. 'Behold My hands', He cries, this is where the fountain is opened for sin and for uncleanness. The blood that flowed from these pierced hands flowed right to the throne of God and touched the holy heart of the Father on high, turning His anger away, so making peace. Sin no longer stands - as it once stood - between God and the world. It is removed and washed away. As Paul was later to say, 'We have peace through the blood of the cross'. We have often spoken of Christ stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee, in the days of His flesh, when the winds and the waves obeyed His voice. But it is the nail-pierced hands, and they alone, that can quell the storm sin has stirred. No other power can ever bring true and lasting peace to the souls of men. Little wonder that the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Is this what happens to us on our Sundays?

246) 20:19-31

The bestowal of peace (21) on the disciples is followed by their commissioning and enduement for service (22, 23). There are several lessons to be learned here. For one thing, in the link between the giving of peace and the sending forth of the disciples we may learn that one can go forth in the service of the Lord worthily only from a position of peace. We have, in fact, nothing to go forth with as a gospel until first of all we have experienced His peace. The good news has to be good news to us before we can communicate it to others. For another thing, we may learn that we cannot go forth in Christ's service without the enduement of the Holy Spirit. But there is something more important here still. John links together in a very remarkable way the cross, the resurrection, and the giving of the Spirit, and indicates that the gift of the Spirit is connected with Christ's atoning work. As Paul says in Ephes 4:8, 'When He ascended up on high He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men'. But how are we to interpret Jesus' words in 22, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost'? How does this tie up with the events of the day of Pentecost, and what relation does it bear to that later phenomenon? The traditional interpretation is that the words 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost' are proleptic, that is, they point forward in anticipation to Pentecost. This is the construction Calvin and the Reformers tended to put upon these words. As Calvin puts it, 'They received, as it were, a sprinkling of the Holy Ghost at this point, and He came in full flood in tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost.' One would not want to quarrel with this; it has the virtue at least of linking the words in an anticipatory manner with the events of Pentecost; it was a forerunner, a symbolic enactment or even a promissory note to be fulfilled on that awesome day. There is another interpretation, however, and to it we shall turn in tomorrow's Note.

247) 20:19-31

The other interpretation of these words (22) is that this is John's way of describing Pentecost itself. What we mean by that is this: John is giving his version of the complete 'movement' of the gospel, just as Luke and Matthew do in their respective accounts, in different ways. In Luke, we have the purely chronological statement of what happened - death, resurrection, promise of the Spirit, ascension, then Pentecost. In Matthew, we have a different pattern, and the commissioning of the disciples and the enduement of power (implied at least) come together. John is still more condensed, telescoping together the rising of Jesus, the bestowal of peace, the commissioning and the enduement of power into the first Easter Sunday. We should bear in mind what John has already said about the Holy Spirit in chapter 7, indicating that the Spirit would be given when Jesus was glorified. John must therefore imply here, in Jesus' words in 22, that Jesus has now been glorified (in His cross and resurrection). Historically, chronologically, Luke's version is the accurate one; but John is writing not chronologically, but theologically; he is giving the theology of the situation, and therefore he can bring together the death and resurrection, and the commissioning of the disciples and their enduement with power and indicate that all are inherent in the very meaning of Easter. John is not saying that everything happened on that first Easter Sunday, but he is saying that the significance of everything belongs to Easter, and that Pentecost is meaningless apart from Easter. This is the true theology of the Holy Spirit, that it is inseparably linked with the death and rising again of Jesus.

248) 20:19-31

A further thought may not be out of place. Paul, in speaking of this subject, says in 1 Cor 15:45, 'The first Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening (life-giving) spirit.' In Genesis 2:7 we are told that the Lord God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life that was the first creation. And here we have the new creation, with the same Creator God, in the Person of His risen Son, breathing His breath into the new man. This is John's point throughout his gospel, the difference Jesus makes. Here is how the difference comes about by the Holy Spirit.

John's bringing all these things together, although misleading so far as chronology is concerned, underlines the fact that for Christian experience there can be no question of time-lapse or waiting either between our experience of the death of Christ and His resurrection (historically a period of three days) or between our experience of the resurrection and Pentecost (historically a period of fifty days). Theologically, these experiences are simultaneous. One cannot know the power of Christ's death without in the same instant knowing the power of His resurrection. What is more, the power of His death and the power of His resurrection can be, theologically, nothing more and nothing other than the power of the Holy Ghost. There is not a multiplicity of spiritual powers, only One.

249) 20:19-31

What are we to say about 23? It is very salutary to read Calvin's commentary on this verse. He points out that there is no foundation whatever for supposing that Christ imparts the power to forgive sins to any man. Who can forgive sins but God alone? What is therefore referred to therefore is the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. Interestingly enough, this is what Luke seems to indicate also (24:46, 47). If it be thought that this is less than convincing as an interpretation, it may be asked. If the words mean that the power to forgive sins was in fact bestowed by the disciples here, how is it that it is nowhere recorded in the Acts of the Apostles as having been exercised in the early Church? What we do find, however, in Acts, is Peter and the other apostles using the keys of the kingdom, opening the kingdom of heaven to men by the proclamation of the word of forgiveness in the gospel. For the parallel emphasis of the retention of sins, see Acts 13:46, 47, 51, and 2 Cor 2:15, 16.

We should note finally, in this section of the passage (21), that Jesus said to the disciples, 'As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you'. How did the Father send Him? He sent Him to walk the way of the cross. Jesus sends us that way too, and it is as we are prepared to walk that way that the reception of the Holy Spirit becomes relevant. It is one of the most important lessons to learn, that we cannot without danger and loss separate the doctrine of the Holy Spirit from the death and resurrection of Christ. They belong together, and what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

250) 20:19-31

Much can be learned from the record of Thomas's doubting. The first thing that requires to be asked is, where was he, on that first Sunday? He was not in his place with the others: he should have been, and because he was not, he missed the blessing (this is one of the reasons why Hebrews 10:25 is important). Was he so despairing that he did not bother to come? It is true that sometimes the upsets of life lay such a hold on us that we feel we cannot come to Church; but Church is the very place for us, in such circumstances, for it is the place of blessing (cf Psalm 73:16,17). But there are other lessons here also, and one is our Lord's wonderful condescension to doubters. Thomas was clearly of a morbid temperament, and things often tended to take a darker hue for him than for others. It was probably this low spirit that had led to his absenting himself from the disciple band on the first occasion. This is certainly a spirit that can hinder and hurt the believer's life. But here is a word of great assurance: God is the God of doubters also, and He is willing to help and encourage us into light and peace out of our dark days. His loving-kindness can break through the midnight of the soul. Not only so, his dark doubt finally brought him to a wonderful confession of faith, 'My Lord and my God, ' perhaps the greatest confession in the New Testament (we should notice in passing that Jesus did not contradict him, but accepted this testimony to His deity). From all this we may learn that those with early doubts, and many dark struggles, often by these very struggles, come through to bedrock faith and devotion. The fiery trial of faith in the crucible of darkness and affliction is not wasted. It is something to be brought through to this place!

251) 20:30-31

The two final verses of the chapter are important as a summing-up by John of the purpose of his having written his gospel. It is significant to realise that with Thomas's confession of the deity of Christ in the previous verses, John has come full circle from the wonderfully profound statement in the Prologue (1:1-14). Deity incarnate was his opening thesis, and now Deity incarnate is confessed by man. This was the point of the exercise, John means to say, to bring men to this point of conviction; it was for this that the signs and wonders were set forth before the eyes of men. The reference in 30 may be to the pre-crucifixion days or to those following the resurrection, and there is little reason to suppose that John may not have meant both. At all events, there were many more that could have been recorded, with the same purpose. The words 'these are written' have enormous significance for they mean that the written testimony of the Scriptures is of crucial importance if living faith in Christ is to be brought about. We must therefore not be put off by high-sounding and plausible talk that would seek to drive a wedge between the Scriptures as the Word of God and the living Christ as the Word of God. The distinction is basically a false one, for the living Christ can be known only through the inspired Scriptures.

252) 21:1-14

Some think that, as John originally wrote his gospel, its original ending was at 20:31. It is true that the gospel might well have ended at that point; but another chapter follows, standing, it would seem, as a kind of epilogue to all that comes before it. And it was surely added by the Apostle for a particular purpose. In 20:31 we read, 'These are written that ye might believe' - that is to say, John wrote with a view to obtaining a verdict from those who would read. And now John adds this further chapter to show how the message and challenge of the gospel works out practically in personal life. It was never meant that anyone should simply say, on hearing the gospel message, 'That is very interesting', then pass on, unaffected, to something else. A verdict is required, and in this chapter we see how it worked out with Simon Peter. This is its significance, this is what it is all about: it comes home to the individual soul. We pointed out in our earlier studies that one of the themes John was concerned to underline was the difference Jesus makes to life. Here, then, is the difference He made to Peter's life. It is in this light that we now look at John's final word. It is in two main sections, one, the fishing expedition and what followed it on the shore of the sea of Galilee, the other, the dramatic and challenging encounter between the risen Lord and Simon, son of Jonas.

253) 21:1-14

The circumstances surrounding the incident recorded in these verses are full of significance, and we need to understand the background aright before we can fully appreciate what happened. For three years these men had companied with Jesus. He had called them from their boats and nets to become fishers of men. He had trained them in the intimacy of the disciple band, and they had received His incomparable teaching. They had witnessed His cross, and now they had experienced the wonder of His resurrection, and the appearances already recorded in the previous chapter. It would be fair comment to say that their world had been turned upside down for them. The last week or two had been revolutionary in the deepest possible sense; the whole period had undoubtedly been a time of tremendous crisis for them, and their minds and hearts must have been stirred and moved to the very depths as they thought on these things. We need to try to put ourselves into their situation to feel something of the drama and the tension that was gripping them: their beloved Master being taken from them and crucified; their despair and desolation with the bottom dropping out of their world - and then this incredible news that He was risen from the dead: They must have been like men in a dream. An upheaval of this sort cannot happen to people without tremendous emotional and psychological reaction taking place in them. Above all, this would be true of Peter, in view of what had happened in his denial of Jesus. More than any of them, he must have felt this. And now, obviously, momentous issues were facing them all, and perhaps even then some glimmering of what it was all going to mean for them in coming days was dawning on their souls. If so, they must have been trembling at the very thought. Such was the background; and it serves to explain what happened next, as we shall discuss in tomorrow's Note.

254) 21:1-14

Here, then, are the disciples at the sea of Tiberias, and alongside, tied up at the shore, the fishing boats which they used to work, with the fisherman putting out to sea, one by one, in the evening. And here is the drama of the situation: for in this picture two worlds are meeting, each of them claiming the allegiance of these men: on the one hand, this almost unbelievable new world that had laid hold upon them and devastated them with the absolutely unlooked-for drama of the situation, a world that must have felt almost like a make-believe world, in which they were living as in a crazy, fantastic dream; and on the other hand, alongside this, there was the world that they knew, the world of the familiar, that did not overpower them, a sane, secure world, a world of net; and boats and the tang of sea air. These two worlds were claiming their allegiance, and under the strain of the collision between the, Peter- impulsive as ever - feels that he can stand it no longer. We can almost see something snapping in him. He sees the boats going out one by one, and he blurts out, 'I am going out'. That was all that was needed; the others were with him in an instant. And the claim of that older world to which they had belonged overpowered them, and off they went in the boat, unable to resist. And they fell back into the old ways as if the past three years had been nothing but a dream, and there had been no cross and no empty tomb. Drama indeed, in such a situation, with inevitable repercussions, as we shall see in tomorrow's Note.

255) 21:1-14

The events discussed in our last two Notes form a familiar spiritual pattern. It is often the case that the message of the gospel kindles and warms men's hearts into a tremendous enthusiasm for the things of God. This is good, so far as it goes. But the great question is. How far does it go? Sometimes it does not go far enough; it did not go far enough with Peter; for it did not take much to send him back to the old ways again. The mere combination of a number of circumstances and pressures proved too much for him. And this teaches us that the enthusiasm that stirs hearts - good and necessary as it is - needs something more to make it a steady loyalty to Christ. The will must also be involved, and that will must be yielded unreservedly and for good and all to Him. This is the real message of the chapter and this the point to which the gospel brings us, a crisis-point at which we are either going to go back to the old ways and subside in the former pattern, or go on to the new creation altogether. This is the kind of confrontation that the gospel brings about; and the right choice must be made, says John. 'These things are written that ye might believe', he has indicated. Ah, but believing means certain things: it means resisting the impulse to go back to the old ways. And it goes ill with those who do not resist. Of course, their expedition proved a complete failure. They toiled all night and caught nothing. And one can hardly avoid the conclusion that John is implying that this was the Lord's doing. We see this from the fact that in the morning He gently showed them that He was Lord of the sea, and told them where to put down their nets. It was the Lord that blighted and blasted their endeavours, because He was resolved that they should not find any satisfaction in the old calling from which He had taken them to be with Him. His call to them had spoiled the old ways for them forever, and they were destined never to find fulfilment in it again.

256) 21:1-14

Christ had said to the disciples, 'I will make you fishers of men'. When a man is called to such a task, and tries to go back from it to the old ways, the story is always one of frustration, disappointment and failure. And Jesus is intent on showing them that nothing but this can ever come upon them if once they have seen a glimpse of the new life. There is a gentle irony at work in our Lord's dealing with them, particularly in 5, 'Children, have ye any meat?' And when these words are taken with the others in 12, 'Come and dine', we see an interesting and instructive pattern. So very often it is when we have toiled all night and caught nothing - and one can apply this in any number of different ways - that the Lord comes and reminds us that all fulness dwells in Him. 'Not that way, Peter, but this. Come and dine'. And the lesson is surely plain. Service or employment apart from Christ always means emptiness and failure. How often we have proved this to be so in our own experience. Yet how wonderful it is that, in the midst of such failure, the Lord should come with His invitation (12), as if to remind us that He is the source and fountainhead of all that is true and fulfilling in the Christian life. Would that we could learn, once and for all, the truth of the hymn writer's words,

From the best bliss that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to Thee again.

257) 21:15-17

This dramatic interview and encounter between our Lord and Peter issues not only from the earlier incident of the disciples' going off to fish (1-14) but also - we can hardly doubt - from his disastrous and shameful denial at the time of Jesus' trial. What we have here is in fact an inquest on Peter's failure, and his threefold denial is met with a threefold challenge. There are several significant circumstances associated with this incident that repay careful consideration. For one thing, when the disciples came in to land (9) they saw a fire of coals, with fish laid thereon, and bread, a fire prepared by Jesus. It is a significant fact that the only other occasion in which a fire of coals is mentioned in the gospel record is in 18:18 - the fire of coals in Pilate's judgment hall. It can hardly be accidental that Jesus made a fire of coals on the seashore for the disciples to warm themselves at. Jesus was deliberately reminding Peter of that earlier, fateful night. Jesus had already sent a special message to Peter after His resurrection, 'Go tell the disciples and Peter....' This had been a token to the despairing disciple to reassure him of His forgiveness; and that lifted his despair. But the problem of Peter's wayward heart had not been dealt with, and now the time of reckoning had come. One can almost see the colour draining from his face as he came ashore and saw the fire. Then again, this encounter took place on the shores of Galilee, at the very place, and in the very circumstances, attending Peter's first call to follow Jesus (cf Matt 4:19). It was as if the Lord were saying to him, 'Do you remember that day when I called you to follow Me, and you forsook your nets and followed? How much was it worth, Peter, how much did it mean, how much in earnest were you? This is what I want to know'.

258) 21:15-17

Furthermore, we should notice that in addressing him our Lord called him, not Peter, not Cephas, but Simon, son of Jonas, - not the Rock, but the old man. There was still a Simon there. How penetrating were our Lord's dealings with his erring disciple. Even in His tenderness and love He was faithful with him in the deepest sense. Furthermore, we see His gentle yet devastating irony in what He said: 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?' The phrase 'more than these' has been variously interpreted. In the famous hymn, 'Jesus calls us', it is referred to things that can distract and beguile the believer from Christ. 'Do you love Me more than you love your fishing and your nets?' But it is more likely to refer to Peter's repeated outbursts, full of self-confidence, avowing love and devotion and loyalty to Jesus above all the other disciples, and in particular to his avowal on the night of the trial (13:38, Matt 26:33), 'With Peter, there was always the blustering insistence that his love was greater than the others'. 'Though all men forsake Thee, yet will I not forsake Thee'. How little he knew his heart. And with gentle irony our Lord probes and exposes this innate self-deception. We should note also, before going further, that in reference to Peter's failure, our Lord was calling in question, not his faith, or doctrine, or beliefs, but his love for Him. This is where Peter failed.

259) 21:15-17

In the threefold question and answer pattern in this dramatic encounter a point of very considerable importance is obscured in the A. V. translation. It is that there are two different Greek words both translated 'love'. Twice, when Jesus asked His question, His word for 'love' was 'agape'; but in his answer, Peter used the word 'philia'. At the third question, Jesus dropped His original word and used Peter's. Some scholars maintain that there is no significance in the different words used. They point out, and rightly, that the word Peter used is sometimes used of love to God as well as human love. But the question still arises: Why, if there is no difference in the words, were different words used? This must surely indicate that there was a difference intended, and that difference is this: The word Jesus used is the word always used of divine love, whereas Peter's denotes a different kind of love - natural affection. And what is being shown us here is that there are two levels of love, and it was because Peter loved Jesus in the wrong way that he denied his Lord. Peter's word is one used of friendship and genuine, warm, spontaneous affection. And this sums up Peter's attitude to Christ; it followed his natural temperament. This was the kind of man he was. His heart went out wholeheartedly in true affection for Jesus. We may say, what is wrong with that? The answer is that there is nothing wrong with that, so far as it goes, except that it is not the kind of love Jesus was speaking about and asking of him. Just what Jesus was asking of him - and of us all - we shall discuss in tomorrow's Note.

260) 21:15-17

The word that Jesus uses for love - agape - implies more than natural affection, however deep and sincere, it implies the yielding of the will as well as the outgoing of the affection; and what He said could very fairly be paraphrased in some such words as these: 'Simon, son of Jonas, do you, in the full determination of your will, love Me? Do you yield your will unreservedly to Me?' Put like this, one sees only too clearly that Peter's rejoinder, 'Lord, you know how fond of you I am' fall so very short of what our Lord was demanding of him. It is as if Jesus had said to him, 'The love I want, Peter, is a love that will hand over the will to Me. Only this will be strong enough to keep you from falling'. All this serves to underline the distinction between the two words: Peter's love was the love that receives, selfish love; Christ spoke of a love that gives, self-denying love. Human relationships afford a good analogy here. There are certain people we like very much because their company gives us a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction; it stimulates, helps and encourages us. This of course is not wrong or unworthy, but a natural and integral part of friendship. And Peter's love for Jesus was like that: friendship, companionship with Jesus made him 'feel real good', as the American idiom has it. But it is wrong, in the spiritual life, when it fails to go on from there, from 'getting' to 'giving'.

261) 21:15-17

The love of which Jesus speaks is a love that makes demands, a love that has to give. And the great pattern here is John 3:16. Divine love is love that gives, love that leads to a cross. And to love Jesus in the way He wants us to means not merely that we should have tender and affectionate feelings towards Him, it is to love His cross, and be prepared to take it up. The real test of a man's love to Christ is not his avowals of faithfulness or protestations of devotion, but his conformity to Christ's death in his own personal experience, his dying to sin. Crucifixion, not testimony, is the criterion. This is what Peter had to learn; and this is where Peter had failed. And that is what we also have to learn, for that is where we so often fail, If we do not love Jesus enough to share His death, we do not love Him at all as He wants us to love Him. This alone is spiritual love, and it is something that God alone can give us by His Spirit. It is the love which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And just as no man can call Jesus Lord save by the Holy Spirit, so also no man can love Christ except that love be shed abroad in His heart by that Spirit. Peter's love up to this time was real, genuine, sincere and spontaneous, but it was of the flesh - not in the bad sense, but simply in the sense of the old nature, and Paul's words, 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit' are as applicable here as elsewhere. The natural man shrinks from the cross, and this was Peter's whole trouble, as it is so often with us. There is so often something of the natural man, of the old nature, ready to creep into our relationship with Christ. Spurgeon once said, 'There is a zeal - and, we may add, a love - which is rather the warmth of nature than the holy fire of grace'. The reason why Peter was so grieved was that he remembered the death he had refused to die. And is not this how Jesus deals with us in our failures?

262) 21:15-17

In the final repetition of the words 'Lovest thou Me?' Jesus used Peter's own word. Clearly he is boring very deeply into the disciple's soul, for now He is calling in question the strength even of this natural love. This has something important to teach us: when the deepest and truest love is at risk, all lesser loves are thereby called in question and weakened. We cannot love as we ought on the human level if spiritual love is at a discount in us.

Our Lord's response to Peter's answers calls for comment. First, it was 'Feed My lambs'; then, 'Tend (the word in the Greek is different) My Sheep'; and finally, 'Feed My sheep'. The commentators suggest there is a progression evident in these words. Those called to the Lord's service are to give spiritual food to the lambs of the flock. In a sense, this is the basic work, feeding those who have come to Him, the new-born babes in Christ (we note in passing the change of metaphor from fishers of men to under-shepherds). In the second response, the words are different. The term used for 'sheep' could well be rendered 'little sheep' - not that it means 'lambs', for it is a term of affection and endearment. 'Feed' here means 'tend', - giving help, direction, guidance, counsel. Thirdly, the feeding and nurture of those that are of mature spiritual age. And all this dependent on love to Him, for its worthy and proper fulfilment. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the three most important things in Christian discipleship and service may be said to be, love to Jesus, love to Jesus, love to Jesus.

263) 21:18-19

What does our Lord refer to in 18? The words have both a literal and also a metaphorical, spiritual significance. On the one hand, here is a simple statement about the physical freedom enjoyed by a young man; he is his own master, he can do what he likes. But when he becomes old, he is restricted, and no longer is able to do the things he did as a young man. But the underlying, spiritual meaning, on the other hand is that these words describe the sort of man Peter had been up to that time, self-willed and independent, his own master. And John makes very plain in 19 that Jesus is referring to the kind of death Peter was to die. In this connection, we should look back to 13:36-38, to words spoken of Peter's imminent denial. Jesus said that Peter could not follow Him then, but would thereafter. It seems that it is this that Jesus is referring to here, hence the words at the end of 19, 'Follow Me'. The words of Jesus were fulfilled in a twofold way: it is true in a literal sense that Peter was in fact crucified and became a martyr for the name of Jesus. But it is just as true that when Jesus said, 'Follow Me' He was calling Peter to walk the way of the cross - the thing that up to that point he had never done. This is the real fulfilment of the 'Lovest thou Me?' questions. Jesus is saying, in effect, that in contrast to what Peter had been, the cross would now henceforth become the principle of his life. It is significant that at the outset of our Lord's ministry, these were the words - 'Follow Me' - with which He had first called the disciples (1:43). Between that point and this, we have the whole exposition of what that command really means and involves; discipleship based on the cross. With what tremendous significance, therefore, is this second 'Follow Me' fulfilled.

264) 21:20-25

We look next at Peter's query concerning John, in 21. What are we to say of this? He had just been devastated by the threefold challenge that had ploughed into his soul, humbling and recommissioning him; and then, almost in the next moment, his eyes are off his own situation and its solemnity, and he indulges in a fleshly preoccupation with someone else's spiritual life. There is an attitude of glancing over one's shoulder at others' affairs that is reprehensible at any time; but that Peter should have indulged in it at this point almost passes comprehension. And it bears witness to something in Peter that was obviously proving difficult to crucify. It is hardly surprising that Jesus roundly rebuked him, bidding him mind his own business. This carnal desire to 'manage' John's life was an evidence of Peter's old self flaring up again, and it prompts the question whether in fact the interview of the earlier verses had really touched him at depth. We can hardly deny that it did, but this is an indication of just how much self there may be in the deepest of spiritual experiences. One sees a parallel here with the incident at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:13ff), when the wonderful confession of Christ as Messiah was followed by an attitude that Jesus described as Satanic. This should teach us how partial even the deepest experiences of grace are, and how much land there still remains to be possessed. This is further corroborated when we look at the post-Pentecostal period. It may be said that after the baptism of fire at Pentecost, Peter became a different man. Yet, even in the context of this great transformation in the Apostle, the partial nature of the experience of grace must still be recognised, as we may see from Gal 2:11ff, where we learn that Peter dissembled, for fear of the Jews and compromised his testimony. This does not mean that Peter was false, or his experience spurious; but it does bear witness to the fact that problems of personality and temperament have a habit of recurring even in the context of Pentecostal conditions. This should help us to keep such things in perspective.

265) 21:20-25

In 23, John appears to mean and this is the simplest way of interpretation - that Jesus simply meant the words in 22 as a hypothetical statement. He certainly did not say that John would still be alive at His coming. He merely underlined the fact that the disposal of each disciple's life was in His hands alone, and was not the business of the others. But the saying had obviously given rise to a legend, and it seems John recorded this to explode it. Trouble always starts when we put constructions on Jesus' words that they will not bear. 24 identifies the writer of the gospel with John the disciple; the 'we' in the next sentence is taken to refer to the elders at Ephesus where John wrote it, who were adding their testimony to the truth of what had been written. The final verse means: 'There is a great deal more that can be known about Jesus, but nothing more need be known'. What is given in the Scriptures is sufficient for our needs - the record is therefore complete. The implication of this statement is important, since it is surely applicable also to the canon of Scripture itself. Christ is God's last word to men, and there is nothing more for Him to say. This does not, of course, mean that new light cannot break from the Scriptures - we are always getting new light, thank God - but we must recognise that all new light that comes about Christ comes from the Scriptures. The Spirit can and does give new insights, but always in harmony with the teaching of the Scriptures; nothing that does not bear the test of the written Word can ever be admitted as authentic. God has given a complete and full revelation of Himself, and John's last words here categorically deny authenticity to anything other than has been written (cf Rev 22:18, 19).