

STUDIES IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

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1. THE TRUE LIGHT based on John 1:1-14

A young man went from paper to paper trying to get a job as a cartoonist, but he was rejected and told he had no talent. Finally, a pastor hired him to draw advertising for the church events. It was a poor paying job, and he had no place to stay, and so he was allowed to sleep in the old church manse. One morning as the sun rose he was awakened by the noise of scurrying mice, and this gave him an idea. He began to sketch one of those church mice, and that morning one of the most famous of fictional characters was born-Mickey Mouse. Walt Disney always looked back on that morning as the dawn of his career. Amazing and wondrous things happen in history, and in our physical world when the Sun, the light of our world, rises.

Everyday is a new adventure in life as we rise from the darkness of night, and walk into the light where God promises His mercies are new every morning. What a wondrous thing is light. The poet said,

**Out of the scabbard of the night
By God's hand drawn,
Flashes his shining sword of light,
And lo-the dawn.**

Every dawn is a wonder, but never has there been a more wondrous dawn than that on which the sun arose for the first time on this planet when it's creator was one of the inhabitants. Through Him all things were made and now He is a part of His own creation. The artist has entered his own painting. The author has become a character in his own drama. It is a wonder beyond all wonders for on that first Christmas dawn the light of our physical world was shining down on the light of our spiritual world. It was a dawn of a new day in a new way, for never before in history had the

sun ever risen on Him who is the origin of all light.

John was so dazzled by the light of Christ that he became the apostle of light and used the word light in his Gospel more than all the others put together. In this opening chapter of his Gospel he gives us some of the most amazing revelation about this light that came into the world on that first Christmas. The first thing we want to look at is-

I. THE WONDER OF HIS LIGHT.

John makes some statements here about Jesus that are as mysterious and beyond comprehension as physical light is to science. Light is the very essence of science, and everything that is wondrous about science revolves around light. Science and theology have this in common for all theology also revolves around light.

In verse 4 John says, the life of Jesus was the light of men, and then in verse 9 he says, the true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. Later in John, Jesus says, I am the light of the world. The more you know about the wonders of light, the more you know about the wonder of God's Christmas light-His only begotten Son.

Light and Jesus have so much in common. It is as if light is an expression of His image. For centuries scientists debated the nature of light just as theologians debated the nature of Christ. Was light a wave or a particle? It was so hard to decide because light was so creative it could be either. In 1905 Albert Einstein won the Nobel Prize for his paper on light. He proved that the whole controversy over light was nonsense, for light did not have to be one or the other. It could be, and it was, both. Light, he proved, has a dual nature.

So also, theologians have debated the issue-was Jesus God or man? Oceans of ink have been used on both sides. But the Bible makes it clear that this too is nonsense. Jesus, like light, has a dual nature. He is not God or man, but both God and man. The Word who was God became flesh and lived among us. Just as scientists had to face up to the reality that light has a dual nature which is contradictory, so theologians had to face up to the reality that the light of the world is both God and man. It may not be easy to grasp, but light does not have to be logical. It is the absolute of science and theology, and man has to bow to it's power to be dual in nature.

The very first thing that God called good was light. He began the process of creation of all order by saying, "let there be light." Then He said the light was good. Everything else that He made He made in the light and He made all life dependent upon light.

Christmas marks the beginning of a new creation. When Jesus was born God was saying for the second time, let there be light. Thus began the creation of a new order based on the light of His Son. The wonder of this Christmas Light is that it is as universal as the physical light of the sun. John says Jesus is the true light that gives light to every man. Christmas is the most universal of holidays, for even the most worldly people get involved, even if they do not know it's true meaning. Light shines on all men even if they are blind and cannot see it. Christmas is the most unique of all holidays because God gives His light to all men even if they are not aware of it. The wonder is that every human being on this planet has a right to receive God's gift of light, and thus, become a child of God.

Spurgeon said, "The most despotic monarch cannot enclose the light for himself. The meanest beggar takes a royal share. It cannot be monopolized, but pays its gladsome visits to all alike.

Even thus Scriptures reveal the freeness of divine grace and experience shows that it shines on the poorest and the simplest, and it enlightens the foolish and the ignorant." Take away light and you take away life for darkness cannot produce life or sustain it. Only light can give life. There is no power in the universe like the power of light. It is the source, not only of life, but of joy, pleasure and healing and all that makes life worthwhile. Jesus is all of this to the spiritual life of man. And the wonder of it is that it comes to us like the light of the sun, not like the thunder, but quietly.

**How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given.
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.**

Light is the greatest power in the universe yet it works so gently. A thread has more power to stop you than millions of rays of light. We can pass through them with no resistance at all, and feel no pressure as they flood our bodies with life-giving power. Jesus is the wondrous light that can silently enter our lives and give us victory over the power of darkness.

In one December issue of Discover, there is an article about physicist John Asmus and his wonderful flashblaster. He travels around the world with a light machine which can clean corroded works of art. It restores them to their original white marble. Chemicals of all kinds have been used, but they do damage to the marble. To art conservators around the world, Asmus is a sort of technical missionary saving works of art by means of light. He can focus an intense flash of light-millions of watts packed into a spot smaller than a dime-which heats a black crust of gypsum to as much as 3 thousand degrees. Then with a pop it is vaporized in a millionth of a second leaving the surface clean. Beautiful works of art in museums and churches all over Europe, which have turned

black by centuries of pollution, are being restored to their original white beauty by his flashblaster.

God gave the world a spiritual flashblaster on that first Christmas. Jesus is the only light that can cleanse God's highest and most noble work of art-man. Man has been corroded by sin and has lost the luster of his original purity. Nothing can restore him but the light of Christ. John says, "If we confess our sin He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The light of the world working in total silence can focus on our sins and vaporize them, and leave us clean in an instant. Thank God for this wondrous gift of light at Christmas.

Man will go on discovering wondrous ways to use light. The plan is for a garbage disposal system where a laser will simply vaporize all of our garbage. But on the spiritual level there can be no improvement for Jesus is our light, and He can vaporize our spiritual garbage right now.

John Asmus, who developed the flashbaster, also worked on 6 devices for Star Wars. Modern man knows that light is the key to the best weapons of the future. H. G Wells, long ago, wrote, The War Of The Worlds and told of the Martian invasion of earth with their mysterious swords of light. They could drop men in their tracks and make lead run like water, and flash any substance into a mass of flame. Modern science is making this fantasy a reality by means of laser beams. But the Christian has had this weapon of light all along in spiritual warfare. By means of the Sword Of The Spirit, Christians have penetrated the world of darkness everywhere with the power of light. This wondrous power sets the prisoner of darkness free and ushers then into the kingdom of light.

When the baby Jesus was brought to the temple in Jerusalem, Simeon took the child into his arms and praised God saying,

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." This little baby was already being declared the light of the world. He is the light that saves, that cleanses, that heals and that guides.

As the light of the world Jesus is also the hope of the world. Light is the hope that every form of evil can be defeated. In the physical realm light is man's hope for defeating the negatives of life. William J. Young, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, uses the laser to detect if a painting is authentic or a fake. For example, the laser revealed that a 16th century painting had zinc in the paint. This proved it was a fake because zinc was not used in paint until 1820. Light reveals the fake and that is why the Christian is to test all things by the light of Christ and His Word. Any idea or practice that cannot look good in the light of Christ is a fake. Paul makes a major issue of this to the Ephesians in 5:8-9, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth." These are the kinds of gifts God wants to give the world through Christians who are children of light.

When God gave His Son as the light of world, He began a whole new family called sons of the light. In I Thess. 5:5 he writes of Christians, "You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness." Peter put it this way in I Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praise of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."

The wonder of this wonderful light is that we are welcome to walk in it and like the angels, the shepherds, and wise men, become

witnesses of that light God gave at Christmas. That is the next point we want to look at-

II. THE WITNESS TO HIS LIGHT.

John the Baptist was not the light, says verse 8, but he came as a witness to the light. That can be said of all other persons involved in the Christmas story. The angels broke into time and space and when they did the glory of the Lord shone around them. This was a light in the darkness the shepherds would never forget, but they did not bow to the angels or set up a monument to them. They went to the manger, for the light of the angels was not the light God sent into the world. It was only a witness to the Light.

The star that led the wise men to Jesus had to be a spectacular light to get their attention, but they did not worship the star. Its light was to lead them to the light of the world, and so its purpose was to be a witness to that light. What we need to see is that this is the case with all lights. They are all to point us to Him who is the True Light, and the source of all of lights wonders.

As children of light, all Christians are to be witnesses to the True Light. This is the greatest challenge of the Christian life,, and there are more ways to fail than can be counted. We try the laid back approach of just being nice people, and we seldom see anybody come to the True Light. We are often like bald men trying to sell hair tonic. We do not impress people very intensely with the product we give witness to. On the other hand, there are Christians who blaze like a tumble weed for awhile and then burn out. Their witness is also negative for they are soon back in darkness. Others come on so strong they scare those in darkness.

Don Richardson in Peace Child, tells of he and his family moving into a hut among the Sawi people. As natives often do, they

surrounded his house and filled the porch and were peeking in the windows. Dan, thinking nothing of it, pumped up his kerosene pressure lamp and turned it on. Listen to his description of the effects-

"...forgetting that this was the first time I had used such a device among the Sawi. There was a mad scramble as the unexpected burst of light struck their eyes. No one took the time to find the stairs-they simply abandoned ship by leaping over the railings. Fortunately the level of our porch was only five feet above ground.

Outside, the drumming came to a sudden halt, and the chanting boiled over into a wail. There was an unmistakable sound of hundreds of feet stampeding into the night. Setting the lamp on a counter, I hurried outside to reassure the people.

Then I saw why they had fled. Our entire home was agleam with light like some gigantic, awesome jack-o-lantern. Through hundreds of cracks in sago-frond walls, through every door and window, the blinding light of the little five-hundred-candlepower silk mantle was stabbing into the darkness."

Slowly he was able to get them to return and not be afraid. As children of the light and witnesses to the true light, we need to be sensitive to the fact that people in darkness are not impressed by a dim light, and they are not attracted by a light so bright that it frightens them. Light that is attractive has to be of an intensity that is pleasant and revealing. It has to give people hope in their darkness that there is a way out: That there is a power available that can cleanse and heal and set people free from the bondage to darkness. That is what motivates people at Christmas. All the lights and beauty give people hope that life can be beautiful, and darkness can be overcome.

God's plan is that we, as children of light, bear witness to the Light that can save and heal and give life. Jesus is the Lord of Light but He is also the Lord of the lesser lights which He uses to point to the greater. We are those lesser lights. A Danish author tells the true story of a widow and her child who were going to be put out of their home because of a debt. Her husband had paid off most of the debt to a friend who loaned him the money. But a plague took both he and his friend, and the heir of the friend had no record of any payments, and he demanded the full value of the debt. Without any record of payments she had no proof and was forced to lose her home. The night before she was to leave, a fire fly came into her bedroom where she was earnestly praying for God to help her find a solution to her dilemma. She did not want this creature in her house, and she began to chase it. It went behind a big chest that stood against the wall. She could not reach it so she pulled the chest out a bit. Something wedged between the wall and the chest fell to the floor. She pulled it out, and to her great delight it was the book in which her husband had receipts for all his payments. God answered her prayers by the tiniest little light. This little light of mine, we sing-I'm going to let it shine. Why? Because God can use our little light to answer major prayers and lead people to the Light of the world.

In 1979, a crew of physicists and astronomers from Minnesota were up near Winnipeg with a large array of scientific equipment. They were there to study a complete solar eclipse. Peter Fribley was one of them and he gives this account-

It was the most eerie sight I have ever seen or likely ever will: fifteen degrees drop in temperature in minutes, sudden high winds, the long skip of night communications coming up midday, birds nesting as if it were night, and most

awesome of all, a 360-degree sunset. And then darkness.

And yet, all the while, light, the ring of refracted light from behind the blotting moon. Thus even during the time of so-called total eclipse, "the light shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

On the cross, the Light of the world went through His total eclipse, and for three hours there was darkness over the land. But as with the sun of our solar system, it was only a temporary eclipse, for darkness at it's worst cannot conquer light. The cross is not a very popular Christmas symbol, but it should be, for Jesus as the Light of the world is God's greatest gift to man. On the cross Jesus continued to shine when evil was doing it's worst. Love was stronger than hate and forgiveness was stronger than sin. In this Christmas season, let us thank God often for His gift of the True Light.

2. THE WORD BECAME FLESH Based on John 1:1-14

Everybody in the world has a birthday. It doesn't make any difference if they are rich or poor, black or white, or educated or uneducated. Everybody has one in every age. Methuselah had 969 of them before he died, and that was the world record until Jesus came. Jesus only had 33 birthdays before He died on the cross, but He conquered death and rose again after 3 days, and so He has never really missed a birthday since He was born in that manger of Bethlehem. He has had about 2000 of them, which is over twice as many as Methuselah, the oldest man who ever lived. That makes

Jesus the record holder for birthdays.

But the birthday of Jesus is not just the greatest because it is the oldest, but because there is no other birthday like it in history. His is the only birthday where we all receive a gift greater than anything we can give to Him whose birthday it is. At many birthday parties the guests receive prizes and get small gifts, but who ever heard of the guest getting more and greater gifts than the one whose birthday is being celebrated? Only at Christmas does this happen, and that is why it is such a joyous birthday.

Now what is it that we all receive from God on Christmas? John tells us that God gave us a Word. A word doesn't sound like much of a gift does it? If all I had to give was words it would be cheap and easy task to do my Christmas shopping. I wouldn't have to leave the house. I could just say great words like love, joy and peace to each one in my family and I would be done. A word would be a very disappointing gift. All of you would be sad this Christmas if all you got was a word. Why then is the Word that God gave us the greatest gift in the world? It is because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Word was the name of Jesus before He became a child in the manger. He was with God forever in the past, and He was just like God, for He was invisible. God had wonderful thoughts for man back then when Jesus was the Word. God thought, "I love man even though he is sinful. I love him and want to save him. I want to make it possible for his sin to be forgiven so he can enter my presence in peace, and have fellowship with me."

Now all of those great thoughts did not do man any good until God put His thoughts into action. Parents might think of how nice it would be to get Billy a new bike, but what Billy really wants is to see the new bike. Good thoughts are not enough for us, and so it is with God's good thoughts. So God sent His good thoughts into the world wrapped in swaddling clothes. His Word became flesh where

we could see, hear and feel His love. Gifts are words we can see and touch. In your mind you have a thought that you love your child. It is a good word you have in your mind, but then you take action so that your word becomes a gift that your child can see and touch, and then they can experience the reality of your thought.

God so loved the world, but He didn't just say so, for that would be the Word staying as a word. God so loved that He gave His Son, and that was the Word becoming flesh. God gave us a Person on Christmas, and there is no greater gift than that. God gave us himself and all His love in Jesus. If we receive Jesus, we have the best that God can give. We have His best thought, which was His Christmas thought. It was His thought that He loves us and will save us if we receive His Word.

3. PART ONE OF THE WEDDING OF CANA JOHN 2:1-11

INTRODUCTION:

CANA OF GALILEE

Nathanael, one of Jesus's first disciples is called in John 21:2 "Nathanael from Cana in Galilee." This was his home town and he no doubt knew many of the people.

This was a very small village about three hours journey from Nazareth. It is not named in the Old Testament nor in Josephus. Jesus did his first miracle in a very obscure place.

Jesus's mother was there. There is no reference to Joseph. Tradition says he died when Jesus was 16 years old. In verse 12 we read that the brothers of Jesus were there also. This bride and groom must have been close friends of the family of Jesus. This

means Jesus began the use of His miracle powers for friendship.

Why is John the only one of the Gospel writers to record this first miracle? It is because John was the only one of the writers who was there. It was a very secret miracle known only to a few. After the cross Mary lived with John, her sisters son, and they no doubt talked of this first miracle often.

MIRACLES

There are 35 miracles in the Gospels. Matthew tells of 20, Mark of 18, Luke of 20, and John of only 7.

This was the first miracle of Jesus. 30 years as the Son of God on earth and He did not use His supernatural power. Satan tempted Him to use it before this but He refused. He even starts here very cautiously and quietly.

A miracle is a manifestation of power that is greater than nature, indicating a Creator above the creation, and a Law Maker above the law.

People today have a low view of miracles because the word is used so loosely. You have miracles everywhere in the grocery store. You have miracle whip, miracle suds, miracle bandages, and a host of miracle gadgets. You can buy products that work miracles on your hair, complexion, grass, or the engine of your car. This word no longer stands for a direct and visible act of God that cannot be explained by science or reason. It now means anything that is amazing or wonderful that can be produced by the intelligence of man and explained by science.

Even Christians no longer use the word in the proper way. A group of youth were out in a boat off the coast of Miami when a storm came up and the engine stopped. The waves were so high they

began to sink the boat. It was miles out of the regular route of the coast guard but they came that way for the first time and they rescued the youth. It was called a miracle, but this really fits into another category. There are three ways that God works in history. The first is called PROVIDENCE. This is the general guidance that God gives which is fully in conformity with natural laws. The second is SPECIAL PROVIDENCE. This is when God works within law, but with such amazing timing that it is quite awesome. Life may be spared because of split second timing, or of circumstances that are out of the ordinary, but which is not impossible to have happen. The third is MIRACLE. This is when God goes beyond any law and just breaks into time and does what cannot be done or explained by any law or knowledge known to man. It is clearly supernatural. Some object and say God has to work through law, but this is to make law superior to God. He made the laws and He can go around them whenever He chooses. He seldom does, but just because a man has gone through his front door coming home from work every day for twenty years does not mean he cannot choose to go through the back door. God can at any time do what is not according to the laws of nature, for He is the Lord of nature and not its servant.

An example of these three ways God works would be-

You get in an accident and you are not hurt=Providence.

You get thrown out of your car and land in a haystack=Special Providence

You get smashed and broken and are nearly dead, but suddenly you rise up and walk away with no injury whatever=Miracle.

VERSE 1

WEDDING

As marriage was the first institution of God, so marriage became the scene of Christ's power revealed on earth. This first miracle

brought pleasure and joy to life and this was the purpose in all of the miracles of Jesus. He came to give life abundant and His miracles gave life from death and health from sickness and produced faith to overcome doubt.

By His presence here we see Jesus breaking down the wall between the sacred and the secular. Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do we are to do all to the glory of God. Jesus starts His life of miracles in a secular setting for God is to be glorified there as well as in the temple-where we see next that He was not.

Wedding: Jesus the Bridegroom of the Church begins his public ministry at a wedding. He ends history also at the wedding of the Lamb. The primary focus of the ministry of Jesus is joy. He came to give life abundant and eternal joy at God's right hand. Victory over all evil and sorrow is his ultimate goal. Valid pleasure is a vital part of the Kingdom of God. God wants His children to have pleasure just as we want that for our children. Gloom is not godliness and sourness is not saintliness.

Long wrote, "There is a time to laugh as well as a time to weep, and the Son of Man, who shared our tears on the way to the grave of Lazarus and the cross of Calvary, shared also our mirth at the feast of Cana. All the faculties of life are to be, not suspected, but redeemed from evil by the Christian; and one of the richest and happiest is the faculty of earth. Our duty is not to check its brightness, but to keep its innocence; and surely in the laughter that is like the laughter of the child, of the sunlight and the birds, God is well pleased."

In the first coming of Jesus He entered into fellowship with men to redeem all aspects of life. He made birth, marriage, and death all

more sacred and meaningful. In a small town like Cana a wedding like this could be the social event of the year, and Jesus was glad to play a major role in making it successful.

Jesus was opposed to asceticism. For Jesus self denial did not mean isolation, unsociableness, and refraining from the common pleasures of life. Jesus was going forth to bear the burden of the world's sin, and he did not want the seriousness of His task to make men feel He did not approve of the laughter and joy of life. He begins on a happy note to make this clear.

VERSE2

Jesus never turned down an invitation that we have any record of. He even accepted the invitation of a Pharisee. Rich or poor, well-known or obscure, Jesus never refused to eat with anyone. He even invited himself over to a rejects house-that of Zacchaeus.

VERSE3

Mary was apparently in charge of refreshments, and as sometimes happens the committee did not anticipate so large a crowd. They had not prepared enough. This happens to the best of people and committees. But why tell a guest that a host is caught in an embarrassing situation? Mary is now on the spot, and she knows her son has power beyond the ordinary. She has confidence that He can find a way to solve her problem. We can't assume that she expected Him to do a miracle. Calvin thought she wanted Jesus to speak and thus entertain the guests making them forget the lack of wine. This is not likely. Most see her as the person of faith behind the miracle. Faith is almost always connected with miracles, and it is her faith that gets Jesus to do His first one. With Joseph dead Jesus was the man of the house and she was use to coming to Jesus for His help. She may not have known He would do a miracle, but she knew He would do something.

Hospitality was very important and to run out of wine would be very embarrassing. Mary seeks to prevent this embarrassment before anyone is aware of the lack of wine. Prevention is wise. To help people avoid embarrassment is an act of love.

This story is told in the biography of Ralph Waldo Emerson. A young boy who faced the difficult problem of getting a stubborn calf into the barn enlisted the aid of Emerson. They tried to figure a way to persuade the calf to go into the barn. The boy tugged on rope fastened around the animal's neck. Emerson applied his shoulders to the rear and shoved, but with all the pushing and pulling nothing was accomplished, and the calf maintained his status quo. Then an Irish maidservant came out on a neighboring porch, and watching the spectacle, laughed loud and long. Sauntering over, she dipped a finger in a pail of milk, stuck the finger into the calf's mouth, and without effort, lead the now happy animal into the barn. Whereupon, we are told, Emerson walked into the house, wiping the perspiration off his face and thinking deeply. Then he sat down at his desk and wrote in his immortal journal: "I love people who can DO things." Mary brought her problem to Jesus because Jesus was able to do things.

Trench said, "He who made wine out of water might have made bread out of stones; but he will do nothing at the suggestion of Satan, though all at the suggestion of love."

WINE =Oinos. It was the ordinary wine of the day common at weddings. There was no way to refrigerate in that day and so no way to keep wine from fermenting. Many have tried to argue that this was not fermented but they have not convinced the majority who study the subject. It is not a stamp of approval on drinking

alcohol if Jesus made fermented wine. All forms of drunkenness are clearly forbidden in the Bible, and there are numerous warnings about the dangers of drinking. This was an occasion where wine was a part of the social joy and Jesus entered into that joy.

John Laidlaw wrote " It is an insult to the common sense of any plain reader of Scripture to ask him to believe that the wines of the Bible were not intoxicating when used to excess." But it is also plain to see Jesus did not okay excess by this act any more than He did by making wine possible in the first place as Creator.

William Barclay writes, "for a Jewish feast wine was essential. "Without wine," said the Rabbis, "there is no joy." It was not that people were drunken, but in the East wine was an essential. Drunkenness was in fact a great disgrace, and they actually drank their wine in a mixture composed of two parts of wine to three parts of water. At any time the failure of provisions would have been a problem, for hospitality in the East is a sacred duty, but for the provisions to fail at a wedding would be a terrible shame for the bride and the bridegroom. That indeed would have been a humiliation."

Charles Spurgeon said on this wine issue, "I do not think that I should do any good if I were to enter upon the discussion as to what sort of wine our Lord Jesus made on this occasion. It was wine, and I am quite sure it was very good wine, for He would produce nothing but the best. Was it wine such as men understand by that word now? It was wine, but there are very few people in this country who ever see, much less drink, any of that beverage. That which goes under the name wine is not true wine, but a fiery, brandied concoction of which I feel sure that Jesus would not have tasted a drop. The fire-waters and blazing spirits of modern wine manufacturers are very different articles from the juice of the grape, mildly exhilarating, which was the usual wine of more sober

centuries. As to the wine such as is commonly used in the East, a person must drink inordinately before he would become intoxicated with it. It would be possible, for there were cases in which men were intoxicated with wine, but, as a rule, intoxication was a rare vice in the Saviors times and in the preceding ages. Had our great Exemplar lived under our present circumstances, surrounded by a sea of deadly drink, which is running tens of thousands, I know how He would have acted. I am sure He would not have contributed by word or deed to the rivers of poisonous beverages in which bodies and souls are now being destroyed wholesale. The kind of wine which He made was such that, if there had been no stronger drink in the world, nobody would have thought it necessary to enter any protest against drinking it. It would have done nobody any hurt, be sure of that, or else Jesus our loving Savior would not have made it." " I abstain myself from alcoholic drink in every form, and I think others would be wise to do the same; but of this each one must be a guide unto himself."

J.C. Ryle said, "If our Lord Jesus Christ actually worked a miracle in order to supply wine at a marriage feast, it seems to me impossible, by any ingenuity, to prove that drinking wine is sinful." Most agree that the wine was normal wine which if taken to excess would be intoxicating. If the wedding took place between June and September when the grapes were ripening, it would be possible this was just fresh grape juice, but the fact that the taster says this is the best wine that is usually given first implies it was not just juice but fermented wine that could deaden the senses to the lesser fermented wine to be given later.

Those who accept this as fermented wine do not, however, see it as a stamp of approval on drinking. Jesus puts his stamp of approval on marriage but not on the drinking of alcohol which often is a destroyer of marriage.

VERSE 4

WOMAN The NIV has dear woman to sound less disrespectful, but all commentators recognize this was a positive way to address your mother or any woman. The Greeks addressed queens and women of distinction by this word. William Barclay writes of this word, "in Homer it is the title by which Odysseus addresses Penelope, his well-loved wife. It is a title by which Augustus, the Roman Empire, addressed Cleopatra, the famous Egyptian Queen. So far from being a rough and discourteous way of address, it was a title of respect. We have no way of speaking in English which is exactly renders it; but it is better to translate it lady which gives at least the courtesy in it."

Some get a kick out of the fact that woman in Greek is gune. I told a young man this and he used it to tease the girls. He was fortunate that I did not tell them that the Hebrew for man is ish. Ish and gune do not sound good to our ears, but they were fine sounding words to the Greeks and Hebrews.

William Barclay writes, "it means: "don't worry; you don't quite understand what is going on; leave things to me, and I will settle them in my own way."

TIME NOT YET COME:

Jesus is saying do not expect me to do a spectacular show here to please you and all at this party. My hour for public show of power is not yet. Jesus is only refusing to do a full public miracle like feeding the five thousand.

TIMING:

Timing was always important to Jesus. His very coming was in the fullness of time and His death and resurrection were planned according to precise timing. Jesus did a secret miracle here because it was not the right timing for a public display of His power. Mary

knew He was the Messiah and must have thought this would be the perfect occasion to make it public, but she was wrong. Only Jesus could know what was the right time.

Jesus did not want to get involved in this problem it seems, at least to the degree that Mary wanted him to. There are good reasons why people do not want to get involved in problems. It can be in conflict with goals that are greater and more significant. It can be an area of life where you are not qualified to do any good. Nobody can do everything. Even Jesus had limitations and could not do everything, and so many problems were all around him which he did not solve. We all have to face our limitations.

This was not a miracle of necessity but of luxury. It was to meet a felt need but not a desperate need. It was for the sake of pleasure and pleasantness, and not for survival. This makes it a very unusual miracle for Jesus. Most of His miracles were to meet very serious needs. Jesus was first tempted to use His miracle power to turn stones into bread to meet a personal necessity. But Jesus did not start his use of divine power by meeting a self need, but rather by meeting a luxury need of others. Spurgeon sees this as significant. He would not meet His own necessity for bread but would meet others need for luxury. This illustrates that divine power is primarily for service and not self gain. Most of Jesus miracles are to add joy to the lives of others. This first one is a key sign that He is the Joy Bringer. We see here that not all of life is a battle. There are times to enjoy the victories of battles won. Jesus starts His ministry on a positive note before He begins His battles with the leaders of Israel.

Let us keep in mind that not all godly people are like Jesus in every way. John the Baptist would never be here at a wedding. He was the funeral type of believer. His focus was on the judgement and not on

the joy of life. It was of God too and he was a great man of God. Not all believers need to be wedding type people. It is the ideal but the fact is some are just made for the more solemn realities of life like John was.

Jesus was not too busy to be at a wedding. He had a short public ministry yet he had time for family and friends and their times of joy. He was not a workaholic but could get away and enjoy a feast and time of fellowship. He teaches that the balanced life is the best life. Some Christians feel guilty if they are not always engaged in something serious. They need to see Jesus with only three and a half years to live taking time out to enjoy a feast.

Mine hour is not yet come This expression is used 6 times in John, and reveals just how important timing was to Jesus. There was a clear plan and Jesus was going to follow the plan and not blow the timing of his revelation. Turner says Jesus is saying, "The time of my self-revelation is in the future; leave this situation to my judgement."

There is an interpretation that is interesting. Mary could be saying there is no wine left, you just as well leave, and Jesus is saying it is not my time to leave yet. I am going to stay and do something about it. This is not likely but you can see it can seem to fit.

CONTINUED IN PART 2

4. PART 2 OF THE WEDDING OF CANA IN JOHN 2:1-11

VERSE5

Mary is satisfied Jesus will do what is best and so submits to Him

and tells the servants to do the same. She understands his need to time things right and is content to leave him in control of the decision. She is no control freak who has to have it her way. She can let go and let God. Barclay writes, "Even when Mary did not understand what Jesus was going to do, even when it seemed that He had refused her request, Mary still believed in Him so much that she turned to the serving folk and told them to do what ever Jesus told them to do. Mary had the faith, which could trust even when it did not understand. She did not know what Jesus was going to do, but she was quite sure that He would do the right thing."

Mary did not read into what Jesus said, a no, forget it, I won't help, but rather, give me time to figure it out. She said, fine, you guys do what He says when He comes up with a solution.

John E. Large writes, "Among all the words ever recorded the whole human history of the worlds literature, can you conceive of a wiser command or of a lovelier valedictory?"

Obedience is a key idea here. The miracle took place in an environment of complete obedience to the will of Jesus. Obedience is a key subject all through the Bible.

**We see here PERFECT OBEDIENCE-WHAT EVER
PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE-DO
PERSONAL OBEDIENCE-HE TELLS YOU**

**Whatsoever He bids you, do it,
Though you may not understand:
Yield to Him complete obedience,
Then you'll see His mighty hand;
"Fill the water pots with water,"
Fill them to the very brim;
He will honor all your trusting-
Leave the miracle to Him!**

**Oh, ye Christians, learn the lesson!
Are you struggling all the way?
Cease your trying, change to trusting;
Then you'll triumph every day!
"Whatsoever He bids you, do it,"
Fill the water pots to brim;
But remember, 'tis His battle-
Leave the miracle to Him!**

Thomas Allan

The forces of nature obeyed Jesus:

**At Cana first His power is shown
His might the blushing waters own
And, changing as He speaks the word,
Flow wine, obedient to their Lord.**

The servants would not see how filling these jars with water was relevant to the need. Everyone had already washed and that is why they were empty. Why do the irrelevant? All they had to do was obey Jesus and it would become clear that there was a purpose. Just do your best and let Him do the rest. Jesus could have done it without their help, but He always likes to have some human cooperation in all of His miracles. Jesus does not expect men to do miracles, but He does expect them to do what they can do, such as filling water pots.

When man's resources run out and come to an end the story is never over. Jesus can step in and supply what man cannot. The law could get man just so far, but only grace could get him into the abundant life. Water can only become wine by the grace of God: law can never do it.

VERSE6

Lloyd C. Douglas, author of the Robe, wrote an earlier book called Those Disturbing Miracles. In it he wrote, "Surely he is a very unfortunate reader of this epic who gets himself so distracted by all those stone water pots that he misses the real and only point at issue, which is the simple fact that Jesus bears a transforming power, that He turns water into wine, frowns into smiles, whispers of fear into anthems of hope, deserts into gardens, and sin-blistered souls into valorous saints by the catalyzing alchemy of a selfless love."

We read in Mark 7:3, "The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders." These six jars would hold anywhere from 120 to 180 gallons. This does not mean that Jesus made all of the water in these jars into wine. Some feel that as the smaller vessel was dipped into one of these jars it was changed to wine. Some feel it was only the vessel dipped into the well after the jars were filled that was turned to wine. The fact is nobody knows how much wine was created.

VERSE8

Draw out now=a debatable image. Did they draw out of the 6 waterpots or out of the well? If out of the well then it was only the wine in their small containers that was turned into wine. This would mean a very limited amount of wine. If out of the water pots it could mean Jesus changed all the water into wine in those six pots and this would be an enormous amount of wine. Most believe the wine was made just for that occasion to fill a need near the end of the celebration and that there was no need for an enormous amount.

VERSE9

The ruler of the feast=not the master of ceremonies but the man in charge of the arrangement of the room and the food and drink. He was the wine steward or the hear waiter. He was responsible for tasting the wine.

Jesus could have made wine out of nothing, but He chose to change the lower to the higher. He takes what is and lifts it to what it can be. He takes the lowly life and transforms it into a higher life.

The master of the banquet did not know there was a problem being solved. The guests did not know there was a problem. If everybody knew Jesus did a miracle to supply wine the bride and groom would still be embarrassed which would defeat the purpose of the miracle.

VERSE10

Drunk freely=Turner says the word here means to become intoxicated. They are now less alert to taste and so can take watered down wine and not notice is the point.

Barclay writes that he probably spoke in jest saying, "most people served the good wine first; and then, when the guests have drunk a good deal, and when their palates are dulled and when they are not in much of a condition to appreciate what they are drinking, they serve the inferior wine, but you have kept the best until now."

Barclay writes again, "Every story John tells us, not of something Jesus did once and never did again, but of something Jesus is forever and eternally doing.and what John wants us to see here is not that Jesus once on a day turned some waterpots of water into wine; he wants us to see that whenever Jesus comes into life, there comes a new quality which it like turning water into wine."

Quesnel writes, "God gave at first the old wine of the law, without strength, spirit or taste; and in the fullness of time He gave the new wine, of a strong and powerful taste, which enables us to fulfill the law, which inebriates the heart in a holy manner..."

**Dear Friend! whose presence in the house
Whose gracious word benign,
Could once, at Cana's wedding-feast
Change water into wine.**

**Come, visit us, and when dull work
Grows weary, line on line,
Revive our souls, and make us see
Life's water glow as wine.**

**Gay mirth shall deepen into joy,
Earth's hopes shall grow divine,
When Jesus visits us, to turn
Life's water into wine.**

Transforming the commonplace into the glorious is the work Jesus loves to do. He takes moral waste and turns it into moral wealth, says Clovis Chappell. Luther Burbank said every weed is a potential flower and he proved it by turning many weeds into flowers. He made the cactus bloom. It is a godly work to take the commonplace and glorify it. Jesus took the churches greatest menace-Saul, and turned him into the churches greatest missionary-Paul.

THE WORST FOR THE LAST:

There is a certain amount of social deception in all of life, and here is a case of economy and planning so as to use even the poor quality wine. If it is done at the right time nobody will notice. You hide the

poor to give the impression there is no poor. Any good host wants to make a good impression. The problem is this is the world's system. It offers a lot of fun at the beginning and does not tell you of the worst for last. In contrast Jesus may call you to take up the cross at the beginning but He offers the best for the last. John Bunyan in Pilgrims Progress has Christian go through great trial, but at last he comes to the land of eternal bliss and cries out, "O Jesus, Jesus, Jesus thou hast indeed kept the best wine until now." Satan has the worst at last, but the Savior has the best.

Quality is important to our Lord. He does not make the good, or the better only, but He makes the best.

**Such is thy banquet, dearest Lord;
O give us grace, to cast
Our lot with Thine, to trust Thy word,
And keep our best till last.**

John Keble

The Pulpit Commentary says, "It is a Christian act to increase the innocent pleasures of the world. Where the cup of gladness is not full, Jesus will fill it. The good of this miracle is made manifest as one considers what an effectual protest it is against those who would make religion the necessary enemy of deep-rooted social customs."

The Pulpit Commentary says, "God's grace is progressively revealed in the individual experience of Christians. The longer Jesus is known, the more are His benefits realized, and the more He is valued."

VERSE11

FIRST

F.W. Robertson writes, "This was the "beginning of miracles"

which Jesus did, and yet He was now 30 years of age. For 30 years He had done no miracle; and that is in itself almost worthy to be called a miracle. That He abstained for 30 years from the expression of His wonder-working power is as marvelous as that He possessed for 3 years the power to exert. He was content to live long in deep obscurity.....He could bide His time. He had the strength to wait." "In all the works of God there is a conspicuous absence of haste and hurry."

SIGN

It leads the spectator's eye off from the deed to the doer. The signs point to Jesus. We are not to get so into the sign that we forget the one to whom it points.

Barclay writes, "To John miracles were the signs of the love of God. In any miracle, then, there are three things. There is the wonder, which leaves men dazzled, astonished, aghast. There is the power, which is effective, which can deal with and mend a broken body, and unhinged mind, a bruised heart, a power, which can do things. There is the sign which tells of the love in the heart of God who does such things for men."

Manifested his glory=(doxa) It occurs twenty times in John's Gospel. The verb to glorify is used 22 times, more than any other Gospel. This sign was to glorify Jesus, and that means to make him honorable in our sight. Origen, the church father says the main significance of this miracle is in its symbolizing that to the Christian Jesus is the source of joy.

Barclay writes, " it was in sympathy, in kindness, in understanding for simple folk that Jesus acted. Nearly everyone can do the big thing on the big occasion; but it takes Jesus to do the big thing on a simple, homely occasion like this. There is a kind of natural human maliciousness which rather enjoys the misfortune of others, and which delights to make a good story of them over the teacups. But

Jesus, the Lord of all life, and the King of Glory, use His power to save a simple Galilaean lad and lass from shame and humiliation. It is just by such deeds of understanding, simple kindliness that we too can show that we are followers of Jesus Christ."

It is the glory of anything to be true to its nature. There is the glory of the Sun and the glory of the moon and the glory of the stars. Each is glorious as they are true to their nature. Jesus is glorified by being true to His nature. He is a caring, loving Savior who will do what He can in any situation to add to the joy of life. It is His nature to do so. We see in the next passage that it was also His nature to reject and resist injustice and do what he could to prevent it. He was glorified in anger as well as in this positive miracle. F. W. Robertson says it was also His glory to sanctify all things natural and all natural relationships.

**Glory Of The Common
Glory In His Concern
Glory In His Control**

The Pulpit Commentary says, "Does it seem to the reader of this simple narrative that this language is somewhat strained-is pitched rather to high? And obscure village, a homely festival, a peasant's party;-are these suggestive of, harmonious with, this great word "glory"? Ah! let us not be deceived by outward appearances; but rather remember that, as the world judges, there was no glory in Jesus anymore than in His surroundings, His associates."

Beginnings are important for they contain the seed of all that is to follow. You can see some of the future by looking at the beginning. The Gospel is good news and so from the very beginning Jesus does what is good and joy producing. Jesus has some terrible things to say about judgement and hell, but these things were said to those who rejected his good news. They were not his message but rather

the consequence of not receiving his message. They are valid truths of Jesus but they are not his Gospel. Jesus wins the lost with good news of salvation and only gives the negative warnings to those who will not receive the good news.

His disciples put their faith in Him. This was really very much a secret miracle. Nobody said, "Listen everybody, for your entertainment and pleasure Jesus is going to turn water into wine. It was a secret sign to the disciples and not to the crowd of wedding guests.

Jesus was not a showman or opportunist who used His miracles like magic to make money or draw crowds for entertainment. The Apocryphal gospels have Jesus all sorts of things like making clay birds and then making them fly away, or lengthening boards that were too short as a carpenter. Jesus used miracles only for the benefit of others and to be signs of His deity.

Faith can grow. It is like all living things. Give it more evidence and it gets stronger. The disciples did not start with a full-grown faith and neither do we. Our faith is to see and hear more and more of what Jesus can do and get stronger and stronger. Faith is progressive and gets stronger as revelation progresses. The disciples were fairly new in their faith and this first miracle gave them strong confirmation they were truly following the Messiah. They were not just impressed with the gift but with the Giver.

12. After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

13 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

14 In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.

15 So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.

16 To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here!

How

dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

17 His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." {Psalm 69:9}

18 Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign

can you

show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

20 The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"

21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

23. Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. {Or and believed in him}

24 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men.

25 He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

VERSE13

PASSOVER:

This was to Israel what Christmas is to us. A large part of the

yearly income came from this season of celebration. A million or more people came to Jerusalem during this seven-day celebration. Wherever there is a lot of money to be made people come up with ways to do it. Greed takes over and people sell for five dollars what is worth five cents. Jesus lived in a world where religion was used as a racket to make money off people. History does not change. Jesus was angered by those who take advantage of others in the area of economics. Jesus knew this was a popular time for the masses and he chose this time on purpose for he knew the value of advertising and the appeal to the crowds. You have to get the attention of people to make an impact.

VERSE14

The second sign Jesus would show was here in the temple. First the home and then the temple. These two places are where all men need to sense the presence of God. The foundation for any nation is in the home and the church. The secular and the sacred life have this in common-they both need the power and the presence of God.

MONEY CHANGERS:

The Roman coins with the image of the Emperor on them could not be used in the temple, and so they needed to be exchanged for Jewish coins. Morgan says they were also there to make religion easy and less expensive. You could change your large coins for smaller ones so you did not have to give as much. You could also buy a lamb or small pigeons there and not have to bring your own. This made religion much more convenient and less demanding

VERSE 15

This is the only record of Jesus using force. It had to be an unusual situation calling for force to motivate this unusual response of Jesus. This act of anger was out of the ordinary for Him.

Arthur Pink writes, "We think of the Lord Jesus as the gentle and compassionate One. And such He was and still is. But this is not all He is.....Scripture speaks of "The wrath of the Lamb," And our lesson furnishes us with a solemn illustration of this. The unresisting money-changers and cattle-dealers, fleeing in terror before His flashing eye and upraised hand, give warning of what shall happen when the wicked stand before the throne of His judgement."

Whip=this was a whip commonly used to flog those being crucified. The Egyptian Pharaohs of the New Kingdom Period were sculptured holding across the chest a similar scourge as a symbol of their authority.

Sheep and cattle: You can imagine the noise and stench that people experienced as they entered this area. George Turner writes, " The temple "market' was indefensible whether from the standpoint of aesthetics, reverence, hygiene, or justice."

Adrienne von Speyr writes, "It was an elemental action; he gave no warning, preached no sermon, and gave no counsel: it was a storm that cleared the atmosphere. In other circumstances he was always ready to receive the sinner, but in this case there was no alternative. They were shopkeepers wanting in taste, in sense, in understanding, entirely preoccupied with material concerns and there was no point of contact with them.

Jesus reveals that sometimes the negative must come before the positive can work. You have to get rid of the negative for the positive to make sense.

VERSE 16

DOVES C.S. Lovett writes," Cattle could be driven and later

collected, so nothing is lost, neither is there any hurt. Money thrown to the ground could be regathered. But loosed doves would fly away, so he merely orders them taken away. Even in anger, Christ acts prudently. He rebukes all, yet none is injured, nothing is lost. What an example! It was prophesied, "behold my servant shall deal wisely!" (Isa.52:13).

Ronald Ward writes, "Our Lord did not overturn the tables bearing the birds in their cages, for fear of hurting them. His anger against men did not include His other creatures. Even the animal creation benefits from His coming (Rom.8:19-22).

The priorities got all twisted around. It started as a convenience for worshippers to have the moneychangers there and the sacrifices, but this convenience came to be the primary business of the temple. Worship was put on the back shelf and especially for the Gentile.

Business took precedence over worship and this is sacrilege to Jesus. The church is to make worship the first priority and be different from the world and its pursuits. When this is not the case materialism dominates spirituality and men lose the essence of worship and the sense of God's presence.

My Father's house. Here is a direct claim to his Messiahship. God, the God of this temple was his Father. This was the basis for his authority.

MARKET OR DEN OF THEIVES:

Arthur Pink writes quoting Dr. Dods, "The poor was shamefully cheated, and the worship of God was hindered and impoverished instead of being facilitated and enriched. The worshiper who came to the temple seeking quiet and fellowship with God had to push his way through the touts of dealers, and have his devotional temper dissipated by the wrangling and shouting of a cattle market. Yet although many must have lamented this, no one had been bold

enough to rebuke and abolish the glaring profanation."

George Hutcheson writes, "Things lawful, being done in a wrong time and place, become sin;..." Merchandise selling is perfectly legitimate but not in this context where it hinders worship which is the primary purpose of the temple.

Barclay writes, "He acted as he did because Gods house was being desecrated. In the temple there was worship without reverence. Reverence is an instinctive thing. Edward Seago, the artist, tells how he took two gypsy children on a visit to a cathedral in England. They were wild enough children at ordinary times. But, he tells us, from the moment he came into the cathedral they were strangely still and quiet: All the way home they were unusually solemn; And it was not until the evening time that they returned to their normal boisterousness. Instinctive reverence was in their uninstructed hearts. Worship without reverence can be terrible thing.

The court of the gentiles was the only place a gentile could worship in the temple. With all of the noise of the animals and the shouts of the hucksters and the racket of business there was no way a gentile could experience reverence. This angered Jesus because men who were seeking God were prevented from experiencing His presence. It is a severe evil to rob people of the chance to experience reverence.

VERSE 17

The quote is from Psalm 69:9. This is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament. The references to vicarious suffering make it a distinctive messianic message.

When the Messiah came He would be filled with zeal for the house of God. When they saw Jesus with such zeal it was confirmed in their mind that He was indeed the Messiah.

VERSE 18

The Jewish leaders were fanatics for signs, but they could not see one even when it bit them in the nose. Jesus was giving them signs all the time, yet they were forever asking him for a sign. After he healed a demon possessed man who was blind and mute we read in Matt. 12:38 Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him,'Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you'" After he fed the five thousand they say to him in John 6:30, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?" They lacked the spiritual discernment to see that Jesus was the Son of God.

They were ever seeking for that which was ever present before them. (See stories of those who seek far and wide for what is at their fingertips.)

Mark 14:58 says, "I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands." Barclay writes, "Now clearly what Jesus really meant was that His coming had put an end to all this man-made, man-arranged way of worshiping God, and had put in it's place a spiritual worship; that he had put an end to all this business of animal sacrifice and priestly ritual, and had put in its place a direct approach of our spirit to the spirit of God which did not need an elaborate man-made temple and a ritual of incense and sacrifice offered by the hands of men....."

I have come to destroy this temple in Jerusalem and to make the whole round earth the temple where men can approach and know the presence of the living God."

VERSE 19

The temple they thought he was talking about was the one nearby which Herod the Great had begun to build in 20 B.C. It had been under construction for 46 years and was not completed until 64A.D. just 6 years before it was destroyed in 70A.D.

George Hutcheson writes, "Christ did foreknow all His sufferings, and would not hinder, but willingly permitted them to come on, and under went them; for "destroy this temple, " is not a command of Christ, but a prediction for telling their malice, and a permission to them to do their uttermost." From the start of His ministry Jesus knew that the Cross was His destiny.

Jay Styles writes, "The dignity of our Lord's body. The bodies of believers are called temples because God dwells in them by a communication of grace, but the humanity of Christ is Gods temple by a substantial inhabitation, immediately and personally-"in Him dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead." God dwells in the church as a King among His subjects, in Christ's humanity as a King in His royal palace.

"The essential idea of a temple is that of a place where God manifests Himself to man." Jesus was the temple in which the fullness of God dwelt. His death and resurrection was the sign of His ultimate authority.

VERSE 20

C.S. Lovett writes, "their vision is restricted to the symbolical temple on Zion, whereas the body of Christ was the true dwelling of God. The shekinah glory, which formerly graced the most holy place of the tabernacle, now had two legs and walked among them. His glory was wonderfully manifested by this act of cleansing the temple, but they didn't get it."

The Jewish leaders were such literalists in their interpretation, and that is why they were not able to understand much of what Jesus taught. Interpretation must come up with the meaning the speaker had in mind or it is not really interpretation but mere speculation.

VERSE 21

George Hutcheson writes, "Christ's body is the truth of that type of the temple; for as God did declare the temple to be His dwelling place, so in Him dwelleth the fullest of the God head bodily."

VERSE22

RECALLED

George Hutcheson writes, "even true disciples may be such babes in knowledge that for a long time they will little understand what Christ saith: for it was long before the disciples took up the meaning of this passage..... Disciples may hear that at one time, the understanding and benefit whereof may be reserved to be gotten by them at another time,"

VERSE 23

Many believed= the masses of common people had more discernment than did the leaders. They saw the signs of Jesus and believed for it was obvious to them that he was who he claimed to be. There had been no miracles in Israel like his since the time of the prophet Elisha centuries before this.

VERSE 24

Jesus was skeptical of their belief, however, for he knew that faith that is based on the spectacular can wither fast when the miracles do not continue. People want bread every day or they will forget the miracle. What has he done for me lately will soon surface and they will look for another hero. Being popular was not the goal of Jesus. He could achieve this easily and that is what Satan tempted him to do, but this is not lasting commitment to get people to love you for the amazing. It makes you a performer and your popularity only last as long as you keep performing. People won by miracles need more and more miracles to keep them faithful.

Arthur W. Pink writes, "The Lord's example here is a warning for

us. We do well to remember that all is not gold that glitters. It is not wise to trust in appearances of friendliness on short acquaintance. The discreet man will be kind to all, but intimate with few.

George Hutcheson writes, "it is a clear evidence of unsoundness when Christ works are the chief thing drawing men to profess faith, and not His word."

Jesus knew human nature and knew these people would soon be looking for another magic act to follow. He placed little confidence in people who only believe when there is a miracle to focus on. This kind of belief is based on emotion alone and is not an adequate commitment. True belief says that though I get no miracle and have to suffer I will say with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

Barclay writes, "He knew quite well there were many who would have followed him while he continued to produce miracles and wonders and signs, but if he had begun to talk to them about service and self-denial, if he had begun to talk to them about self-surrender to the will of God, if he had begun to talk to them about a cross and about carrying a cross, they would have stared at him with blank incomprehension and would have left him on the spot. It is the great characteristic of Jesus that he did not receive followers unless these followers clearly knew and definitely accepted that which was involved in following him. He refused-in the modern phrase-to cash in on a moments popularity.....He knew how human nature hungers for sensations. He wanted, not a crowd of men cheering they knew not what, but a small company who knew what they were doing and who were prepared to follow to the end."

Paul encountered this fickle faith of the crowd in Lystra. He healed

a man lame from birth and we read in Acts. 14:11 " When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" They were instant believers based on the miracle. But just a few verses later we read in verse 19, "Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead." He was a god one day and a man to be despised and killed the next. Faith based on miracles is not a very reliable faith.

VERSE 25

John stresses that Jesus knew human nature well and that is why he was skeptical and did not buy into the superficial. It is part of being Christ like to be skeptical of human nature. It is fallen and not to be trusted based on the superficial.

John tells the story of Nicodemus next because in contrast to those who had a superficial belief, Nicodemus had a deep desire to know Jesus and Jesus knew it and let him come and learn true faith. He knew the heart of this man was sincere and was not just an emotional thing caused by the miracles.

THE WEDDING OF CANA Based on John 2:1-11 BY GLENN PEASE

**A WEDDING TOOK PLACE THE THIRD DAY,
IN CANA OF GALILEE.
MARY WAS THERE AS A MAINSTAY,
JESUS JOINED THIS GAIETY.**

**HE AND HIS DISCIPLES WERE GUESTS,
SUDDENLY THE WINE WAS GONE;
MARY CAME MAKING A REQUEST
TO HELP THIS GREAT FEAST GO ON.**

**SHE SAID, "THERE IS NOW NO MORE WINE."
HE REPLIED, "WHY INVOLVE ME?"
"DEAR WOMAN, ITS NOT MY DESIGN
TO REVEAL ALL THAT WILL BE."**

**HE SAID, "MY TIME HAS NOT YET COME."
THEN SHE DID THIS PLAN PURSUE.
HER ORDER WAS NOT BURDENSOME.
"DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU."**

**THERE STOOD SIX WATER JARS OF STONE,
USED FOR WASHING BY THE JEWS.
THEIR CLEANSING WAS A CORNERSTONE,
FROM THESE GALLONS THEY COULD CHOOSE.**

**JESUS SAID UNTO THE SERVANTS,
"FILL THESE JARS UP TO THE BRIM.
THEN DRAW SOME OUT AS OBSERVANTS.."
THEY COMPLETELY OBEYED HIM.**

**TAKE TO MASTER OF THE BANQUET
THEY OBEYED AND THEY DID SO.
HE TASTING SAID, "I MUST ADMIT,
WHERE THIS CAME FROM I DON'T KNOW.**

**THEN HE CALLED THE BRIDEGROOM ASIDE
SAYING, " MOST GIVE THE BEST FIRST,
BUT THIS CHOICE WINE YOU CHOSE TO HIDE
UNTIL GUESTS HAD QUENCHED THEIR THIRST.**

**"YOU HAVE SAVED THE BEST UNTIL LAST,
NOT THE USUAL WAY TO GO."
JESUS BY THIS BREAK FROM HIS PAST
DID HIS SECRET GLORY SHOW.**

**THIS WAS HIS FIRST MIRACLE SIGN.
HIS GLORY WAS THUS REVEALED.
THIS TURNING WATER INTO WINE,
HIS DISCIPLES FAITH CONGEALED.**

5. CONFRONTING THE SCANDAL OF OUR PREJUDICES 4

Billy Graham has preached the Gospel around the world to every race. In an interview with Diane Sawyer he was asked this question: "If you could wave your hand and make one problem in this world go away, what would it be?" Without hesitation he replied, "Racial division and strife." This world is filled with civil wars based on race and religion all because people have a deep-seated prejudice against other people who are different. Hate crimes abound for the same reason. If this was the limit of the impact of prejudice in our world, it would be the number one sin of mankind according to Billy Graham and many others. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. Prejudice of one kind or another poisons the heart of just about everyone. Masses of people do not experience racial prejudice because they have no contact with any but their own race. But nobody escapes all forms of prejudice.

The issue of male-female prejudice touches almost everyone. Class prejudice is also nearly universal. Religious prejudice, not only between the religious and non-religious, but between the many religions of the world and the many denominations of each religion. We could go on endlessly listing areas of prejudice down to such trivialities as right-handers against left-handers and cassettes lovers against CD lovers. There does not appear to be anyone who can escape all forms of prejudice, and so to some degree we are all a part of the problem.

The Apostle John tells us that he did not record all that Jesus did, for the world could not contain it if everything was recorded. But he did record the confrontation of Jesus with the woman at the well, and he gave us a lot of detail. The reason for it is because in this encounter Jesus demonstrates that He was free from, and uncontaminated by the prejudice that dominated the fallen hearts of men. Jesus rejects all the major prejudices of men in this account. Racial, religious, and sexual prejudice are rejected in this encounter. No two people could be more in contrast to each other than Jesus and this woman, and yet we see Jesus reaching out to break down all the walls of prejudice in relating to her.

It is hard for us to grasp the audacity of Jesus in this situation, and to understand why the disciples were so surprised to see Him talking with her. But just imagine if you walked into a McDonalds and saw Billy Graham in a booth talking to a black prostitute whom you knew had just started her own cult in the area, and Graham is asking her to go get him a glass of water. If that scene would not surprise you and draw out some feelings of prejudice, you are ready for the rapture. Most Christians would be shocked just as the disciples were shocked at Jesus. Why? It was because they were prejudice. They were products of their culture, and so they had the typical sexual, racial, and religious prejudices of their day.

Jesus uses prejudice people like His disciples because that was His only choice. They wanted to call fire down from heaven to destroy the Samaritans. They wanted no part of eating with Gentiles, and they were even prejudice against little children, for they wanted mothers to keep their kids away from Jesus. He rebuked them and told them to let the little children come, for of such is the kingdom of God. Jesus had to fight all kinds of prejudice in His disciples, and the fight goes on all through history for Christians are full of all the prejudices that are popular in the

culture in which they live.

Jesus came to buck the system and to reject the prejudices in all its forms. He goes against the grain of His culture and dares to love all people equally. It is His dream that His disciples will be people of the same spirit. It took a long time for Jesus to get His disciples free of prejudice. Peter, even long after Pentecost, could not bring himself to eat with Gentiles. It was a deep prejudice in him, and even the Holy Spirit could not cleanse him of it. God had to speak to him in a dream and tell him not to call anything unclean that he had made clean. He finally got Peter to go and eat with the Gentile Centurion Cornelius in Acts 10. It was one of Peter's hardest spiritual battles in letting go of his prejudice against Gentiles.

It is good that his battle is recorded, for we do not want to give the impression that prejudice is easy to eliminate. It is very hard to do so, and often the best Christians can do in the short range is to recognize that they have prejudice, and to keep it under control so it does not do damage. I know Christian leaders who are prejudice against others, but they know it and face it honestly, and they do not let it block their Christ-like response to others. It is there, but it is Christ who is controlling their actions.

Overcoming the power of prejudice may be the hardest battle many Christians will fight. Lavonne and I are grateful for our mostly prejudice free upbringing. We have very seldom felt the power of prejudices in our lives, and we have not found it hard to love people of a wide variety of differences. This has not been the case for many Christians, and the result is they have a perpetual fight with the power of prejudice. Bad circumstances that lead you to suffer because of other people's behavior leads to prejudice.

I read a funny story that illustrates this point. A Jewish painter

in Tel Aviv was hired to paint a church. The ladder began to slip when he was painting the ceiling, and he fell into the baptismal font and was knocked out. The priest passed by and tried to revive him, but he could not do it. He made the sign of the cross over him and uttered a few Latin phrases. He was about to leave when Mr. Feldman awoke. He asked, "What happened? Where am I?" The priest said, "You are in a church and I just bestowed a blessing on you. You are now a Christian." Feldman went home feeling very shaky, and he called out to his wife, "Rachel do you want to hear what happened to me today?" She shot back from the kitchen, "No time! I'm late for my tennis game. Supper is on the table." He went to his daughter's door and said, "Marian, do you want to hear what happened to me at work today?" She came bursting out of the door saying, no time! I hear Don honking the horn for us. Bye." He walked down the hall to his 17-year-old sons room, and before he could even ask his son he came out clutching his basketball and said, "Hi dad. The guys are waiting to get started. I'll see you tonight." Feldman sat down on the living room couch and thought to himself, "I'm a Christian only a few hours and already I hate three Jews."

The point is, if you are in some way mistreated by a person who is of another race, class, sex, or religion, you will tend to hold all people in that category accountable for your suffering, and that is prejudice. Let one woman driver do something stupid and almost cause you to have an accident and you will say, "Those awful women drivers," and condemn the whole class because of the mistake of one. Then every time you see a female driver you have the preconceived judgment that she is a menace on the road.

Prejudice is based on magnifying a particular experience into a universal principle. I know a Mexican who will not get out and get a job. Therefore, all Mexicans are lazy. I know an Irishman who drinks too much. Therefore, all Irishmen are drunks. We could go

on endlessly describing how people make universals out of particulars. Jesus refused to do this, and instead, he treated all people as individuals without judging them as a part of a class. Other Rabbis would be saying that you do not talk to a woman because they are uneducated and ignorant. Jesus did not assume such a thing, and the result was that He found her to be quite intelligent. Jesus did not assume anything, but He treated her as an individual with as much worth as any other individual.

Jesus did the same thing with Zachaeus. Others were prejudice against this little man, for he was a tax collector. He was pre-judged as being a scoundrel with no potential to be an asset to society. Jesus did not prejudge him, but He loved him and treated him with respect. Because of this He won him as a disciple. Jesus did not right anybody off as having no potential to be a part of His kingdom. Gentiles, women, children, publicans and prostitutes, and even Pharisees were welcome. Jesus never shut the door on any individual, for He was prejudice free. This is the goal for every believer.

Jesus lived in a world filled with all forms of prejudice. The Jews hated Samaritans, and both hated Romans. The Jewish and Gentile conflict was perpetual. All of these conflicts are still a part of that area of the world. Jesus did not change that at all but He produced a kingdom within the world where prejudice is not allowed. In the kingdom of God there is no Jew or Gentile, bound or free, male or female, but all are one in Christ. In the kingdom of God all prejudice is eliminated. When Christians do have prejudice it is because they are conforming to the world, and they are letting the values of their culture control their lives. They are not praying that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The Christian is to be in world but not of it. When they are both in and of it they no longer represent the kingdom of God.

There would be no point in the Lord's Prayer being prayed: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," if this was automatic. It is not, and the Christian can refuse to let the kingdom come, and instead let prejudice be a controlling factor in their lives. At this point they are just like the world, and this explains why there is so much conflict in the Christian world. When we operate in Christ, and His spirit dominates us, then we are in conflict with the value system of the world. If other Christians are not in Christ, but are in the world, they will be prejudiced against us.

Take D. L. Moody as an example. He was so full of the love of Christ for all people that he was severely criticized by many Christians. Moody loved the ragged poor kids of Chicago, and this made the rich Christians angry at his folly in focusing on them. Moody loved famous theologians like George Adams Smith and Henry Drummond. They were too liberal for many Christians, and they were angry at Moody for loving them. Moody was friendly with certain Roman Catholics in a day when this was very offensive to many Protestants. When his son Paul Moody wrote about how prejudice free his father was he was savagely attacked by other Christians. Why? Because the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world are in conflict, and if you have the mind of Christ and live free of the scandal of prejudice, you will be in conflict with all people who thrive on prejudice.

I have a hunch that the large majority of Christian conflict with other Christians is a matter of prejudice. When the Christian does not have the mind of Christ, but is thinking like the world, there will be inevitable conflict with Christians who do have the mind of Christ. If you are prejudice free you will not only be bucking the world system, but the Christian population who is influenced more by that system than by the Spirit of Christ. This means that to be really Christ like you have break out of your comfort zone, and, like

Paul, rebuke Peter for his prejudice against Gentiles. It is hard to risk the disfavor of other Christians, but it is a duty to point out the scandal of a Christian having prejudice attitudes. Peter responded to the rebuke by overcoming his prejudice, but not all will respond this way.

Jesus cared about this Samaritan woman as much as He cared about any other person. She was of a mongrel race, which was a race of Jews that had intermarried with the hated Assyrians. She was of a corrupt religion, and her personal life was a disaster of broken relationships. If anybody Jesus ever met should have been ignored or rejected, here was the prime candidate. But Jesus gives her more than the time of day. He gives her the water of life, and she became one of the greatest evangelists of the New Testament as she brought many others to Christ. There are dozens of reasons why this was all wrong from the point of view of prejudice, but none of these reasons had any effect on Jesus. He broke down all relational walls so that there was no such thing as a person who was treated with any kind of prejudice.

The greatest enemies of Christ were the Pharisees, and the most violent of them all was Saul of Tarsus. And yet Jesus chose this enemy to be His Apostle to the Gentiles. He converted him, filled him with His spirit, and sent him into the world to break down walls, and to be an agent of reconciliation. Saul, the embodiment of prejudice, and a man filled with bitter hatred toward those who were different, became Paul the embodiment of Christ-likeness with a prejudice free spirit. This is the dream of Jesus for all who follow Him. Jesus did not approve of this woman's divorce record, nor did He put any stamp of approval on her living with a man out of wedlock. He did not okay her unorthodox religious views either. Being loving and unprejudiced towards others is not the same thing as acceptance of all others do or believe. Jesus was very narrow in His perspective. He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no

man comes to the Father but by me."

Jesus had many deep and absolute convictions. But He was able to accept all persons regardless of how they may differ from Him. He did not say, "You are a woman, and so I'll not waste my time talking to you. You are a Samaritan, and so I'll not make any effort to break down that wall. You are immoral, and so I'll not try to show you a better way." A prejudice free spirit says that anybody and everybody is worth relating to, for they have the freedom to choose the will of God for their life. Being prejudice free does not mean you like or accept everything about another person, but that you accept the person, and do not let what you don't like hinder your treating them with respect.

To do this is a far greater sign that you are filled with the Spirit than speaking in tongues, or healing of diseases. You can do wonders galore, but if you do not have love you are, as Paul says, nothing. Without the prejudice free Spirit of Christ that enables you to love all people you cannot fulfill His dreams for you. Gandhi in his Autobiography tells of how he was beaten and forced by officials to leave his first class place on the train in South Africa, even though he had a first class ticket. The whites refused to let a colored man have equal accommodations with them. He refused to cooperate with their prejudice, and they had to take him off the train by force. He fought this kind of prejudice and inspired many around the world to do so. A lot has changed because of his influence, but the spirit of prejudice is still alive everywhere.

The Christian is to go beyond the law and really care about people of all races. By law the world has to treat people better, but if the Christian does not rise above that level they are still sub-Christian. Christians are to love and not just tolerate, and until they do they are not prejudice free, and until we are prejudice free we are still a part of the scandal that is so contrary to the Spirit of

Christ.

6. EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED Based on John 4:1f

The unexpected is the source of so much of the joy of life. Our three year old granddaughter, Jennifer, was praying at the table a couple of weeks ago. I noticed she was going faster than usual, and she came to the end saying, "In Jesus name, amen." Then she shouted, "I win." It was so unexpected that we were all shocked into laughter, and we realized at that point, she and Jason had a thing going as to who could finish first. It was a whole new concept to me, the concept of competitive prayer.

We expected the commonplace, and we were surprised by the unexpected. God does this a lot, as you study His handiwork. God has so designed natural life that it can only exist by means of the exceptional and the unexpected. It is a law of nature that as a liquid cools its density increases, and it gets heavier. But if water followed this law, the ice that formed on the top of lakes would sink to the bottom, and eventually the whole lake would be solid ice. But fortunately, water is an exception to this law. It expands when it freezes, and ice becomes lighter than water, and it floats. If God had not made water an exception, life would be greatly limited on this planet, and may have been impossible.

It is surprising how many exceptions are necessary for life on earth. If the law of gravity had no exceptions, the heavy gas would be at the bottom, and the lighter gas at the top. This would mean the whole earth would be under a layer of carbon dioxide, and this would make life as we know it impossible. But the law of gravity is defied by the law of diffusion of gases, and so oxygen can be

available for all of life on the surface of the earth.

God is not a legalist, even in His laws for governing the universe. He has variety and flexibility, and unique unexpected exceptions. Beware of locking God in and saying, He always does this, or never does that. God is the God of surprises, and the God of the unexpected. Those who study any aspect of His creation soon learn this, and it is true in the study of His Word as well. No where is this more evident than in John chapter 4, where we see the encounter of Jesus with the woman at the well. It is literally loaded with exceptions and surprises. Let's look at some of them to get the flavor of the whole passage.

1. Ordinarily you run to success, but this text tells us Jesus had to flee from it. His disciples were baptizing more people than John the Baptist. His movement was growing like wildfire, and so he packed up and left. A very unexpected reaction to success, but he had to escape the conflict this was going to produce with the Pharisees. His time was not yet, and so he fled success.

2. Also unusual is the verse which tells us Jesus did not baptize people. John did, but Jesus let His disciples do the baptizing. As far as we know, Jesus never baptized anyone, and that is surprising.

3. Jesus took the route to Galilee that was the unusual route. Most Jews went around Samaria because of the hostility of these two peoples. Jesus is the exception, and He takes the unexpected way, right through this alien territory.

4. His disciples go into town to buy food, which is a surprise, because, as the woman at the well says in verse 9, the Jews do not associate with the Samaritans. Here is another exception.

5. The woman of Samaria is one surprise after another. She is the

only woman in the Bible, that we know of, who had five husbands, and the only one we know of who was living with a man out of wedlock. This may not be uncommon in our day, but it was the unusual and unexpected than. Jesus only took one trip through Samaria, and He runs into the only woman with her particular record.

6. It was a surprise that anybody would be at the well at high noon. This is the hottest part of the day. Most would come in the cool of the morning or evening, but she was there at the unexpected time.

7. It was unexpected that a rabbi would talk to any woman in public. But here we are surprised, for Jesus not only talks with her, He shares with her the deepest insights into the nature of God. He gives her the clearest revelation of who He is, as the Messiah. You would expect a teacher of the caliber of Jesus to reveal His most profound truths to the highest leaders of the land, or at least some leaders in some formal setting. But Jesus is full of surprises, and He gives this lowly nobody insights of the greatest depth. There is no rule to cover this. This is just another great exception.

8. Finally, you do not expect a woman to be one of the first successful witnesses, but her testimony led crowds of Samaritans to believe in Jesus, and become His disciples. Jesus did not chose any woman to be one of the twelve, but long before any of the twelve were effective evangelists, this woman led a multitude to Jesus.

This whole account is an exception to the rule. When Jesus sent out His twelve, we read that He gave them these instructions in Matt. 10:5-6, "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel." Here He is doing the very thing He forbids them to do, and by so doing, He has the biggest harvest of fruit He ever had in His ministry. The bottom line of all this is, expect the unexpected when you follow Jesus. The

disciples of Jesus never expected to see Him talking with a woman. Verse 27 implies they were embarrassed by the whole scene. It was a surprise, and so unexpected, and they could not handle this exceptional situation. The text tells us, "No one asked what do you want, or why are you talking with her?" Their minds were full of questions, but they were shocked into silence, and did not know how to deal with this unique situations.

They were not expecting the unexpected, nor were they open to the unusual and exceptional. This is one of the basic principles of evangelism, and they had to learn it, and we have to learn it, to be effective tools for Christ. After all, if Jesus sent His church into all the world to make disciples, then He expects His church to be ready for an infinite variety of possibilities. My father use to say, "It doesn't take all kinds to make a world, but we've got them anyway." We have to face reality and recognize, the world we are trying to reach is full of diversity, variety, and the unusual. If you do not expect the unexpected, you will be closed to both God and the world He wants you to reach. Part of what it means to walk in the spirit is to expect the unexpected.

Jesus expected prostitutes, tax collectors, and people that nobody else ever dreamed of reaching, to respond to the Gospel, and become a part of the kingdom of God. Jesus expected that this Samaritan woman would respond to His acceptance, and that the kingdom of God would be extended into territory that no Jew would ever even try to reach. In Acts 1:8 we read that Jesus said to His Apostles, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Do you think the Apostles would have taken that serious, that they were to witness in Samaria, unless they had seen with their own eyes the results of this encounter with the woman of Samaria? They had to be eye witnesses of this exceptional, and totally unexpected event, or they never would have been able to go to Samaria with any expectation

at all. The result is, in Acts 8 we read that Philip had a marvelous ministry in Samaria. And Peter and John preached the Gospel in many Samaritan villages.

My point is, this never would have happened, and all the evangelism that took place, and all the lives of the Samaritans changed forever, never would have happened had Jesus not prepared the way by helping His disciples learn to expect the unexpected. They were slow learners, for He taught them to expect the cross and resurrection too, but they were not open to it, and had to learn the hard way. One of the main reasons why many people are not evangelized is because of Christians who have never learned to expect the unexpected. Almost every pastor who has been in the ministry any length of time could tell a story similar to that of Dr. Dino Pedrone, who pastored in Pennsylvania.

A woman came to him for counseling, and in the course of their conversation he asked her about her husband. She said he was a good man, but he was not a Christian. When the pastor asked if he could come and talk to him about the Lord, she said it wouldn't do any good, for he will never become a Christian. The next Saturday he went to see the husband. He discovered that though he was hard and indifferent to spiritual things in relation to his wife, he was hungry to know God. The wife was shocked when her husband opened his heart to Christ. Soon he was baptized and a part of the church.

The next time this wife came for counseling, he asked about her children. She told him she had a son who was a rebel, and was always in trouble. He asked if anybody had ever talked to him about the Lord. She said that she knew her son would never trust in Christ. The next Tuesday some people from the church called on the son, and her son received Christ. After that she came to the pastor with a list of her relatives. Not all of them responded to the

Gospel, but some did, because she had finally learned to expect the unexpected.

Until we learn this basic principle, we determine what God will, or will not do, and we never even try that which seems unusual, for we do not give the exceptional a chance to happen. This is what quenching the spirit is all about. We refuse to be available to the Holy Spirit to do what is unusual and unexpected. We are just like the Jews who rejected Jesus. They expected a Messiah like David the warrior, who would lead them to victory over Rome. They did not expect the unexpected, and that is exactly what Jesus was. Jesus did the unexpected, because He expected God to use the unexpected to change lives, and God honored that expectation. When we talk about being like Jesus, let us not forget this aspect of His character.

God moves in mysterious ways, was not just a saying or a song for Jesus, it was a philosophy of life. He did not live in conformity to what was expected, but in His passion for people, He reached out to touch them any way He could, and to let them know they were loved, and were invited to be a part of the family of God. The world seeks to force us into its mold. It says conform and avoid being an exception. But the call of Christ is to be a non-conformer. Be different, be unusual, and be the exception. Be open to the unexpected, for these are the people God uses to open up new worlds, as Jesus opened up the world of Samaria to the kingdom of God.

One of the most Christian nations of the world today is Korea. The largest church in the world is there, along with many other great churches. It all began with an exception. Robert J. Thomas was a Welshman working in China for the Scottish Bible Society. He learned that the Korean language was based on the Chinese, and so the Korean intellectuals could read the Chinese Bible. Nobody had any interest in Korea, but he was determined these people

would have the Bible. He got on an American ship, the General Sherman, and sailed to Korea. When the ship got near the port a fight broke out with a Korean ship, and the American vessel was set on fire, and all the passengers were killed. Thomas was so determined to finish his mission that he took some of his Bibles, and leaped into the sea. He struggled to the shore, and staggered out of the water. He thrust the Bibles into the hand of the Koreans, who clubbed him to death. That is how the Gospel first came to Korea in 1866. It was not a very promising beginning, nobody would expect anything to come of such a tragic event. But God used this exceptional event to produce one of the greatest harvests of history.

William Carrey said, "Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God." If you never attempt to do anything but the usual and the expected, you will never know if God will use you to do the unexpected. We have to stop thinking that our friends and neighbors are too unusual and different, and use that to justify our refusal to witness to them. We must expect the unexpected and share the good news with them. If the disciples would have watched this encounter of Jesus and the woman at the well, you can count on it, they would have been betting that Jesus would have had an easier time getting Satan to make stones into bread, than of getting this woman to supply Him with water. She was there at noon in the hot Sun because she was not welcome by the other women who came at cooler times. She was not a very sociable person, and to serve a Jew was not likely her cup of tea. She just was not a likely prospect for getting a cup of cold water, let alone a prospect for evangelism. She would not have gotten a single vote if Jesus would have operated on the majority rule, and taken a vote on it.

Jesus had passion, and he had a procedure, and now we want to look at-

HIS PROSPECTS FOR EVANGELISM.

For Jesus, every person who crossed His path was a prospect for evangelism. Jesus, like the Good Samaritan, considered every man he met with a need as His neighbor. Now Jesus confronts a bad Samaritan, and He has the same spirit. This woman at the well was robbed by Satan, and beaten out of a life of love. She was as helpless to help herself as was the man who was beaten who was found by the Good Samaritan. Jesus is now stopping to help this bad Samaritan because she is His neighbor.

One of the most amazing things about this great rescue is that it was all done by words. There is no miracle in this passage anywhere. Jesus could have had her jar float down into the well, and return without the use of a robe. He could have added the Cana touch, and made the water turn to wine. He could have done all sorts of miracles to convince her He was the Messiah, but He needed none of that. The Jews saw wonder after wonder, and still would not believe. But here is one of the so-called heretic Samaritans, and she only hears the words of Jesus, and does not see a single wonder of His miracle working power, and she believes. The masses came and believed as well, with no record of a single miracle in the two days He stayed there. Note verse 41, "And because of His words many more became believers." They went on to give Jesus the title, the Savior of the World in verse 42.

This, from Samaritan people who were enemies of the Jews, and on whom James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy. No wonder Jesus rebuked them, for He did not see the Samaritans as His enemies. He saw them as prospects for evangelism. He did not write them off, for He expected the unexpected. He expected these despised people to become a part of His family. The day you label any person of any class or race as being no prospect for evangelism, is the day you cease to have the mind of Christ. This whole account, which is so unusual and full of the unexpected, is designed to make it clear to Christians all

through history that our Lord expects us to expect the unexpected, and never write anyone off as a prospect for evangelism.

This is the Jesus version of Ripley's Believe It Or Not. It is mission impossible. This passage of scripture is surely designed to demonstrate but the Gospel is for everybody. There is no such thing as a hopeless case. The least likely people in this world can become children of God, and can become leaders in the kingdom, as did this Samaritan sinner.

Alfred Noble was a Swedish chemist who made a fortune by inventing powerful explosives, which he sold to governments around the world, so they could make weapons and blow people and things to pieces. He was not the kind of man you would expect to have compassion for suffering humanity. But one day his brother died, and the newspaper by accident published his obituary instead of his brothers. It is not often a man gets to read his own obituary. It had a shocking impact on Alfred, for he was identified in the obituary as the man who made a fortune by enabling armies to achieve new levels of mass destruction. He was going to be remembered as a merchant of death, and he hated it.

So he took his fortune and established awards to be given in various fields to people whose work was a benefit to humanity. Today he is remembered, not as the destroyer, but as a benefactor to man. The man least likely to be so remembered is so remembered. The point is, people can change, and time can change, and circumstances can change, and, therefore, anything is possible. So let's stop assuming that Samaritans are not good prospects for evangelism.

Whom do you never expect to be a child of God? Whom do you never expect to be used of God to touch others for Christ? What is the most unexpected change Christ could make in another's life by

your influence? Faith is simply expecting that these unexpected events can become a reality. Thoreau wrote, "I learned this, at least, by my experiment: That if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours."

Do you have any dreams about what might be if the world was more hopeful, if life was more simple, if you had more control of what happens? Don't wait for life to level off and even out, but go for your dream now, expecting the unexpected. Have you ever wondered why it is why collectors have so many rare coins, or stamps, or bottles? If they are so rare and unusual, how can anybody have a collection of them? It is because they are people who go through life looking for the unusual. They expect the unexpected. The non-collector walks pass treasures all the time and does not see them. Collectors see them, because they expect to see them, and they are always looking for the unlikely.

Our environment is loaded with people who are lost. They are hidden treasures, like this sinful Samaritan woman, but we pass them by, because we don't expect Christ to ever find these lost sheep, at least not through us. As long as we think this way, we will be right, and we get what we expect-nothing. The only way we will ever be used to win the lost is to live with the mind of Christ, a mind that expected the unexpected.

We are not trying to deny the reality of Murphy's Law, for it to is a part of life. Who of us has not decided to watch a TV series, which we haven't watched for 6 months, only to discover it is a rerun of the one other time we decided to watch it? Or who of us has not been on vacation watching a program, only to suddenly see it end with the words, to be continued? No setting is so solemn that it scares away Murphy's Law. Stewart Briscoe told of one of his

associate pastors at the funeral of a war veteran. The pastor was to lead his military friends out through a side door, but he chose the wrong door. With military precision they marched into a storage closet in full view of mourners. The effect was somewhat marred when they had to beat a hasty retreat in confusion. The unexpected is not always good, and what we would hope for, but to have the mind of Christ we need to expect good unexpected things to happen, when we care about every person we meet, enough to share the love of Christ.

You will never meet a person who does not need Christ. You will never meet a person for whom Christ did not die. You will never meet a person who cannot come to Christ. Therefore, no matter how unlikely it is, expect people to be won into the kingdom of God, and expect God to use you to be a key factor in making that happen. So let us go into our Samaria with the mind of Christ, and expect the unexpected.

7. THE WELL WITHIN Based on John 4:1-26

Keith Miller in his book The Scent Of Love tells of the young intern who was brilliant and competitive, and wanted to get his hands on the toughest cases that came into the hospital. One day a man was brought in very sick. His temperature was high, his blood count was down, and his fluids were out of balance. He was in bad shape, and this young doctor said, "I'll take him." He started working on the sick man and got his temperature down. Then he got his blood count up, and his fluids in balance. Everything was going quite well, but suddenly the patient died.

The supervising physician came by just as the intern was

covering the patient, and he noticed he was furious. He watched unobserved from the hall as the young doctor grabbed the chart at the front of the bed, took a pen out of his pocket, and scrawled something across it. Then he stormed angrily out passed the supervisor, and never said a word. The older physician could not resist going into to see what he had written. It said, "This patient was in better condition when he died then when he first came to me." This is in the same category with the statement, "The operation was a success, but the patient died." It sounds strange, but this is the goal of the physician of the soul-to make sure people are in better condition when they die.

Corrie Ten Boom got the warning that a Jewish orphanage was to be raided, and all the babies killed. She quickly got some of her Dutch boys dressed up in Nazi uniforms, and sent them to the orphanage to demand that the babies be turned over to them. With tears they were handed over. The people did not realize that they were really saving the babies. All were given to families to raise. One of the boys involved in this clever rescue said to Corrie that he believed the most important work of his life was the saving of those babies. Corrie said to him that as important as it was, the more important work is saving people forever by telling them of Jesus. She put her hand on his shoulder and said, "Pete, every Christian is called to be a soul winner for Jesus.....and in your life there will come a times when you will see that as the most important work for you.

Six months later he was arrested, and given one week to live. The day before he was executed he wrote this letter to Corrie. "All the boys in my cell are sentenced to death. I am so glad that I could tell them about Jesus and they have accepted Him. I know that when they shoot us tomorrow, we will all go to heaven, because we have brought our sins to Jesus and He has made us all children of God. We know that the house of the Father with many mansions is our

very close future. I see now that the most important work for a Christian is to win souls for eternity. Like the young doctor, this young physician of the soul could have written their death certificates with these words: "These boys were in better condition when they died than when they came to me." Jesus could have written this concerning the thief on the cross as well.

This is the ultimate need of all mankind. We cannot solve the problems of the world. It will be a fallen world until Jesus comes again, and it will be a world of unsolvable problems and crooked paths we cannot make straight. But we can make sure that the victims of this fallen world are in better condition when they die, than ever before. That is the great human need that Jesus addresses in John 4. He does not offer the woman at the well marriage counseling, or some advice on self-esteem therapy. After being rejected by five husbands, she no doubt had a head full of psychological problems. Jesus did not inquire if there were children involved, and offer her family guidance, or legal advice on how she could get out of Samaria and start a new life. This woman may have had more problems than we could imagine, but all Jesus offered her was a spring of water that would well up to eternal life. He was not solving all her problems, but He was offering her the chance to be in better condition when she died, than she ever was before she met the Messiah.

The point I am getting at is this: Man's greatest need is for eternal life. There are a great many studies on man's basic needs. He needs food, air, water, shelter, clothing, and he needs love and security, self-esteem, and a host of other things for the ideal and balanced life. But the bottom line Biblically is, man needs God. He needs to know he is a child of God, and a part of a family that never ends. This woman at the well had five families that ended, and we do not know what state she was in with her present family. Jesus offers her a chance to be a part of a family where she will be loved

permanently. Her wells kept running dry, but Jesus offers her a well that will never run dry. He offers her a place where she will always belong. This meets her basic need for love, acceptance, and security.

This whole passage is about meeting needs, and it leads us to focus on another principle truth about evangelism-the purpose of evangelism. Let's review the key truth that Jesus is teaching us in John 4. We have looked at-

- 1. HIS PASSION FOR EVANGELISM.**
- 2. HIS PROCEDURE IN EVANGELISM.**
- 3. HIS PROSPECTS FOR EVANGELISM.**
- 4. HIS PURPOSE IN EVANGELISM.**

This last one is our focus now. There are literally thousands of definitions of what evangelism is. I have written a couple myself. Here are some of the most famous:

- 1. The Madras Foreign Missions Council, "Evangelism is so to present Jesus Christ to the world in the power of the Holy Spirit that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, accept them as their Savior and serve Him as their Lord in the fellowship of His church."**
- 2. The World Council Of Churches, "Evangelism is so making Christ known to men that each is confronted with the necessity of a personal decision, yes or no."**
- 3. Toyohiko Kagawa, "Evangelism means the conversion of people from worldliness to Christlike godliness."**
- 4. Albert W. Beaven, "Evangelism is simply the contagion of enthusiasm for Jesus Christ. The methods which we employ are only channels through which this enthusiasm flows."**
- 5. Archbishop Temple, "Evangelism is the winning of men to**

acknowledge Christ as their Savior and King, so that they may give themselves to His service in the fellowship of His church."

6. Samuel Boon of Siam, "Evangelism means living, doing, and talking for Christ."

There are many ways to say it, but when you reduce it to its essence, evangelism is simply meeting mans basic need for salvation, or the need for eternal life. When this purpose is achieved, there will be many changes in time, but the ultimate value will be, people will be in better condition when they die than they were before they met the Great Physician. As we watch the Master at work in fulfilling the purpose of evangelism, we see how the entire process is need oriented.

Jesus deals with each person He encounters according to their need. Find a need and meet it was His strategy. In John 3 Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again." This analogy of coming into the kingdom of God by the process of a new birth has so dominated the minds of modern Christians that they have completely ignored the fact that Jesus never once referred to it in dealing with the woman at the well. His analogy here is tailored to meet her need, and He uses the analogy of drinking at a fountain that never runs dry. For Nicodemus, and millions of others, the concept of being born anew is just what they need to grasp the Gospel. But for others, the need is to see being saved is like finding a fountain of water that quenches the thirst for love, meaning, and acceptance. Still others need to see it as being a lost sheep found by a loving shepherd, and being returned to the fold.

There are different analogies used in the Bible to describe the experience of being saved, because the people who need to be saved have a variety of individual differences. Jesus did not treat people like pieces of plastic coming along in a assembly line, all alike, and all needing the same label attached, or the same hole drilled in the

same place. People are all different, and though they all have the same ultimate need, they have very different temporal needs, and these need to be addressed in witnessing to them, and leading them to have their needs met in Christ. We should all have a sort of canned presentation of the Gospel prepared, but we need to be aware of the importance of being flexible, and not so locked in to a specific presentation that we ignore people's differences.

If all you ever say to people is, you must be born again, you are not being Christ like, for He only used that as one of several analogies of salvation. So use them all, and vary them with the circumstances, and the nature of the people you are dealing with. This woman was at the well in the heat of the day, and she was obviously in great need of water, so Jesus takes this need and builds His presentation of the Gospel around that need. Jesus said you need living water, and this got her attention, for that was her most relevant need just then. A wise witness will observe and listen so as to know something of the needs of the person he is witnessing to. If the Gospel does not speak to a felt need, you can count on it, it will seem irrelevant to the person you are talking to. If the purpose of evangelism is to meet a basic need, then you have to be dealing with a persons need to get anywhere in achieving this goal.

You can never catch fish unless you appeal to a need. They need food, and so you offer them bait, and a variety of bait for appeal to different fish. You also have to appeal to a need to be a fisher of men. That is why Jesus has so many different names and titles in the Bible. Each one makes Him just what people need at a particular time in their life.

**To the lonely, Jesus is the friend.
To the lost, Jesus is the Good Shepherd.
To the sick, Jesus is the Great Physician.
To the ignorant Jesus is the teacher.**

There are many other examples, and the point is, Jesus is what people need, but He has to be presented according to the specific needs of the individual, and that is why we need to pay attention to people's needs, for they are the doors of opportunity to share the good news of Jesus. All that Jesus is doing in this context revolves around need. He exposes her record of failed relationships, not to embarrass or condemn her, but to make it quite clear that she has a need for love and acceptance, which she just can not quench. She has been trying to satisfy her thirst for love by one relationship after another, always hoping the next one will meet her need. We do not know the details of why five men divorced her, but the chances are good that it was because she could never be satisfied, and was always looking for another man. She could have been like many in our day who expect to find love and life's meaning in sex alone.

We do not want to minimize the value of sex, and its place in God's plan, and try to pretend it is not a major need. We are just pointing out that people who become obsessed with sex make it an idol, and destroy all their relationships by an insatiable quest to quench their thirst for love at this one well. People need a love that is more powerful and more permanent than sex. That is what this woman needed, and that is what all need, and that is the love that Jesus offered her, and offers to all.

This woman went from man to man expecting her thirst to be quenched, if she could just find the right man. Jesus did not question her need, and say it was not legitimate. He did not say she did not need love and satisfaction. He just said she was drinking from the wrong well, and seeking to satisfy her need by means of externals. The only water that can satisfy is living water, and that comes from a well from within. This is the very essence of what the Gospel is all about. It is about the inner life. The world system is a system of externals. The meaning of life is in what you can see, feel,

hear, smell, and taste, and so it makes sense that they drink at the wells of sensualism and materialism.

The people we contact every day in the world are people who are thirsty, and who are seeking to quench that thirst by getting all the pleasure they can if that means drinking at the well of immorality, then so be it, it is the only well they know. The purpose of evangelism is to help them see a better well. A well that can meet their deepest needs, and save them from a futile search that makes them slaves rather than liberated people. Jesus came to give this woman life and life abundant. That is, a life set free from the slavery of being compelled to go from one relationship to another, always looking for that external setting that would satisfy. When we find our deepest needs met by water within, we are free from this external compulsion. Jesus is that well that provides the living water, and when He is in our lives, we can find satisfaction from within. We can know we are loved and accepted, and feel secure without the constant reinforcement of externals.

We thank thee, Lord, for Pilgrim days,
When desert springs were dry,
When first we knew what depths of need
Thy love could satisfy.

The purpose of evangelism is to help people change their focus so they find their needs met by the kingdom of God which is within them, when they receive Christ as Savior. The Well Within is the goal. The well without is the focus of the world, as it was with this woman. What she needed most, and what all people need most is, The Well Within-an inner source of the water of life that meets our deepest needs and quenches our thirst for love. The purpose of evangelism is to point to Jesus as this Well Within, and make Him so appealing that people want to open their lives and welcome Him in.

Those who drink of this well will never thirst again Jesus said. This does not mean people who take Jesus as their Savior never feel thirsty. Jesus Himself felt thirsty, and asked for a drink. The needs of life go on, and we all need external water, and we all need external love, acceptance, and the materialism of the secular life is still an important part of the Christian life. But the ultimate need is met in Christ, and we no longer need to live under the delusion that some external can satisfy the meaning of life. The need for God, for love, and for eternal life are all met in Christ, and we never need to thirst again for these needs to be met.

This woman had plenty of needs after she welcomed Christ into her life as her Messiah. She still needed to come to the well and get water. She still needed to bring her sex life under the control of God's law, and make a commitment to the man she was living with. She had a list of needs she had to meet in the external world. But she had a well within that satisfied her ultimate need for love and life in God. Billy Sunday, the great evangelist, once wrote to the mayor of the city where he was going for a campaign. He asked him to send him the names of citizens in special need of prayer. The mayor sent him the city directory. Everybody is in need of prayer, and everybody always will be, as long as history lasts. Just knowing this need makes it easier to witness to all people.

The Gospel is not, come to Jesus and you will never need to come to the well again; you will never need human love again; you will never need the acceptance of society again; you will never need a job, food, a place to live, and friends again. Not at all! These needs go on for all people, as they did for this woman at the well. The Gospel is, you don't have to look for the meaning of life in all of the wrong places, for you have found it in your relationship to Christ. The meaning of life is found in Jesus, who by His death for your sin has reconciled you to God, and given you eternal life. The good news is, you will be in better condition when you die than you ever

were before you came to Christ, and began to drink from the well within.

Jesus did not scold this woman for her futile search for water to quench her thirst. Nor is it our calling to blast people for their foolish quest to find the fountain of life in all of the externals of the world. Our calling is to witness to a source of water that quenches the thirst for meaning, and sets people free from the slavery to externals. All people have a deep need for a relationship with God. Back in the days of the death of God movement someone said, "Isn't it strange, we've gotten rid of God, and yet something is still missing." There is a thirst in man that can never be quenched until he feels right with God. Even atheists feel this. Bertrand Russell was one of the most famous atheists of this century. Listen to what he wrote, "Even when one feels nearest to other people, something in one seems obstinately to belong to God, and to refuse to enter into any earthy communion-at least that is how I should express it if I thought there was a God. It is odd isn't it? I care passionately for this world and many things and people in it, and yet...what is it all? There must be something more important, one feels, though I don't believe there is."

He didn't even believe in God, but he admitted he had a thirst for God, and a need for God to make sense of life, and to make it complete. Everyone you know and meet has this basic and ultimate need to know God, and to be reconciled to Him. Every need people have is a door by which we can enter into their lives, and point out their greater need. If you want to make the Gospel relevant, make it need centered. Find a need and meet it. The purpose of evangelism is to do what Jesus did with this woman at the well. Appeal to the need for water that satisfy people's thirst, and then point them to the only water that can meet that need, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will be to all who receive Him, The Well Within.

8. THE PROBLEMS IN EVANGELISM Based on John 4:1-26

James McGinley had a woman come forward in one of his meetings, and he took her into the counseling room and shared the Gospel with her, and then he prayed. She then asked him what he thought about a Protestant marrying a Catholic. He said it can often be very difficult for both, and he asked her why she asked him that. She told him that her boyfriend was out in the audience, and that she wanted to leave her husband and two children to marry him, but thought she should get converted first. She wanted Christ to okay her sinful decision, and put His stamp of approval on it, so she would be off the hook. She did not want freedom from her sin, but freedom from the guilt of it.

People want Jesus to save them from the consequences of their sin, but they do not want to be His disciples. They are not looking for a commitment, but just an easy way out. Almost everybody in evangelism can tell stories of people who come forward to be delivered from the messes their sins have created, but who have no intent on becoming followers of Christ. They don't want in on anything, they just want out of something that is a problem. They are like fish who want the bait, but when they see they are hooked and being taken out of their environment, they resist like mad. If they can dive into the reeds and create a slack in the line so they can snap it, they can escape, and that is what they do. They want what they can get out of Christ, but they don't want to be taken captive by Christ.

Fishing is full of problems because the fish have a different agenda than the fishermen, and so it is with fishing for men. We need to face this reality up front, for those who go with the illusion that fish love to be taken out of the water and into the boat will soon

be disillusioned by discovering that sinners often fight to stay in the kingdom of darkness, and resist coming into the kingdom of light. The Christian has to recognize that evangelism has many of the same problems as fishing, and you need to know, not only a lot about bait, but about how to be patient, and how to let the hooked fish run and feel free at times, and other times to keep the tension on. Fishing for men is sometimes as easy as catching fish, and sometimes it is as hard, and we have to be prepared to deal with the problems.

If Jesus would have wanted us to think it was a snap to make disciples, He would not have made it a point to call attention to the problems of evangelism. Problems are a part of life, and there is no escape, even when you are doing what most pleases God. This whole account in John 4 is problem oriented. Jesus was at the well in Samaria because of a problem. He had to get out of Judea because of the opposition of the Pharisees. If He had no problems, He probably would not have been there in the first place. But Jesus never let a problem blind Him to opportunity. He never would have been in the world if it was not for a problem, that men are lost without a Savior.

I. The first problem of evangelism is that we let problems blind us to opportunity.

Most of us go through life thinking that problems are obstacles to our being a witness for Christ. The fact is, most people only come to Christ because of some problem. Problems are what open people up to hear the good news. They only feel the need of it when they have a problem. Your problems should make you sensitive to the problems of others. Every interruption and foul up in our life's plan should open your eyes to see it as an opportunity to touch another life.

Jesus was being rejected by the leaders of Israel, and now He sees a woman at the well at noon, and He know she is a woman who has suffered much rejection. He has the same problem she has. He has been rejected by the people that should love Him, and she has been rejected by five husbands. A common problem has brought these two together. If Jesus would not have been rejected He would not be in Samaria at this point, and if she had not been rejected by her husbands, she would never have been here at noon. She would have come with the other women in the cool of the day.

Problems are not always barriers to evangelism, but are often the reason there is an opportunity for evangelism. We need to stop seeing problems as only problems, and see them as opportunities. The early Christians did this, there is a fascinating parallel to John 4 in Acts 8. There was great persecution in Jerusalem, and many of the Christians had to flee. Acts 8:1 says the Apostles stayed in Jerusalem, but the lay people scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Verse 4 says they preached the Word wherever they went, and then it tells of how Philip went to Samaria and had a great ministry. It is almost a rerun of John 4. The problems of Christians led to great blessing and evangelism for the people in Samaria.

The lesson is clear. People with an eye for evangelism do not see problems in their lives, or the lives of others, as obstacles, but as opportunities. We need to see every problem as a door of opportunity to touch some life that we could never touch had the problem not taken us in a new direction that led us to cross their path. Jim Spady, a missionary in Nigaria, was interrupted one day by shouts that an elephant was coming. It was rare in those parts, and so everybody, including the police, were running to see. It was learned that the beast had escaped from a reserve area the day before. And it had killed a man. The police began to fire and it ran at them, and Jim found himself up a tree with many others.

The police lined up and fired together, and the elephant dropped. One of the policeman was injured in this dangerous situation, and was taken to the hospital. The missionary visited him, gave him a New Testament, and to make a long story short, this Muslim policeman came to Christ.

Had this problem, that brought them together, ever happen, there's not likely any way he would have witnessed to this man. The problem, however, provided a way by which they could share, and because he used the problem to this end, he won a man to Christ. So it was with the woman at the well, and so it is with millions who come into the kingdom of God because of Christians who see problems as opportunities, rather than obstacles. Man an injured Christian has ended up in the hospital where they witnessed to others, and turned mutual tragedy into mutual triumph.

If you have got a problem, be aware of the people it may bring you into contact with, and be alert to how your problem may be the providence of God in opening up a door of opportunity to witness. If you see the problems of others, do not only sympathize, but look for a chance to evangelize. This does not mean you pounce on others when they are down, and force yourself on them. It means you graciously open the door to help them see their greatest need is Christ. Every problem in life can be a fragment of the will of God, and a light beckoning us to go in a certain direction, and find in it an opportunity to touch some life for Christ.

II. The second problem in evangelism is blindness of the prospects for evangelism.

People can die of thirst with the water of life at their finger tips. Jesus said to the Samaria woman in verse 10, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is who asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water." Jesus is

saying, everything you have ever searched for is yours for the asking, but in your ignorance, you blindly walk right pass the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The providence of God has presented you with the winning ticket to the greatest prize ever given-eternal life. But you are so hung up on this Jew-Samaritan prejudice, you are letting it slip through your fingers.

She didn't know she was conversing with the Messiah, and people just do not realize that when they hear the Gospel they are being offered the greatest opportunity of their life. Fortunately, Jesus did not just say, you are right lady, I as a Jew should not be asking a Samaritan for a drink, and then just let her go away. The story would be one of the great tragedy of the New Testament, just like that of the rich young ruler, had that been the case. Jesus does not let her go, but keeps the conversation going until the light breaks through her darkness. If people are blind to the value of what can be theirs in Christ, you have to be persistent in your presentation if you expect to see them enlightened.

If you are going to let the blindness, the stubbornness, and the prejudice of the sinner cause you to give up, you will not pursue many people for very long. Your chances of being an effective fisher of men will be about as slim as your chance of catching fish by their leaping into your boat. It is because sinners are blind to the wealth you offer them, that you need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Because of the problem of blindness, and all sorts of negative feelings on the part of the lost, the Christlike witness needs to develop tact. Tact is the discernment of what is appropriate to do so say in dealing with others. It is the ability to be delicate and sympathetic, even in difficult situations, so as not to give offense.

No where do we see Jesus as the Master of tact more effective than here in John 4. He knew this woman's past, and her present

violation of the law of God. He could have taken a totally different approach to her. He could have said, don't you dare question my asking you for a drink, and pretend that you are somehow bound by such drivel as the prejudice between Jew and Samaritan. You care nothing for the law of God, and you defy it by your life style, which deserves more severe judgment than the isolation you receive from your community. You deserve the flames of hell where there will be no well, and not a drop of water to cool the tongue of the likes of you.

This approach would not be theologically incorrect, but by no stretch of the imagination would it be good news. We need to constantly remind ourselves of the distinction between the Gospel and judgment. The Gospel is good news, and judgment is the result of rejecting the good news. Too often Christians what to get right to part 2, and skip past the good news, and just pronounce judgment on the sinner. This was not the approach of Jesus. He offered the sinner good news first, and only after the light was rejected, did He warn of judgment. Judgment is not the Gospel.

This woman had already been through much judgment, as she had likely been through 5 divorces. She had been proclaimed an unfit wife, and suffered, who knows how much, public condemnation. A person like her would be very sensitive to criticism. Jesus knew that, and so He is extremely tactful with her. This is a key element in overcoming the problem of the blindness of the sinner in evangelism. Jesus approaches her in a spirit of need and humility, and not a spirit of superiority. In human warfare you want your opponent to think you are stronger than they are, and so you make a show of force to impress them with your superiority. In spiritual warfare, where you are trying to invade the kingdom of darkness and set its captives free, you reverse that psychology. You come in weakness and try to make your opponent feel superior, or at least, equal to you.

You do not intimidate, but you eliminate any reason for provoking their defenses. You do not want their guard to go up, but to come down, and the only way to do this is to approach them without an air of superiority, but one of humility. Jesus said, I need your help to get a drink. He did not say I am the Messiah woman, get me a drink! He put her in control by asking her to help Him. She could respond to His need, or reject it. She was not threatened by Jesus, for she was in a position to threaten Him, and say get your own drink.

So often we are afraid to witness because we feel we have to be superior to those we witness to. In reality, we will be effective only when we make them feel equal to us, or even superior. This is a New Testament principle. Listen to Paul in Phil. 2:3, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." Anybody can do this if they will, but we tend to be too proud to do it. But in the context, Paul says Jesus is the best example of this, and we see it here in John 4. J. C. Macaulay in his book Personal Evangelism wrote, "We must rid our minds of any sense of superiority. If that exists, it cannot be hidden, and we are defeated before we begin. No man is going to accept our superiority, not even the derelict on skid row."

He tells of Evangeline Booth, of Salvation Army Fame. She always looked for something in others she could affirm, even if it was only that they were superior to her in their knowledge of sin. That is why she won so many to Christ. We tend to think we have to impress the sinner with how great we are, when in reality, we have to impress them with how valuable they are. Jesus said to this woman, if you would have asked I would have given you living water. This is pure grace and unconditional love, as you will find it no where in the Bible more clearly. Jesus did not say to her, if you give up the man you are living with, and beg for mercy, I'll see what I can do to reduce your judgment. He said to her, eternal life is just

waiting for you for the asking. There is not one iota of law here. This is grace as pure as it comes.

This is how Jesus penetrates the blindness of the sinner. He does not treat her like dirt as the Pharisees did, nor does he come demanding all kinds of reformatations before they qualify for His love. He comes saying you are somebody, somebody I even need, and you are so loved and valued that I will give you all that anyone could ever hope to receive to quench their thirst for love and meaning, and it is yours just for the asking.

It is a strange paradox that the saint and the sinner have some of the same fears. The saint is fearful because they feel weak and inadequate, and so full of need themselves. They are afraid to be exposed as needy people, and so they hold back in their witness, lest it be thrown in their face-physician heal thyself. The sinner, on the other hand, is also fearful of being exposed. They do not want to have their sin and failure known. They want to put on a good front so as to be acceptable.

Jesus is the example of how to solve both of these problems. First of all, the Christian needs to stop pretending they are not needy. He had needs, and did not hesitate to let it be known to the prospect. Keith Miller made a great breakthrough in the Christian world when he demanded that Christians quit playing the game of pretending they do not have problems. The common testimony use to be, I had a life of problems, and then I accepted Jesus, and now my problems are gone. He challenged that fantasy with the facts. He had plenty of problems before his conversion, but he also had plenty of them after, and he found this to be true of the Christians he knew. Assurance of eternal life in Christ did not solve all his problems. He was still selfish, proud, resentful, lustful, and all sorts of sub-Christian things. He was saved, and he loved the Lord, but he was far from problem free.

What he discovered was that this was not a liability but an asset in witnessing, for it was his problems that enabled the lost to identify with him, and have hope that they could still be saved, even with a host of problems. Not many people can identify with a problem free life, and so don't pretend you have one. Let your problems and needs be evident, and you will be a more effective witness. That is what Jesus did with the woman at the well.

The second thing He did was to help her overcome her pride. Pride is what makes us hide our problems. Jesus let her know very tactfully that He knew all about her shady past, and sordid present, and yet He did not reject her. He had already told her He was willing to give her living water. He had already made it clear she was a candidate to receive His best gift. You and I cannot know people as Jesus knew this woman. We do not know their hurts and how much rejection they have experienced, and how much failure they have survived. But we can still let people know that even if we knew the worst about them, our goal is not to hurt, but to help them, and heal them.

This woman was damaged goods, but Jesus made it clear she had nothing to fear, for even though He knew the worst side of her story, He intended to offer her a solution to her deepest need. The best counselors; the best Christian friends; the best soul-winners, and disciple makers, are people who can convey to sinners the message that nothing I can know about you will alter my determination to help you find God's best. The best and most loving Christian witness is one where you acknowledge problems, and use them to so relate to the lost, that they become an aid to bringing the lost to finding a solution to their greatest problem-the living water, the Lord Jesus Christ.

9. ONE IS ENOUGH Based on John 4:1-30

It is hard to believe, but one man determined how we as Americans pronounce and spell words. When we began as a new and independent nation, Noah Webster thought it was only right that we stop be a copy of the English, and develop our own original ways of spelling words. Andrew Jackson said, "It is a mighty poor mind that can't think of more than one way to spell a word." This was no joke, but was taken seriously by our forefathers, and this nation began with an unbelievable variety of words spellings. It was a sort of creative phonetics in which each writer sounded out the word, and used the letters that best suited his pronunciation. One could find general spelled jinerll, and February as febrewarie.

Webster said that we need some rules for unity, and to inspire pride in our own national language. In 1803 he gave up journalism and teaching, and he shut himself away from the world for 3 years. He then published a dictionary that had 5 thousand words that had never been in any dictionary. Then he spent the next 20 years laboring on his larger work An American Dictionary Of The English Language. He published it in 1828, and it is the grandfather of all American dictionaries.

If you wonder why you write theater rather than theatre, it is because of Webster. He threw out most of our old endings, and he made words like honor just end in or rather in our. The point is, one man determined to make the American language unique, and distinct from old English, accomplished that goal, and now for over 150 years millions of people speak and write in conformity to this one man's choice. Words are now called right or wrong because of this one man's decision as to how they should be spelled.

True stories of one man crusaders to change the lives of millions are a fascinating part of history. If you read the history of Alaska,

you will discover that one Presbyterian missionary by the name of Sheldon Jackson made Alaska what it is. He built schools and churches all over Alaska. He single handedly hounded the U. S. Congress until they passed bills to fund education for the natives. Congress appointed him U. S. Commissioner of Education for Alaska. He became a one man army to save Alaskans from the suffering due to ignorance. There were fleets of exploiters who recklessly slaughtered their game, and many Eskimos were dying. Jackson took it upon himself to raise money from the churches in the United States.

Jackson brought 16 reindeer from Liberia, and by this move he made the Eskimos self-supporting, and sure of food. It was so successful that congress gave him money to get more, and the whole history of the Eskimos was changed and made secure. We can't list the many other things this one man did for a people he dearly loved, but he proves again that one man is enough to make a world changing difference.

One woman is also enough, as we see in the case of our text. It is amazing that in a male dominated world, like the New Testament times, that a woman should be revealed to be the most successful witness Jesus ever had in His lifetime. We have no record of anyone, not even any of the 12, or even of all of them put together, ever becoming such fruitful witnesses for Christ, as we see in this woman at the well. Not only is she a woman, which was two strikes against her already, but she was something less than honorable. She was the kind of woman who would be read about more in a Hollywood gossip column than in the society page of the temple news letter. She had been with 5 husbands, and was then living with a man she was not married to.

This woman was no quitter, that is for sure, but none the less she was not the kind of woman you would like to be the chairperson of

your evangelism committee. Jesus did not, of course, make her anything. He just convinced her that He was the Messiah, and she went back to town and became a powerful witness. So much so that we read in verse 39, "Many Samaritans from that city believed in Him because of the woman's testimony." We do not know how many this many was, but Jesus in verse 35 said to His disciples, as the crowd came out of the city to see for themselves, "I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest." You get a picture of a vast crowd of people coming with their white robes flowing like grain in the wind, and Jesus says that they are ripe for harvest.

Verse 41 says that many more believed in Him because of His word. The woman's testimony got them there, but their personal contact with Jesus convinced them He was the Savior of the world. Do you know of any other witness for Christ in His earthly ministry that had such an impact on people. One woman changed the history of her people, and she brought them into the kingdom of God. They were outcasts in Israel, but in the kingdom of God they were in on the ground floor because of one woman. It was not because of the 12 who were more concerned about lunch than lost Samaritans, but because of one very lost Samaritan woman who was found by Christ, and who was a motivator of others. She was only one, but one was enough.

Jesus never left the one for a crowd. He did not say to Nicodemus, who came alone at night, "Join the crowd in the morning, and I'll answer your questions with the group." He never said to Zaccheus, "Come down and join the crowd." Jesus, instead, said, "Come down, for I am going to your house to deal with you one on one." Jesus left the crowd for the one, but never the one for the crowd. By His life and teaching Jesus made it clear that one is enough. He said the good shepherd will leave the 99, and go out after the one. One is of enough value to take risks for, and to put

forth great effort to save.

Sometimes our biggest problem is that we think too big. We want to save the world, and this is very noble, but it is an ineffective goal. We need to narrow our scope, and devote our lives and resources to reaching just the one. If you have two tennis balls coming at you, and you try to get both, you usually miss both. You need to concentrate on the one. If several ducks or pheasants fly up in front of you, and you try to shoot them all, you will likely get none of them. You need to focus on just one. This is true in the world of evangelism as well.

Mr. Vincent was a wealthy retired planter in Dublin, Ireland. He went to hear the great D. L. Moody, and he received Jesus Christ as his Savior. He had a friend by the name of Edward Studd, and he invited him to come to hear Moody. That is all we know about Mr. Vincent. He was a new Christian who invited one friend to hear Moody. That is not much of biography is it? Wrong! His concern for this one man changed the history of millions. Edward Studd came to Christ because of his friends persuasion, and though he only lived 2 years after his conversion he touched the life of his son Charles Studd. Charles became one of the great cricket players of all time in England.

Charles had all the glory and fame of a celebrity. He was not an active Christian, but he lived for the pleasures of the world. But when his brother nearly died he was made to realize the vanity of worldly pleasure. He was revived in his faith, and in his desire to bring others to Christ. He had great opportunity, for he was popular with everyone because of his skill in cricket. His friends were willing to listen to his testimony and respond. He wrote, "I cannot tell you what joy it gave me to bring the first soul to the Lord Jesus Christ. I have tasted almost all the pleasures that this world can give...but I can tell you that those pleasures were as

nothing compared to the joy that the saving of that one soul gave me."

He decided to give up his fame and devote his life to preaching the Gospel. As the leading cricket player in England, his fame opened up doors, and he got good press. Thousands of students flocked to hear him. One of them was F. B. Meyer who was so turned on for Christ that he became one of the great preachers of English history. I have read many of his books that have touched millions. He was just one who was touched by C. T. Studd, and we could follow that road to see where his influence went, but we need to press on, for there is no end to the possible detours.

Studd inherited a fortune from his father, but he gave it all away. He gave the money that enables D. L. Moody to start the Moody Bible Institute. He gave to help George Muller in his famous orphanage work, and to General Booth to strengthen his Salvation Army. His gifts alone changed the history of millions. He went off to China where he again reached thousands, bad health brought him back to England where he was still popular, and revival broke out in the universities where he spoke. The Student Volunteer Movement was started, which has had world wide impact ever since. Great movements were everywhere around him, but he still focused on the need for one on one, and the idea of each one reach one. He said, "I'd sooner save one soul than be Queen Victoria." Nobody else can be the Queen, but everybody else can be one who reaches one for Christ.

C. T. Studd went on to become one of the most famous and successful missionaries in China, in India, and in Africa. There will be a multitude out of many nations singing the praise of Christ for all eternity because of this one man. And remember where it all began. Mr. Vincent had one friend he wanted to see saved, and by his efforts to touch this one man he changed time and eternity for

multiplied millions.

Does it make any difference if we reach only one person? Satan deceives us, and he makes us think it is no big deal. The world will not be changed by one person. What difference does it make if you and I help one person to come to Christ? It seems so insignificant, and so we neglect the most important goal of our lives. We hope that some day we will be able to do something big for God, but we see nothing big in trying to touch one person. The fact is, there is probably nothing we can do more important than reaching that one person for Christ.

One of the greatest evangelists in the history of England and America was Gypsy Smith. He may never have been a part of Christian history had a working man neighbor not helped his father become a Christian. We do not even know this man's name, but had he not sought to win this one neighbor, tens of thousands of names now in the Lamb's book of life may never have been touched for Christ. One is enough to motivate us if we see the importance of one. But since one is the smallest number we are psychologically brain washed into to thinking that one is not enough, and it is not a worthy goal.

A young boy asked his father, "What is a millionaire?" The father said, "Well, its somebody who has a million dollars." The little guy thought for a moment, and then said proudly, "Well, I'm a oneaire." He may have been proud of his one dollar, but being a oneaire does not impress us. In some circles even one million is a basis for pity. In our materialistic culture it is almost an embarrassment to admit that you only have one car, or one house, or one of anything. One is just not an impressive number in a world where abundance of possessions is the measure of success. But Christians so easily take their eyes off Jesus and His love for the individual. They let the culture be their value guide, and the result

is that even the best of Christians fail to feel the real value of one.

When Robert Moffat, the Scottish missionary to South Africa, came back to England to recruit helpers he was greeted by a cold British winter. Only a small group braved the elements to come to church, and he was disturbed that most of them were old ladies. All the young people were safely sheltered in their homes while the old ladies were risking their lives to go hear a missionary. Dr. Moffat was discouraged, and who wouldn't be? There was no one there to go to the mission field, and so it was a total flop. That is except for the fact that there was a small boy there who was pumping the bellows for the organ. He was so touched by the call to missions that he went on to school, and he got a degree in medicine.

He spent the rest of his life ministering to the unreached tribes of Africa. His name was David Livingston. Only one little boy, and that was all the fruit there was for Moffat, but that one little boy he touched made an impact on Africa beyond anything he could ever dream. Never say only one with a tone of pessimism, for so often in history one is enough. In the light of what God has done in history through one person time and time again, it should be considered swearing for a Christian to ever say in an negative way-only one.

Billy Graham preached a sermon titled All It Takes Is One back in 1976. In it he traces God's plan through the ages, and he demonstrates that for God one is always enough. One righteous man by the name of Noah was all he needed to save the human race. One righteous man by the name of Abraham was all he needed to start a new nation, and a special people. All he needed was one righteous man by the name of Moses to lead His people out of Egypt. On and on the record goes through the terrible time of the Judges. One Gideon, or one Deborah was all God needed to save His people. Right down to that single seed of Abraham-that One of all ones; that single son of David by which God saved the world, the

Lord Jesus Christ-one has been enough.

G. K. Chesterton, that one in million authors, wrote a poem in which he expressed the mind of the many single heroes of history.

**Though giant reign put out the sun,
Here stand I for a sign.
Though Earth be filled with waters dark,
My cup is filled with wine.
Tell to the trembling priests
Under the deluge rod, that here
One Nameless, tattered, broken man
Stood up and drank to God.**

This poem fits Martin Luther perfectly, for he stood alone against the majority for the cause of Christ, and he changed all of history by doing so. Somebody years ago wrote, "I asked why doesn't somebody do something? Then I realized I was somebody." Everybody is somebody because they are one, and one is enough to make a world of difference.

God, of course, is One. The essence of Jewish theology is Deut. 6:4, "Here, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." The essence of Christian theology is that there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. There is only one way to God, and He is that one way. One way is enough, for it is a way that is open to all. One is enough is a very accurate theological statement. One is enough to hurt the whole of mankind, or one is enough to heal the whole of mankind. Paul in Rom. 5:19 sums up his whole argument, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous." All it takes is one to lose or save a world. One is enough to open the door of heaven or hell.

It is true that John Quincy Adams and Rutherford B. Hayes both became president of the United States by one vote. But it is also true that one vote gave Adolf Hitler leadership of the Nazi party in 1923. One is enough for great good or great evil. One traitor by the name of Judas blots the family of the Apostles. One log can create a massive log jam, and one uncooperative spirit can hold up the flow of the Spirit in the life of a church. One is a powerful number for both the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light.

The king of France sent 6 coffee plants to Brazil, but only one of them survived the violent storm. But from that one single plant came the vast coffee plantations that fill half the coffee cups of the world. Cups of blessings overflow in this world as well because one is enough. Channing Pollock in his book One Man Power develops the theme that everything of importance in the world was begun by one man, or by one woman. Trace every victory over evil in this life back to its beginning, and you will discover one man or one woman who was the key to that victory.

In Acts 8 Philip is having a revival in Samaria, but God calls him to leave the crowds and go to the desert to share the Gospel with one Ethiopian Eunuch. Only one foreigner, and yet God calls him away from the crowds for that one guy. He responds to the Gospel, and he goes back to Ethiopia, and the church there to this day traces its origin back to this one man. God did not save a group of Ethiopians, but only one, for one was enough to change the history of that land.

I trust you get the point, for there is not two or three points, for this is a one point message, for one is enough. The call of God to you and to me is not to change the world, or to change our country, or state, or city. The call of God is to reach one. Not only is this a worthy goal, and one you are more likely to achieve, it is by means

of reaching one that you are most likely to change the world.

**One can blow it;
One can bless it.
One can make or
One can mess it.
One has power-one has might;
One can turn the dark to light.
One is more than a part.
One is a whole.
One can heal your aching heart;
One can even save your soul.
One is all we are for sure,
And being one can seem so tough,
But in this truth we have a cure-
One is enough.**

Author unknown

"O for a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemer's praise," we sing, but the fact is, God only gave us one tongue because one is enough. The sins of men are so varied and multiplied, but we have only one Savior, and one mediator between God and man, because one is enough. There were 12 Apostles, but God chose Paul to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. The Gentile world was far more vast and varied than the Jewish world, but God chose only one, because one was enough. Paul recognized this in his own life when he said, "This one thing I do." We would all be better Christians, and we would all accomplish more for the glory of Christ if we would learn to focus on one thing, and recognize this basic truth that one is enough.

10. THE GREATEST FREEDOM Based on John 8:31-36

The battle for freedom of some kind is being fought around the world. Here in our own land there are constant battles for freedom of religion. Minorities all over the world are fighting for freedom. Years ago Heine said, "Freedom is the new religion; the religion of our time." The possibility of freedom is becoming known to all people because the world has gotten smaller and people everywhere can see that some other people have attained it, and they want it also. Once they have seen what can be, what is becomes intolerable to them. The words of Patrick Henry in 1775 expressed the feelings and minds of millions. He concluded his address by saying, "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, almighty powers! I know not what cause others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death." Moore puts the same idea into poetry.

**Better to dwell in freedom's hall,
With a cold damp floor and moldering wall
Then bow the head and bend the knee
In the proudest palace of slavery.**

Men everywhere are recognizing they were made to be free, and they want to be able to sing with the patriots of America, "My country tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing." They want to boast with the patriots of Columbia, "And ne'er shall the sons of Columbia be slaves, while the earth bears a plant, or the sea rolls its waves. Men want to be free and stay free. Lord Acton said, "History is the record of man's struggle to be free." What is of interest for us to notice is that in this struggle men are concentrating on only the lesser of two kinds of freedom. There is a freedom of external restraint, and a freedom from internal bondage. Man is giving himself to battle for the first, but is hardly even aware of the second kind of freedom.

It is the second kind of freedom that brought the Son of God into the world to become the great Emancipator and Liberator from sin. Jesus would not think lightly of political freedom, but this was not the freedom He came to give. The Apostles would not be indifferent to man's political oppression, but this was not the message they proclaimed. Man is in a greater bondage than that which man can make. He is in bondage to sin, Satan, and his own fallen nature. What can set him free from these tyrants is the greatest freedom. Jesus stands alone as the one who is able to lead men into this greatest of freedoms. This means the church is the most relevant body of people in the world, for it alone has the answer for escape from the bondage to sin. We want to look at three aspects of Christ's teaching concerning this greatest freedom.

I. THE CONDITION NECESSARY TO RECEIVE IT. v. 31

Jesus had been speaking to a crowd of Jews who were not His followers, but as He was speaking some of them believed, and so He addresses those who had just made their declaration of independence from the crowd, and Jewish leaders. Jesus made it clear to them that it is not the start that counts, but the continuing. Anybody can make a commitment on the basis of a good sermon or idea shared, but the real test comes when you continue on and discover truths that you didn't agree with at the time of the commitment. This happens to so many people. They get started, but they do not keep going. Israel was happy to leave Egypt and escape their bondage. They were off to a wonderful start, but it didn't last, for soon they were longing to return.

Someone has said that if all the Christians who looked back to their sinful life with a sense of longing to return were turned into salt, like Lot's wife who looked back, there would be a great many more pillars in the church, and they would be literally the salt of the earth. Jesus came to make us free, and free indeed, but if we do not

fulfill the condition of pressing on, and of continuing in His Word, we will forfeit the goal. Jesus says that only those who continue in His Word are true disciples. A disciple is defined here as one who continues in the Word of Christ.

He is no true follower of Christ who only follows when the Master walks where the follower wants to go. He is no true believer who only believes when the Lord teaches what he agrees with. Jesus did not encourage any superficial discipleship. He told those who believed right on the spot that when they made a commitment to Him it was absolute and permanent, for it was of no value. Calvin said, "Here Christ warns them in the first place, that it is not enough for anyone to have begun well, if there progress to the end does not correspond with it." Just as man's bondage to sin is due to his continuance in sinning, so also our hope for freedom from those powers depends on continuing in the Word of Christ. Jesus was saying this to believers. The distinction between one who is a believer and a disciple is that a believer is one who has begun, but a disciple is one who has continued. Discipleship is the condition for receiving the greatest freedom.

II. THE CAUSE OF RECEIVING IT. v. 32

Discipleship, which has been defined as continuing in the Word of Christ, leads to the discernment of the truth. Jesus says that if you continue in it you shall know the truth. It is not maybe, but you shall know it. It is a promise, and it will be the knowing of the truth that shall liberate you. The greater the discernment of truth, the greater the freedom. All ignorance is bondage, but none if more so costly as the ignorance of the truth of Christ. Men will go to the battlefield to kill and be killed for national freedom, but they will not take the time to study the Word of Christ that they might gain and maintain the greater freedom from the bondage to sin. All other freedoms lose their value to the degree that one does not

possess this greatest freedom.

J. C. Ryle said, "All political liberty, however useful for many purposes is worthless, unless we are children of God, and heirs of the kingdom by faith in Jesus." The problem is that one cannot even discern this truth unless he fulfills the condition and continues in the Word. It is only by continuing that one can find the truth, and only as one has the truth can he be free. Truth is the battering ram by which we smash down the gate of ignorance and escape into the light from the dungeon of error. Truth is what sets us free because it is only by knowing the truth that we even become aware that we are in bondage. The Jews to whom Jesus talked were not even aware of their bondage. Like men today they considered only the external factors and never thought of the tyranny within. They were surprised and probably indignant at his statement that the truth would set them free.

In verse 33 they reply that they are Abraham's seed and never were in bondage to anyone. Jesus did not argue their claim about never being in bondage even though he could have easily won the debate, for they had been in bondage to Egypt, Babylon, and now to the Romans. Jesus is not concern about winning an argument about external bondage. He is concerned about the worst bondage and the greatest tyrant that man faces. So in verse 34 Jesus comes out with a clear statement that He is talking about spiritual bondage and slavery to sin. A good many Americans would be offended just as these proud Jews were, if you told them they were slaves and not free. Many who sing of liberty are in greater bondage than they realize. They do not know that they are captives of their sinful nature. It is the job of the church to help those who live in our great land of liberty to realize that they still need to be set free through the truth of Christ. No person is truly free until they have found the greatest liberty in Jesus.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF RECEIVING IT. v. 35-36

On the 4th of July, 1779 this proclamation was made: "This day being the anniversary of our glorious independence, will be commemorated by the firing of 13 cannon from West Point at 1 o'clock P. M. The Commander-in-Chief thinks proper to grant a general pardon to all prisoners in the army, under sentence of death. They are to be released from confinement accordingly." Certainly it would be that these men so pardoned would be the happiest men alive, for what greater freedom could be had than that which came to them as a consequence of national freedom? We already know the answer, but Jesus in verse 36 stresses it. If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. That is to be truly and really free.

All other freedoms, however good, are only partial, and they do not make one free indeed. These men pardon from prison gained freedom from the external restraint, but it would not release them from their internal bondage. A greater boon it would have been if they had been given the Gospel of Christ, for if they would have received Him they would have become free indeed. This was the case with Madam Guyon who spent 10 years in French prisons, but who had such inner freedom that she could write,

**My cage confines me round;
Aboard I cannot fly;
But though my wing is closely bound,
My heart is at liberty.
My prison walls cannot control
The flight, the freedom of the soul.
Oh, it is good to soar
These bolts and bars above,
To Him whose purpose I adore,
Whose providence I love.**

**And in thy mighty will to find
The joy, the freedom of the mind.**

Jesus says in verse 35 that a servant does not abide forever in the house, but only the son does. All men are still slaves, no matter how many freedoms they have, if they have not found freedom in Christ. Knowing this will not make the Christian less patriotic and less thankful for the great liberties of our land, but it will keep him from sentimentalism, and idolatry of the state. It will make him conscience that when the state has done all it can, it has not begun to do the work that only the church can do by the power of the truth in Christ. This truth when received leads to the greatest freedom.

11. FATE OR FREEDOM Based on John 8:31-38

One of the best known stories of the ancient Greeks is that of Oedipus Rex by Sophocles. The story is had an influence on both theology and psychology. Briefly the story is this: A child is born into a royal family, and the oracle brings bad news, for he says the child is destined to murder his father and marry his mother. A gruesome future which the parents with good reason did not care to anticipate, and so to defeat the decree of fate the king ordered the child to be destroyed by exposure on the mountain side. This, of course, would have solved the problem, but the servant in charge of abandoning the child had a tender heart. He gave the child to some passing pilgrims, and they carried it to a far country where a royal family adopted him.

When he grew up he learned of what the oracle said of his destiny, and thinking he was living with his real parents he fled

from the palace so as to defeat the decree of fate. He went into a far country which happened to be the land of his birth, and there he met the king and queen. Not knowing they were his parents, he fell in love with the queen and killed the king, and took her as his wife. Only after all had been fulfilled did he learn that in spite of all the efforts to outwit the decree of fate, he had fulfilled it to the letter.

This ancient story is a classic example of the world view called fatalism. This is a philosophy of life that is wide spread and claims the allegiance of many millions. It was made popular by the song that said, "Whatever will be will be." The poet has stated it like this:

All that is was ever bound to be;
Since grim, eternal laws are beings bind;
And both the riddle and the answer find,
Both the pain and peace decree,
For plain within the Book of Destiny,
Is written all the journey of mankind,
Inexorably to the end, and blind,
And helpless puppets playing parts are we.

Author unknown

This view of life that all is determined may not appeal to you, but do not think you can dismiss it as a obvious falsehood. There have been very few ideas more influential in history than determinism. The evidence in its favor is so massive that there is no way to prove it wrong, and those who believe in free will must do so ultimately on faith. Faith in our consciousness of freedom, and more important, faith in the words of Christ that they have meaning when he says, "The truth shall make us free," and, "If the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed."

Before we consider our freedom in Christ, however, we consider

some of the support for the concept that all of life is determined for us, and the only freedom we have is the freedom to do what fate has decreed for us to do. Most, if not all, primitive societies were based on determinism. In fact, most of their life was largely determined. Their attitude was, what has been done must continue to be done, for it is evil to break precedent and tradition, and so all customs became law, and they determined how each generation had to act. These societies became fixed, and since they allow no change they see no progress, and so they are determined to stay primitive. The difference in the progress of the Western world, in contrast to that of the East, is in part due to belief in free will in the West.

Oriental life was controlled for centuries by a practical and theoretical determinism. Except for a modified concept of free will by Confucius, most of the major religions of the East are based on determinism. You have Hinduism, Buddhism, and Mohammedanism. Mohamet declared, "When God creates a servant for heaven, He causes him to go in the way of heaven until he dies, after which He take him to heaven; and when He creates a servant for the fires of hell, then He causes him to go in the way of those destined for hell, until he dies, after which He takes him to hell." The Koran says, "Everyman's fate hath God fastened about his neck." One's earthly and eternal destiny is all cut and dried, therefore, and so there is nothing to do but wait and see, for one is saved, not by faith alone, but by fate alone.

Any initiative is futile if this is true, for the present life and the future is already set, and only a fool would work hard to get rich if it is already determined, for he will be rich if he does nothing. A Hindu states, "The possessions which the Creator has written upon our forehead, be it small or great, we shall surely attain even in the waste desert, and more than this we can never get, though we be on Mount Muru, who sides are packed with gold." Imagine trying to explain this philosophy to those in the California gold rush.

Lest we be deceived into thinking determinism is a peculiarity of the Orientals only, we need to consider the fact that it has been held by many in the traditions of the Western world. Great men like Homer, Socrates, Virgil, and Cicero were determinists. Many well known philosophers are also in this category. You have Bacon, Hume, Priestly, Spencer, Hobbs, Voltaire, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Schopenhower, and Nietzsche. It is interesting to see how many of these were anti-Christian in their thinking, but no strong conclusion can be drawn from this fact since many of the most outstanding men of God have also been determinists. You have great men like Jerome, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas in the Catholic tradition, and Luther, Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards in the Protestant tradition.

In other words, there is no way we can draw a line and say the unbelievers were on one side, and Christians were on the other. For you have pagans, atheists, and Christians united on each side in this great intellectual battle. Is man free, or is he a victim of a pre-determined fate? Those who say all is determined not only have the support of so many great minds, but they are backed up by science. We cannot go into all of the arguments of physics, biology, and sociology to support determinism, but we can state the basic principle which is a foundation for all science, and that is the uniformity of nature. Every effect has a cause, and so everything in reality can be explained by the mechanical process of cause and effect. Everything you do is the result of previous causes, and so your will does not enter the picture at all. That is just an illusion that makes you think you choose, but your choice has already been determined.

The skeptic, the libertine, and evil men in general endorse this philosophy, for it is an escape from personal responsibility. Fate is a convenient escape hatch for those who do not want to be bothered with conscience, responsibility, and judgment. This abuse of the

idea of determinism is no proof that it is not true, for many with strong ethical systems also believe it. The facts of history tell us that in spite of all the evil consequences that can result from a belief in determinism, one need not be lead to these evil results, and so one can be a Christian and be fully convinced that all is determined, for there is a great deal of Scripture on which such a conviction can be based. The believer in free will cannot dismiss the evidence, for it is vast, and if he is honest he must admit it. However, as the poet has put it-

**Tis written on paradise's gate,
Woe to the dupe that yields to fate.**

However much truth there is to determinism it cannot be the whole truth. One does not need to reject it as part of the truth in order to believe in free will. Dr. H. H. Horne in his book, Freewill and Human Responsibility says, "As a philosophy of life determinism has this disadvantage, that it has room for no freedom at all; whereas, on the other hand, freedom has this advantage, that it does have room for much determinism. For determinism holds that all acts are determined, while freedom holds only that some acts are free." One who believes in free will can accept all of the obvious truth in determinism; yet at the same time recognize that it is not the total picture, but that some aspects of reality demand a belief in freedom.

Jesus in our text I believe deals with both aspects of this debate. He reveals that He was free, but recognized that much of life is determined. He says in verse 34 that those who commit sin are slaves to sin. A slave is not free, but is bound. The unbeliever may think he is free, but he is just carrying out the orders of his depraved nature that determines his course of action. He is a victim of his nature. His will is no more free to choose to be holy and righteous than it is free to choose to fly or walk through a brick

wall. Any freedom he has is limited to his capacity, and he does not have the capacity to do anything but follow his master, which is sin.

But Jesus has said, the truth shall make you free, and He says if the Son makes you free you will be free indeed. Now if this means anything, it means even if the life of the non-Christian is totally determined, this is not so for the Christian. He is made free in Christ, and it can be said that whenever a Christian does what is not God's will he is fully responsible, for he could have done other than what he did. The Christian has a free will in that he is not bound to follow the forces of either heredity or environment, but can overcome these and choose to act even contrary to them if God so wills. This is really the whole issue in the debate of determinism and free will. Could a person have done something different from what they did do? If not, and all is determined, then it is foolish to get upset to blame them, or even to hold them responsible, for if they are mere puppets of fate, and nothing could possibly be any different than it was, you can only accept it with stoic like indifference.

This is the philosophy behind letting so many criminals go free. They were victims of fate and did only what they had to do, so why make it any tougher on them? After all, fate has made it rough enough. However much truth there might be behind that thinking, it is not the whole picture. We cannot debate about the non-Christian at this point, but must look at what is a certain exception to determinism, and that is the Christ-led, Spirit-filled believer. The New Testament is filled with statements to the effect that in Christ we are free, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty, and we are to stand firm in the freedom where with Christ has made us free. The Christian is fully responsible for his conduct, for he is a free agent restored to the position of Adam who had a free will. Calvin and other determinists admit that Adam had a free will.

Our race, our eyes, our hair color, the length of our nose, and a thousand other things about us have been determined, and our will has no choice in these matters. But when it comes to obedience to God's will we have the capacity to do so, and therefore, the responsibility of doing so. God asks nothing of us but what we can do. If we don't do it, it is our fault. Emerson said, "Tis weak and vicious people who cast the blame on fate." Even Seneca, the pagan said, "No one is made guilty by fate." If we choose to disobey, then the consequences are no longer a matter of choice, but are determined. So also, if we choose to obey, the consequences are determined by God. But the decision of which road we take is ours, and we are responsible for the end result.

Let us consider the life of Christ. Was He nothing but a robot; a masterful machine sent by God to do His work? Not at all, He was a man, and a perfect man, and a perfect example of what God meant man to be. He was the pattern toward which He is bringing all who trust in Him. Did Jesus go to the cross because He had to, and because it was determined? Was He a mere victim of fate? No, He said He laid down His life, and no man took it, for He gave it freely. In the Garden of Gethsemane He said, "Not my will but Thine be done." He chose to submit His will to the Father's. He died freely and not by necessity. If it was by necessity, and He had no choice in the matter, then we are saved by fate, and all talk of great love is meaningless, for He had no choice. If He had to save us, this is fatalism, and it is not true to God's revelation of Himself. He is free and the first cause, and He was not compelled to save us, but chose to do so freely because of His love.

Come unto me says Jesus, and this implies we can if we will. Go ye into all the world says Jesus, and this implies we can if we will. Jesus tried to persuade the Jewish leaders to recognize Him as the Son of God, but He lamented, "Ye would not." I am convinced that God has given all men, by His grace, the capacity to respond to His

truth when they are confronted by it. This is one of the works of the Holy Spirit, and because of this all men are responsible for what they do with the truth. All must agree that the Christian is free, for God is free and if we are indwelt by God and filled with His Spirit, then we must be free indeed. We can introduce causes that will change the future. Conversion and miracles break the chain of causes and effects, and introduce something new into the world. Nicolai Berdyaev said, "God has laid upon man the duty of being free, of safer guarding freedom of spirit, no matter how difficult that may be, or how much sacrifice and suffering it may require."

Suzanne De Dietrich said, "The story of our salvation, as the Bible tells it, is simply the record of a long journey towards freedom." That journey finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ the Lord and Liberator of those held captive and enslaved by sin.

There is no chance, no destiny, no fate,
Can circumvent or hinder or control
The firm resolve of a determined soul.
Gifts counts for nothing; will alone is great;
All things give way before it, soon or late.
What obstacle can stay the mighty force
Of the sea-seeking river in its course,
Or cause the ascending orb of day to wait?
Each well-born soul must win what it deserves.
Let the fool prate of luck. The fortunate
Is he whose earnest purpose never swerves,
Whose slightest action or inaction serves
The one great aim. Why, even death stands still,
And waits an hour sometimes for such a will.
Author unknown

Jesus said, the servant does not abide in the house forever, but

the son does, and the point is that true freedom is a matter of relationship. If I am the son of a man who owns a store, I can walk in and go to the back room or the office; I can take an article off the shelf with a sense of freedom that a non-son cannot have. My relationship makes me free indeed. Freedom indeed is the freedom of relationship. The closer we are to God the greater is the freedom we possess. God has not decreed that you stay home and watch TV rather than go to a Bible study. That is not a matter of fate, it is a matter of choice. Every day the word comes to us, choose you this day whom you shall serve, and every day we choose either for Christ or for some lesser value. Our use or abuse of freedom is the key to Christian growth or stagnation. We are not victims of fate, but we are victims of our own poor use of the great gift of freedom.

12. THE LORD OF LIFE AND DEATH Based on John 11:1-44

One of the oldest and most universal of all questions is the one of Job, "If a man die shall he live again?" In the ancient world almost everyone believed that death was a gateway into another world, and so they buried their dead with food and tools to be used when they arrived. This is obviously foolish to those of us today, but there are many who also feel that the whole idea of eternal life is a foolish superstition. They think it is only the hope of the weak and is mere wishful thinking. But they are doing wishful thinking when they hope that there is no life beyond and no penalty for sinful living.

Leslie Weatherhead points out that when the skeptic gives medicine to his sick child he hopes it will work and restore the child to health. He would be angry if you told him that was only wishful thinking, and was a sign of his weakness. He would say that he was not so simple as to believe that his hope could make the child well.

He was putting his trust in the medicine and not just in his own wishes. There is nothing wrong with wishful thinking and hoping when there is good reason for it. The skeptic would show you it is only common sense to hope for what you love when there is good evidence to do so. He would point out that this same disease was cured in others and so there is evidence for his hope. This reasoning applies perfectly to those who have hope for life after death.

We have a basis for our hope, and we also have case histories in which the dead have been brought back to life. There was the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and then Lazarus the brother of Mary and Martha. We want to look more deeply into this last case for it reveals a great deal about the attitude of Jesus toward death. We want to look at three responses of Christ in the presence of death here. The first response was that of-

I. HIS TROUBLED SPIRIT. v. 33

The Berkley Version has it, "Deeply indignant in spirit." Martha had been first to go and meet Jesus, but Mary did not come until Jesus sent for her. We do not know why, but she was likely deeply hurt by the delay of Jesus, and she was not sure of herself, and so she did not go to Him. But when Jesus called for her she came and fell at His feet, and threw her tears of grief and doubt she said, "Lord if you would have been here my brother would have died." The Jews that were with Mary in the house followed her and they were weeping, and the word means they were wailing.

Jesus responded with a troubled spirit. The meaning of this response has been variously interpreted. There are those who feel that Jesus was angry at the power of death because it caused such grief to those He loved. This makes sense, but I feel that the emotion of Christ here is like that He expressed on another

occasion. When Jesus came near to Jerusalem on the day of His triumphal entry He beheld the city and wept over it. Why? It was because the people were blind and knew not the day of their visitation. The day of peace had come, but they would reject the Messiah and their city would be destroyed. Jesus wept because of their blindness, which was causing them to lose God's best. In anger He entered the temple and expelled the moneychangers who made the house of God a den of thieves. This is the emotion I think Jesus felt as He looked upon these wailing Jews. Here He was as the Lord of life and death in their very presence, but they were blind and mourned as those who had no hope. Jesus was troubled in seeing people live in the dark when the light is all around them.

We do not have near the love and compassion of Christ, but have you not felt sometimes that you would like to take people who are ruining their lives and just shake some sense into them? You are indignant and troubled that they can be so blind. They cling to hell and lose heaven for a straw. One of the most frustrating experiences of Jesus was that of seeing the blindness and the little faith of those whom He loved. Jesus was troubled and indignant because they acted as if the grave was the end. Those who believe that are dead already, for if death is the end, then life has no meaning. Paul made it clear that if in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable. These people were wailing without hope, and Jesus is mourning for them and not for Lazarus. They are dead in a far deeper sense than Lazarus is. The deadness of the spirit that blinds to the truth of God is far more dangerous and sad than the death of the body. This first response of Christ teaches us that hopeless grief has no place in the life of a believer. Next we see-

II. HIS TEARFUL EYES. v. 35

This verse is far more than just the shortest verse in the Bible. It

is also one of the most sublime, for it reveals to us the true sympathy of the Savior. Jesus was indignant at their unbelief, but He was also sympathetic with their grief. Jesus was not wailing as they were, but had silent tears rolling down his face. He could not hold back the tears of compassion. The first part of the account makes us wonder if Jesus had any sympathy at all for Mary and Martha. They had been so good to Him in giving Him a place to eat and sleep. He had been there often, but now when He is most needed He has stayed away.

Mary and Martha are deeply worried because of the illness of Lazarus. They are wondering why he is so ill when Jesus was not there. They knew He could raise him up and heal him as He had so many others. They sent a message to Jesus telling Him that the one He loved was so sick. As soon as Jesus received this message He did not borrow an Arabian horse and race to Bethany as fast as He could. Instead, we read in verse 5 these words: "Yet when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days." Is this a misprint? It seems that Jesus stayed away just when He was most needed. Then to make things even worse we read in verses 14 and 15, "So then he told them plainly, Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe..." It is no wonder that they felt Jesus had lost His compassion for them.

The tears of verse 35, however, wash all the doubts away. Jesus had been so calm about it before because He knew His delay would be for the greatest glory. He was going to perform the greatest miracle of His life up to that point. The other two He raised from the dead had died so short a time before that there may have been some doubt as to the reality of their death. But He delayed to come to Lazarus until his body was in a state of decay so that all could know for sure that he was truly dead. The Jews felt that after 4 days there is no hope for the spirit to enter the body again, and so

there was purpose in the delay of Christ.

Now Jesus stands in the presence of grief and He sheds tears of sympathy. He knew He was going to raise Lazarus, and He knew joy would soon be in their hearts, but He shed these tears of sympathy because He was a man of sympathy. The tears of Jesus indicate that there is such a thing as a good cry. Jesus was not sentimental, nor would He approve of indulging tear-jerking stories, but Jesus was realistic. He would not approve of hopeless grief, but He did recognize the place of honest grief, even in those who are believers. Someone said, "Tears are liquid emotions pressed from the heart." Here was Mary weeping because her brother was now separated from here, and that separation brought sorrow. Jesus said with His tears that He approved of that kind of sorrow. There is a valid place for tears in the Christian life. We need never fear nor be ashamed of the tears of the hopeful. Christ has been our example, and He was touched by our feelings. We need to learn to be sympathetic with the tears of others, even when we know the problem is only temporary. Next we consider-

III. HIS TRIUMPHANT VOICE. v. 43

Jesus revealed His sovereignty over death by a shout. In His conversation with Martha Jesus made a claim that no one else has ever made. He said in verses 25-26, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." Then He asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" How could He expect Martha to believe such a thing when Lazarus had died and was now decaying? She just could not come out and say she believed it. She just said that she knew in the last day he would live again. Jesus is trying to teach her that He is the Lord of the present and not just of the future. Jesus said that He was the life, and not that He would be.

Jesus is trying to tell her that her brother is not dead. He is trying to tell her that He is right now the resurrection and the life. He proved it by talking to Lazarus and calling him back into his body. Who can speak to the dead? Jesus can, for He knows they are yet living and that it is only the body that is dead. Jesus is saying that the Christian never dies even though his body does. This means that the body is not you. There is something more basic that is the real you, and that is the soul. The poet wrote,

**Life is real and life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal.
From thus thou art to dust returnest
Was not spoken of the soul.**

The body is an instrument through which the soul makes its self-known. Unbelieving materialists say that the soul is dependant on the body, and so when the body dies the soul does too. The Christian who believes in Christ can see what they cannot see. Take the prism for example. It separates the colors of light, but when you take it away and the instrument is gone no one believes that the colors no longer exist. The spiritual world goes on and the unseen is just as real even when the physical means to make it visible is gone. When the body is gone the unseen soul continues, and it is under the Lordship of Christ. Jesus is Lord of all the living, and that includes those who have left their bodies. One day they will all hear the trumpet voice of the Son of God and they will be raised in the final resurrection. The raising of Lazarus is Jesus proving that He is the Lord of life and death.

13. LIFE IS FOREVER based on John 11:17-44

From out of the files of the great Michelangelo comes the story of the young artist who labored long and tedious hours on the statue of an angel. When the time for its unvailing had finally come, the young artist hid himself in an inconspicuous spot and waited breathlessly for the response of the great sculptor. When Michelangelo arrived and carefully examined the statue, he turned to one of his colleagues and said, "It lacks only one thing...."

The expectant heart of the young artist was crushed, and without waiting to hear what that one thing was, he slipped away with tearful eyes to grieve. One of his close friends, seeing his condition, mustered up the courage to go to Michelangelo and ask what the statue lacked. The great artist said, "The statue lacked only one thing-life. With life it would be as perfect as God himself could have made it!"

The young artist grieved prematurely for he had done the best that man could do, for only God can give life. God was the first sculptor, and Genesis 2 tells us he formed man from the dust of the ground. Man was first a beautiful lifeless statue, like those we see of great men and women all through history from ancient Greece to our own great presidents. But God could do something that no one has ever been able to do to a statue. He breathed into that statue of Adam the breath of life, and man became a living being. Out of darkness God said let there be light. Out of dust God said let there be life. The Bible says God is the origin of life, the author of life, the creator of life, for God is life.

Life is, because God is. Life is eternal, because God is eternal. Life is the foundation of all that is, for life was before all things. In contrast to those who speculate that life must have developed, or been spontaneously generated out of non-life, the Bible says just the opposite is the case. All non-life is a product of life, for God is life, and all that is, is because God as life, made it so.

It is fascinating to study life from the point of view of how the creator of life has designed it. There are marvels that make science a form of worship, as men probe into the mysteries of life. Take, for example, the wonder that so many of the precious values of life that make modern living such a blessing are non-living products that exist because of life that was sacrificed. Coal, oil, gas, and diamonds, just to name some major ones. These, and their numerous by-products, are all derived from life.

God has so arranged the structure of physical reality that there is only one atom that can be the foundation for life, and that is the carbon atom. All other atoms can form only small molecules of a dozen or less atoms. Carbon, on the other hand, can form molecules of hundreds, thousands, and even millions of atoms. Therefore, carbon is the only atom that can form molecules large enough, and complicated enough, to make life possible. That is why it is called the element of life. There is no life without carbon. It has a tenacity to hold together like no other element. It is the hardest of the elements to melt, and to pull apart. Plants are full of carbon, and ten percent of the atoms in a human being are carbon. Remove the carbon from this room, and not only are the plants gone, but so are we, for carbon is the chemical foundation of life.

When trees fall in a forest and lay there as dry wood, they are 50% carbon, but as they decay further and become peat, they become 60% carbon. The peat becomes Lignite, which is 67 % carbon, and it becomes Bituminous coal, which is 88% carbon, and then the pressure finally produces Anthracite coal which is 95% carbon. The ultimate comes when the carbon is pushed together as hard as it can be with all non-carbon squeezed out, and you have a diamond. The diamond is related to coal, just as the black and white man have the same origin. So the black coal and white diamond have the same origin. The point of all this is, God has so made physical life that even in death it is not defeated, but becomes

a source of great physical blessings. Almost all of the power that makes life a joy comes from coal, oil, and gas-all products of life. All the sources of fire are from that which was once alive. Fire is a flame produced by life. Diamonds that beautify life, also have their source in life. Nothing lovely ever dies completely, but passes into other loveliness. This is the gospel of chemistry.

The Conductor of the great Symphony of Life has so composed the music that there is a continuous interplay of life and death, with life always bursting forth from death. Spring is one of the greatest movements in this symphony of creation. Martin Luther said, "Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection not in books alone, but in every leaf of springtime."

**The hope of life within us burns
As life bursts forth when spring returns.
The flowers with their colors bright,
The lilies clothed in robes of white,
They speak a silent message clear,
That robs death of its power and fear.**

Author unknown

When we move into the higher sphere of life, we hear the advanced orchestra playing the same tunes of the interplay of life or death. Sometimes the blues dominate, and we are compelled to be conscious of the reality of sin, tragedy, sorrow and death. But then the music changes, and the tempo speeds up, and our hearts are lifted, for love, light, and life are the themes, and we are filled with praise and rejoicing. We are moved by the variations to have different moods, and when the blues are playing we wonder how the symphony of life will end. Will it be a solemn and somber dirge, ending with a whimper, or will it be a crashing crescendo of sound, climaxing in rejoicing and praise?

Here in John 11, we see Jesus, the composer of life's symphony, giving us the answer by word and deed. The setting is a time of sadness, and the blues have overwhelmed the sisters of Lazarus. He was relatively young, and now he is decaying in the tomb. Jesus did not try to comfort the sisters by saying something like this: "Look at it this way-the carbon from your brothers body will be crushed beneath the earth, and some aeons hence may become part of a diamond that will grace the crown of some great king or queen."

Jesus rose above this chemical gospel of creation to the higher level of the gospel of resurrection. Diamonds for leaves is a good trade off, but diamonds for lives is not good enough. Man does not want to be glorified by being petrified. He wants to live. Pilgrim setting out from the city of destruction cried out, "Life, life, more life." This is the cry of all men on their journey through this world.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell, the medical missionary, in his book, What Life Means To Me, wrote about life after death, and said, "I know little about it, but that is not of any great importance, because I want it, whatever it is." This is how the majority of human beings feel. They do not relish seeing their life end. Life by its very nature loves to live, and so it longs to conquer death, and live on.

In 1855 Louis Napoleon received a letter from his mother in Switzerland where she was dying. He carried this letter with him the rest of his life. She ended it by writing, "Have faith that we shall meet again. It is too necessary not to be true." This is the universal longing of the human heart. Love is too precious a gem, even more valuable than diamonds, and the only way love can be eternal is if life is eternal, and so, man longs for eternal life.

Jesus responds to this universal longing, which was the specific longing of Mary and Martha, by making the boldest statement ever

made on this planet. He said in verses 25 and 26, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies: and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." This is the ultimate statement on life. It is the pinnacle, the peak, the summit.

You don't go beyond this, for this is that beyond which there is no beyond. This is the word of life itself, and life has the last word. The symphony of life and death will end with life. Death will die, and life will live. But, meanwhile, there are problems to deal with. Edgar Guest wrote this poem, Life Is A Problem.

**Life is a mystery, all of man's history
Tells us but little of how it began.
All earth can show of it,
All we can know of it
Give scarce a hint of its purpose and plan.
Life is not altered by what men have guessed of it,
He is the wisest who just makes the best of it.**

**What does it matter to tailor or hatter,
Butcher or baker or truckmen who drive,
How it all started ?
Clear-eyed and warm-hearted
Each is a person and each is alive!
Life is a problem and this is the test of it,
He is the wisest who just makes the best of it.**

**Life has its sadness, its goodness and badness,
Nor all of man's wisdom can alter that fact.
To this should the living
Their full thought be giving,
How in its grief and its joy shall we act?
Surely if happiness here be the quest of it,**

He is the wisest who just makes the best of it.

But the question is, how do we just make the best of it? The answer is, you look to the Author of life, and the Authority on life, who alone has conquered death, and offers to those who believe in Him those qualities of life that every person longs for-the qualities of a powerful life, a purposeful life, and a perpetual life. When you are in on these three qualities, which only Christ can give, then, and only then, are you making the best of life. Lets look at each of them. First, life in Christ, who is the life, is

I. A POWERFUL LIFE.

The scene is sad, for the power of death seems to be superior to the power of life. Mary and Martha are weeping and grieving, and Jesus himself wept, for death has the power to rob us of love. This is a preview of the sorrow of the cross, where the forces of evil will do their worst, and death will plunge the world into darkness, as the light of the world, and the light of life is put out, and death will seem to be lord of all.

The only way you can get a final answer to the question, which is the most powerful-life or death?-is to let death do its worst, and let life do its best, and see what the outcome is. The cross is deaths worst, but the resurrection is life's best, and the outcome is, life is proclaimed the winner, the champion, the gold medallist, the one more powerful than death. Geogia Harkness wrote,

**On this glad day my heart is lifted high
With gladsome praises to the Lord of life.
The hallelujahs ring; the heavens are rife
With song and story. He who could defy
The powers of death has risen again-is nigh
To say, "Fear not...men, put away your strife,**

I am the resurrection and the life.

Jesus makes this claim before His own resurrection, and He proves it by raising Lazarus from the dead. It is not enough that Jesus can raise Himself, for men want to know, can he raise me? And Jesus says yes. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies. That is the kind of powerful life every man longs for-life that will overcome the power of death.

Jesus, by raising Lazarus, gave us an historical confirmation of the power of life. Paul longed to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, for this is the power of life that is needed in the daily battle with the forces of evil. This is not just relevant at funerals, and once a year at Easter, it is the power for daily living. Earnest Gordon in, Through The Valley Of The Kwai, tells the moving story of British prisoners of war during World War II. Their Japanese captors forced them to build a railroad through the valley of the Kwai river. For many it was life worse than death. The starvation, exhaustion, and disease led to despair and death, and the men were losing their humanity. Selfishness, fear, and hatred took over, and it was every man for himself for survival. They treated each other worse than animals as they kicked, shoved, and fought over a scrap of food.

That camp became a scene just like that around the tomb of Lazarus. Death was lord, and all looked sad and hopeless. But one man brought forth life in the midst of death. Angus McGillivray, a great strapping man, determined that his dying friend would not die, but live. He gave him his own blanket to replace the one stolen from this friend. He gave up his own rations so his friend could be nourished. He used his own money to buy duck eggs and medicine for his friend. Gradually this special care led the soldier to recover his health. But Angus became exhausted, and he collapsed and died. The doctor said he died of starvation and exhaustion. He had

laid down his life for his friend.

His death did something to that camp that gave life power over death, and love power over hate. The story spread like wild-fire through the camp. The officers came alive to their responsibility, and said, "We are in this together." They voted to use part of their allowance to buy extra food for the sick. The spirit of generosity became contagious, and soon men throughout the camp were buying duck eggs for the sick, and showing love for those in special need. They put the law of the jungle behind them, and became human again, as they cared for one another. Earnest Gordon almost died himself, but Dusty Miller, who was recovering from diphtheria, volunteered to bathe him and wash his ulcerous legs, and nurse him back to health.

There was a Presence in the camp he says-a Presence that motivated them to stop sinking to defeat, but to build a community of love. Soon there were groups of volunteers who were scrounging in the woods for materials to make artificial limbs for the amputees. The educated ones organized a jungle university to teach the others. Acts of love, compassion, and kindness transformed that camp to a place where men were living, and not just dying. They had found that powerful life that conquers death on every level-life in Him, who is the resurrection and the life. Secondly, life in Christ is-

II. A PURPOSEFUL LIFE.

There are many levels of living, but the highest level is Christlike living, which is purposeful living. Paul wrote in I Cor. 15:45, "The first man Adam became a living being, the last Adam, a life-giving spirit." Jesus said I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly. Jesus did not just have life, He was a life-bringer, and a life giver.

The purpose of life is the same for us as it was for Him. It is to give life. It is the very nature of life to expand, grow, and increase. Jesus as creator gave life to all that is alive. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, came to give abundant life, and Jesus as the Sovereign Savior gives life eternal. Jesus is the giver of all life. That is what life is all about-more life.

Why else would God create in the first place, except to increase life? The only thing that makes history, and all that creating free-willed beings worthwhile, is the end result of more life-more intelligent God-honoring life in the universe. The purpose of our lives, and the life of the church, is the same-more life, more names in the book of life, more people partaking of the tree of life, more people worshipping and praising the Lord of life forever. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That is life, and purposeful life is helping others achieve the same end. The purpose of life is to live, and living is knowing and loving God. Jesus said in John 17:3, "Now this is life eternal: That they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

Purposeful living is doing what Jesus did with His life-so living it that others might come to know God, whom to know is life eternal. Ellen Jones wrote,

**Would you know life abundant,
Love doubled for all you give?
There is a means no surer
Than helping someone to live.**

Jesus gave people life now. He raised Lazarus now. He wiped away tears now. He healed bodies now, He taught people now. He gave light in darkness now. He was not just a life promiser, He was a life giver.

The reason Christianity grew so rapidly in Korea was because of the practical effect Christians had in purposeful living. The needs were so great after the war and people were so poor. When they came to the mission for food and clothing, and came to know Christ as their Savior, they were told to go and find someone in even greater need and share. This helped produce a nation of loving and caring people and the Christian faith grew like wild fire. Life was producing life.

"Life is currently described in one of four ways: As a journey, as a battle, as a pilgrimage, and as a race. Select your own metaphor, but the finishing necessity is all the same. For if life is a journey, it must be completed. If life is a battle, it must be finished. If life is a pilgrimage, it must be concluded. If life is a race, it must be won." Said Dr. J. Richard Sneed. Like Paul, we must all fight the good fight and finish the race, knowing that the prize Christ has for us is an even more purposeful life in eternity. Thirdly we see, life in Christ is-

III. A PERPETUAL LIFE.

Jesus not only says that those who believe in Him will live though they die, He says whoever lives and believes in Him will never die. What a paradox! They may die, but they will never die. Even though death has the power to rob them of their bodies temporarily, it cannot touch the essence of their life. They never cease to live, and so they never die, for to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, and so life does not skip a moment. Death may separate from the body, but not from the Lord.

In Him we have life that is perpetual. God intended life to be perpetual. Biologist tell us that the cells of life have the potential of immortality. If Adam had not fallen, it was Gods intent that he should live forever. Death was a result of sin, and not inherent in

life. Jesus came to restore man to that life which God intended.

**I know no life divided
O Lord of life, from thee;
In thee is life provided
For all mankind and me.
I know no death, O Jesus
Because I live in thee.
Thy death it is which frees us
From death eternally.**

Author unknown

The story is told of a fox who came upon a cave where he saw many other foxes had entered. He was about to go in when his cunning eye detected that all of the tracks pointed one way. All were pointed in, and none pointed out, which indicated that none had never came back. He wisely changed his mind and did not enter. So man comes to the cave of the grave, and sees the same thing. All the tracks point in but none come out. He has no choice, however. He cannot refuse to enter, and so he does so without hope. That is, unless he has put his trust in the life giver, the Lord Jesus. Jesus had made clear foot prints coming out of the tomb, and those who follow Him can say, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me."

Jesus said in John 14:19, "Because I live you shall live also." Jesus came not only to preach the gospel, but that there might be a gospel to preach-a gospel of light that conquers darkness, a gospel of love that conquers hate, a gospel of life that conquers death. The bottom line is life. Gods best for time and eternity is found in Jesus-the resurrection and the life. Whatever our age, or health, or any other situation, we are expected to live for our Lord, for He is Life.

14. MAKING GOD'S DREAM OUR DREAM John 12:12-19

One of the most famous speeches Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. ever gave was his "I have a dream" speech. It was a dream about a future America where prejudice was eliminated, and there was peace and unity among all races. This dream could only become a reality if men learned to use power in a way that was pleasing to God. On Palm Sunday we see the King of Kings showing the world how to use power to make God's dream come true. All of history and all of life is about the use or abuse of power. Jesus is the only perfect man, and the one and only perfect king to ever reign, for he is the only one who ever demonstrated the perfect use of power. By his perfect use of power he made God's dream come true.

Does God actually dream? Not in the sense of going to sleep and dreaming, for the Bible says he never slumbers or sleeps. God is ever conscious and so his dreams are like those we are talking about in our 50 day adventure. They are desires and goals and plans. God had all of these, and our goal as Christians is to make His goal and purpose our own. Jesus did that perfectly, and He submitted to the dreams of God. He prayed, "Not my will but Thine be done." God has a will and a purpose, and we are either going with the flow of His will, or we are resisting it.

Luke 7:30 says, "But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves." God had a dream for them. He had a purpose for their lives to achieve for His kingdom, but they rejected it. We see them on Palm Sunday, when the crowds were shouting, "Blessed is the king of Israel," sulking and complaining. They refused to join in and acknowledge that Jesus was their long awaited Messiah. Then they became the perfect examples of the abuse of power, for they used their position to see

that this king was nailed to a cross.

Their abuse of power did not hinder God's dream, however, for He uses their evil for good. He had a Son who used His power to serve, and one of the ways He would serve all mankind was to die for their sin. So God even used the abuse of power to fulfill His dream for man. God's dream will come true. Nothing can stop that, but the big question for all of us is, will I be a partner with God in making His dream come true, or will I be one trying to frustrate the dream by abuse of power?

The whole Bible is about God's dream for man, and either man's cooperation or conflict with this dream. Thomas Curtis Clark has written this poetic summary.

Dreams are they-but they are God's dreams!

Shall we decry them and scorn them?

That men shall love one another,

That white shall call black man brother,

That greed shall pass from the market-place,

That lust shall yield to love for the race,

That man shall meet with God face to face-

Dreams are they all,

But shall we despise them?

God's dreams!

Dreams are they-to become man's dreams!

Can we say nay as they claim us?

That men shall cease from their hating,

That war shall soon be abating,

That the glory of kings and lords shall pale,

That the pride of dominion and power shall fail,

That the love of humanity shall prevail-

Dreams are they all,

But shall we despise them?

God's dreams!

The leaders of Israel did despise God's dream, and they did abuse their power. Jesus desired God's dream, and He used His power to fulfill it. Palm Sunday is about the clash between God-centered and self-centered dreams. Self-centered dreams are about having power to control and manipulate others. But God's dreams are about having power to serve others. Jesus had it in His power to do what the crowds hoped He would do. They hoped He would use His power to defeat the Romans and set them free to dominate the Gentiles like they had been dominated by them. This was the dream they thought was about to come true as they shouted, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord-blessed is the King of Israel."

This, however, was not God's dream at all. God's dream was that Israel would fulfill its purpose and become a channel of God's good news of salvation to the whole world. God's dream was for His Son to die for the sins of the world and provide the good news to proclaim, and that Israel would proclaim it. God's dream was that power would be used, not to control others, but to serve others. Abuse of power is one of the major sins of all intelligent beings. Satan abused his power and used it to try and hinder God's purpose. He used it to manipulate man to disobey God. He tried to get Jesus to abuse His power, and use it to turn stones to bread, and thrill the crowds with His magic by leaping off the temple. The masses were in favor of this abuse of power. They longed for a Messiah who would feed them by miracles, and lead them by miracles to rule the world.

The thinking of man is often like this: "What good is power if you do not use it to become top dog." This is the thinking that makes it true that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Any person who can have power and not abuse it is truly Christ like, for this was the major temptation Jesus had to fight and win. He had the power to be abusive, and to fulfill any

self-centered dream He could think of. He could have been the world's greatest conqueror, and the king of all the world. He could have had the Pharisees serving Him as His slaves. He could have had all His enemies at His feet begging for mercy. Every dream Satan could dream for Jesus could have come true if Jesus would have chosen to follow those dreams. He chose instead to dream the dreams of God. He dreamed of being the Savior of all, and the servant of all.

This was not easy for Jesus. It was His hardest battle in life. We see Him fighting it on Palm Sunday, even before the great conflict in the garden of Gethsemene. In John 12:27 Jesus says, "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father glorify your name." In Gethsemene He had to fight the battle all over again, and finally even on the cross He had to resist the temptation to call legions of angels to use heavenly power to rescue them. The power struggles of Jesus are in a category beyond our comprehension, but Jesus won every battle, and He came out of each conflict saying, "Not my will but thine be done." Jesus fulfilled all of God's dreams for Him, and because it is so we too can dream God's dreams and see them come true.

We have to make the same decision that Jesus did, which is to abuse power for selfish ends, or to use power for godly goals. When Jesus said to deny yourself and take up the cross and follow me, He was saying that we need to choose what we are going to do with power. This will mean different things for each of us, but it will always mean breaking out of some comfort zone. Bill Hybels, the pastor of the fastest growing church in America, tells of the choice he had to make to fulfill God's dream for him. He was in the family business ready to make a fortune when a camp director asked him, "Bill, what are you doing with your life that will last forever?" He realized that his life was self-centered and caught up in planes,

boats, and fast cars. He gave up that life to follow God's dream, and he went on to become one of the greatest Christian influences in our world today.

David Mains in his book *Never Too Late To Dream* says some guilt producing things that we need to hear. They don't fit our comfort zone, and his quote from A. W. Tozer offends our use of our freedom of choice. They are not pleasant things to hear, but you determine if they are true for your life. He writes, "Our lives have become so busy that we have little time for God. Our lives have become obsessed with climbing the ladder of success and resting in the easy chair of entertainment. A prayerless church exists in this generation. We cannot get people to prayer meetings, but we have no problem amassing large crowds for Christian entertainment. Our church schedules are filled with events oriented toward entertainment, and we have no time left to seek God. We have become like the Laodicean church. Jesus is on the outside knocking, wanting to come in and have fellowship with us."

"A. W. Tozer said, "For centuries the church stood solidly against every form of worldly entertainment, recognizing it for what it was-a device for wasting time, a refuge from the disturbing voice of conscience, a scheme to divert attention from moral accountability. For this she got herself abused roundly by the sons of this world. But of late she has become tired of the abuse and has given over the struggle. She appears to have decided that if she can not conquer the great god, Entertainment, she may as well join forces with him and make what use she can of his powers."

If that produces no sense of guilt in you, then you are a better Christian than I am, for I do not doubt that I spend more time getting entertained than I do in prayer. My responsibility as a pastor makes me spend a lot more time in Bible study than in getting entertained, but most Christians do not have this advantage, and that means the average Christian in our culture spends more

time being entertained than in Bible study, prayer, worship, and Christian service. This is an abuse of power and our freedom of choice. The problem is that we are comfortable in this weak state of commitment to the dreams of God because we are with the majority. There is great comfort in knowing you are part of a large group of Christians who are comfortable in not taking any risk for the kingdom of God.

We see it in the context of our passage where a good many of the leaders in Israel did believe in Jesus as the Messiah, but they became secret believers because they refused to take the risk of rejection. Don't we quick to judge them, for all of us are probably guilty of the same cowardice. Listen to John 12:42 and 43, "Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue, for they loved praise from men more than praise from God."

They succumbed to the very temptation Jesus had to conquer in order to save them. He had to lose His life to save it. He had to give up His dream of acceptance and having the crowds ever cheering. He had to chose to become despised and rejected. He had to give up every comfort zone that the human mind craves, and suffer the loss of all, even His life, to make God's dream for Him come true. Many Christians refused to follow His example, and they stayed in their comfort zone, and they failed to be a part of God's dream. They do not lose their salvation, but they lose the chance to be what God dreamed they would be. They missed life's greatest adventure, and it can happen to any of us.

On the other hand, it is also true that everyone of us has it in our power to choose the way of Christ, and to use our power and resources to serve our Lord, and the needy world for which He died. Anne Kiemel is one of the gifted dreamers for Christ. I heard

her in person and have read several of her books. She has a desire to love every person she confronts and win them to Christ. She is very successful at it because she really does love them. Her philosophy of life is summed up in these few sentences she wrote: "I think you do one of two things with every human being you meet in the world. You build a wall or a bridge, I don't know about you, but I'm out to build bridges in my corner of the world."

We don't all have her personality and her gifts, but all of us can have her dream, for it is God's dream for all of us to be bridge builders. That is what Jesus chose to do with His power. He laid down His life on the cross to be a bridge builder between God and man, and so that man could cross over to be reconciled to God. Jesus, the Master bridge builder, wants us all to dream of doing the same, and being agents of reconciliation in a world filled with conflict and division.

Whether we choose to be a part of His kingdom plan or not, it will happen, and people will be reconciled to God out of every tribe, tongue and nation. We already know the final chapter in God's book. I love the poem that describes Jesus this way:

"I'd not give way for an Emperor,
I'd hold my road for a King-
To the Triple Crown I would not bow down-
But this is a different thing.
I'll not fight with the powers of Air,
Sentry pass him through!
Draw bridge let fall, 'tis the Lord of us all,
The Dreamer whose dreams come true!"

The self dreams of the masses and the leaders on Palm Sunday did not come true, but the dream of the King did, for he dreamed the dream of God for Him, and chose the way of power to serve

rather than the way of power to control. I do not know how old the boy was who wrote this poem, but he reveals the heart of all people. We can identify with his dream, for it is self-centered enough so that even though we may not make the same choice we can understand his.

**"If I were in charge of the world
I'd cancel oatmeal,
Monday mornings,
Allergy shots, and also
Sara Steinberg.**

**If I were in charge of the world
There'd be brighter night lights,
Healthier hamsters, and
Basketball baskets forty-eight inches lower.**

**If I were in charge of the world
You wouldn't have lonely.
You wouldn't have clean.
You wouldn't have bedtimes.
Or "Don't punch your sister."
You wouldn't even have sisters.**

**If I were in charge of the world
A chocolate sundae with whipped cream and nuts
would be a vegetable.
All 007 movies would be G.
And a person who sometimes forgot to brush,
And sometimes forgot to flush,
Would still be allowed to be
In charge of the world."**

I love this poem for it is a perfect example where most of us are

most of the time. Our dreams are for a world that will conform to us and our likes. That is what the people wanted in a Messiah on Palm Sunday. They wanted someone who would take charge and use power to fulfill their self-centered dreams. But instead Jesus said that if He was in charge of the world He would serve it, suffer for it, die for it and rise again that it might be saved for all eternity. And God said that was His dream as well, and so God put Him in charge. He was a King who did not expect His people to serve Him, but a King who serves His people.

Robert Fulghum became quite famous for his book All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten. I discovered his third book and read it. I asked myself why I do not hesitate to read his books, and the answer I got is that he writes to serve the reader. His dream is to serve others by his writing. He does some mighty strange things. He walks down the street to work in a suit and tie, and a beanie with a propeller on his head for a hat. He gets all kinds of responses. People honk, wave, and shout, "Go gettum grandpa." Teenagers sing the Mickey Mouse song and laugh. Why in the world does he do it?

He tells us why: "I figure the loss of my dignity was balanced by the gain in amusement I gave other people. They got to work in a good humor. They had something to talk about over coffee. I came to think of my wearing the hat and walking to work as a public service." Of course it is crazy, but that is the point. He is willing to be a fool for service. That is what Paul had in mind in being a fool for Christ. It is taking risks and getting out of your comfort zone for the service of others.

Jesus did the craziest thing ever. He let His enemies crucify Him. He gave up His dignity and His life, for He had learned the lesson His Father wanted Him to learn, and that is that power is for service. That is God's dream for us all, and when we learn to use

our power, position, and possessions for service, then we are truly followers of the King, and we will be making God's dream for us our dream as well.

15. A VICTORY WITH WATER BASED ON JOHN 13:1-11

After the Russo-Japanese War in which Japan gained a great victory on the sea, the commander of the Japanese fleet visited the United States. William Jennings Bryan was the secretary of state, and it was his duty to toast the visiting commander. Bryan was a staunch prohibitionist however, and never touched champagne, and so he had a problem. He rose from his table at the formal dinner and held up a glass of water, and he said, "Admiral Togo has won a great victory on water, therefore I will toast him in water. When Admiral Togo wins a victory on champagne, I will toast him in champagne." Whether the Admiral was impressed or not, Bryan was able to gain a personal victory in that situation with water as his weapon.

Kagawa, the great Japanese Christian leader, tells of another victory with water. A man was brought to the hospital with a rare Oriental disease that was rapidly taking his life. The only remedy available was a chemical solution to relieve the suffering. His body had to be completely submerged, and so with even his arms pinned beneath the water he had to spend seven solid years in a bathtub. He had heard the Gospel, but had not responded. He requested a New Testament, and by means of string it was hung on a level with his eyes. He began to submerge his inner being in the water of life. He found Christ in a bathtub, and that pathetic tomb became a temple. Many came to hear the testimony of this man whose life was spared by water until he could drink of that water that gives

life which never ends.

I suppose there are numerous stories of victory that have been won by water. God certainly gained the victory over the Egyptians when the water of the red sea closed in on them. It was by means of water that he cleanse the polluted world in the days of Noah. Jesus saved a couple of great embarrassment at their wedding by turning water into wine. Water has been the primary weapon by which fire fighters have gained their victories over the destructive flames. Scientists tell us that if it was not for water vapor in the air all around us we would be burned up by solar rays. The victory of life over death is going on all the time, and water is the weapon of victory.

Doubtless, numerous volumes could be filled with the victories gained with water. We are examining one that is the Niagara of them all. The paradox is that the great victory that Jesus wins with water is done so quietly that we tend to miss it, like a quiet little stream which runs so noiselessly we fail to detect it. This text seems so quiet for several reasons. First of all it is quiet because Jesus has finished His public ministry. He will never preach to the multitudes again. He will no more walk among the crowds teaching and healing. Jesus had only one more night to live, and He knows it. He is eating His last supper with His disciples, and He knows they have so much to learn before He leaves, and so He has taken them apart.

This leads to the second reason why it seems so quiet. The disciples are somewhat stunned by what Jesus is doing and saying. The disciples ate many meals with Jesus, but never on like this. They did not know it was the last supper, but Jesus did, and He speaks to them in these last chapters of John like He never spoke before. There is depth and mystery here as no where else in Scripture. A. W. Pink says, "We are now to enter upon what believers in each age have regarded as the most precious portion of

this Gospel." John R. W. Stott writes, "If Scripture may be likened to the temple, then these chapters are the enter sanctuary of the temple."

We are on holy ground when we enter chapter 13, but we must recognize it is a battle ground. The very flames of hell are burning fiercely, but only Jesus is conscious of the danger, and the presence of powerful enemy forces. Verse 2 tells us that Satan already had put it into the heart of Judas to betray him. He was working hard on Peter also at this very point, and Luke tells us in 22:31-32 that Jesus said, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail."

In their blind innocence, none of the disciples could see that their Lord was soon going to face the forces of hell and darkness in a direct head on encounter. They were so blind and self-centered that Luke tells us even after Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, "A dispute arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest." Their attitudes were all wrong, and Jesus knew He had to convince them of what true greatness was before He left them. The time was so short, and their minds and wills so stubborn. What could He do?

John makes it clear in verse 3 that he could do anything. Any weapon available to an all powerful Deity was His, for the Father had given all things into His hands. Jesus could have blasted His disciples into submission. By sheer force Jesus could have made Judas forsake his evil scheme, and He could have compelled the others to apologize and respect each other. He did not choose to do this, however. But, rather, with the whole world in His hands, knowing that in a matter of hours He will be in the presence of His Father, as the Lord of glory, He pours water in a basin, and stoops to wash His disciples feet. In so doing, He won a great victory with

water, and demonstrated that love is the supreme weapon which conquers all. Jesus had His choice of any weapons in the universe, and He chose water and a humble act of love.

What Jesus is teaching here, by this incomparable condescension is so precious and manifold in its implications that it is like a diamond with many surfaces sparkling, and each calling our eye to closer examination. We want to glance at a few of these sparkling facets before we plunge deeper into the inner sanctuary. Washing 24 dirty feet does not sound like the most exciting experience in the world, but the more we examine it, the more exciting it gets. Jesus is revealing in this act that there is only one effective way to deal with sin. Sin is like dirt. Whoever heard of taking a hammer to your hands to get dirt off them. Whoever considered using a file to rub their hands clean. There are all kinds of violent and radical means by which you can try to blast and burn dirt to get rid of it, but all such battles are pure folly, when you can gain the victory easily with water.

There is no point in fighting dirt-just wash it away. Pounding it will get you no where, but water will get you clean. This is just one of the lessons that Jesus teaches us about dealing with sin. You can't fight it with force and drive it out of your life. This is a futile and frustrating battle because you always lose. Sin needs to be cleansed and washed away by the water of forgiveness. John says in his first Epistle that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Water is used as a symbol of the Word. In Eph. 5:26 Paul is writing of Christ purifying His bride and says, "Having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word."

Jesus is dealing with very specific sins which Satan is using to bring the disciples to defeat. The primary sin was that of pride. They were all so worried about being great, but Jesus should them

that true greatness was in performing loving service. The way you overcome the great sin of pride is by gentle acts of service to others.

John emphasizes the full knowledge of Jesus at this point. He knew His full dignity as the Son of God. Knowing that, He did not demand that His disciples wash His feet. He, as the King, took off His garments and washed the feet of the servants. The King serves the servants, and by this act declares all human dignity, which prevents a man from performing a lowly act of love for another, is not dignity, but dirt. It is sinful pride, and is clearly un-Christlike.

Jesus was heavenly minded, yet so down to earth. He was conscious that He would soon return to the Father. Imagine all the angels in heaven singing the King is coming even before the cross. From heaven's perspective the return of Christ took place when He left the earth. The mind of Christ was full of these glorious thoughts of His return to the Father. It seems like going to the sublime to the ridiculous to have Jesus, with this hope, stooping to wash His disciples dirty feet. But there is nothing ridiculous about giving all men the chance for greatness and dignity. That is the victory Jesus won for us all with that basin of water. The towel Jesus used should be our flag as Christians, for it represents the greatness we can all attain.

Jesus said the greatest among you is the servant of all. If greatness depends upon magnetic personality, than most men can never be great. If greatness can be achieved only by doing deeds which gain great publicity, and if one must be charming, witty, dashing, or rich to be great, then greatness is reserved for the few. If, however, greatness before God can be achieved by acts of service, then no child of God is eliminated from the competition. Has there ever been a believer so ungifted he could not wash another's feet? The only talent God requires for any of His children to be great is the talent of the towel-that is, the talent to

stoop and meet another's simple needs in lowly service.

In 1878 William Booth started the Salvation Army, and men came from all over the world to join it. Samuel Logan Brengle, a Methodist minister from American, went to England to join the army with the idea of rising to great heights. Booth detected his pride and ordered him to clean the boots of the other trainees as his first job. Brengle rebelled and resented this degrading task, but God spoke to him in a dream. He dreamed of Christ with His disciples in the upper room that last night He spent with them. He dreamed the event of our text, and when he woke he was a changed man, and he prayed, "Lord, you washed their feet, I will black their boots." The example of Christ led him to do acts of service, and thus to greatness, and he became the first American born Commissioner in the Salvation Army.

Jesus had to get this important lesson across to His disciples or the foundation of His church would be cracked from the start. The record of Peter's resistance is given by John because he was the leader of the 12, and if he failed to learn the way to greatness, how could he lead anyone else? Jesus gained a victory of Peter's pride with this water and a basin, and Peter passes it on in I Peter 5:5, "For God gives special blessings to those who are humble, but sets Himself against those who are proud." (Living Bible).

This last lesson that Jesus taught before the cross is a lesson that must be learned by all believers if they hope to fulfill God's plan for their lives. The biggest battle every believer has is with their own pride. D. L. Moody said his greatest problems in the ministry was the envy of Christian workers. He spent his nights fighting the devil, and his days trying to calm the quarreling among his team of evangelists over whose name should be in greater capital letters in the advertising. Jesus knew this was going to be the greatest battle of His disciples all through history. He knew we would have a

tendency to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, and that is why He taught this lesson at such a crucial hour, and in such a dramatic unforgettable way. With water He washed His disciples feet, and John tells us that the love of Christ for His own is what motivated Him. "Having loved His own which are in the world He loved them unto the end."

Love is a central theme in this inner sanctuary. In chapters 1-12 of John's gospel Jesus ministers to the masses, and though He demonstrates love in action, the theme of His messages to the crowds is life and light. Life is used 50 times in these chapters, and light 32 times, but love is used only 6 times. Now, in chapters 13-17, where Jesus speaks in private to His own, the change is obvious. Life is used only 6 times, and light not at all, but love is used 31 times. Love takes the dominate role when Jesus speaks to His own. We learn from this that the world needs love and light, but they will only receive it when the church is dominated by love.

He loved them all along, but John says He loved to the end. In spite of their blindness and their pride, and all their other faults, Jesus loved them, and that is why He washed their feet. He was willing to perform this radical act of condescension for their sake that they might be aided in their battle with sin and Satan. He loved them to the end is often translated, He loved them to the uttermost. Morris has it, "Now He showed how utterly He loved them." He did not cease to love them even though Judas was about to betray Him. Peter was about to resist and then deny Him. His inner circle was about to ignore His agony and forsake Him. Instead of condemning them, He won a victory over His own wrath, and a victory over their stubborn pride, and thus, a victory over all that Satan could have hoped to accomplish here, by pouring water and washing His disciples feet. He loved them to the end-the end of His life and the end of their lives, and to the uttermost, in spite of their pride.

**His love no end or measure knows,
No change can turn its course;
Eternally the same it flows
From one eternal Source.**

Love which does not stoop is not agape or Christlike love. Jesus stooped to lay aside His garments of deity to take on flesh and be born of a virgin (a victory with water, for like all babies He was born with water). He stooped to inner the river of Jordon and be baptized (a victory with water, for He identified Himself with sinful humanity). Now in His last hours in the flesh He stoops again to gain a victory with water by this act of condescending love.

We all need to recognize we are no better than the 12, but are equally blind to our self-centeredness and pride. Leslie Weatherhead said in his sermon in London during World War II while the Germans were bombing it-"...when a foul egotism rises up within me and would bid me assert myself, planned for myself, served my own interest, play my own hand and take care of number one: Then, O my Lord, may I hear in imagination the gentle splashing of water falling into a basin, and see the Son of God washing the disciples feet..." If we could develop an attitude like this, we would all win many a victory with water.

Jesus is first of all the Savior, and the greatest victory of life is victory over all that sin can do by receiving Him as Savior and the Water of Life. Horatius Bonar wrote,

**I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink, and live.**

I came to Jesus, and I drank

**Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.**

That is life's greatest victory with water. If you have not experienced this victory put your trust in Christ right now as the Water of Life.

16. FRIENDSHIP Based on John 15:9-17

After making his historic stand before the Diet Of Worms where he defied the church and refused to recant, Martin Luther started for home. He had stirred up a hornet's nest of opposition, and plots were made against his life. As Luther's carriage entered a narrow pass, ideal for an ambush, it was suddenly surrounded by 5 horsemen, who were masked and armed. They forced Luther to get down, and they threw a cloak over him. They put him on an extra horse and disappeared into the forest. Silently they took Luther to the Castle of Wortburg, which was hidden high in the mountains.

There he discovered that he was in the hands of friends. Frederic the Elector had Luther kidnapped in order to protect him from his enemies who would certainly have killed him. This single act of friendship changed the course of history and played a major role in the success of the reformation. It was while hiding in that castle that Luther translated the Bible into the German language. He did much other writing also that influenced the thinking of the masses.

Time and time again friendship has been the force determining the course of history. We see it in the great friendship of David and

Jonathan in the Old Testament. Jonathan loved David even more than his own father Saul. He defended and protected David when Saul was out to kill him. When Jonathan died in battle David wrote in great sorrow in II Sam. 1:26, "I am distressed for you my brother Jonathan, very pleasant have you been to me, your love to me was wonderful passing the love of women." David is saying that friendship love can be a greater pleasure than erotic love, and we will see the importance of this later even in marriage.

This also has tremendous implications for singles, for it is saying that the sexual relationship is not the highest relationship of two people. Jesus never had a mate, but He did have friends, and this is potentially a higher level of love. Friendship can be a higher level than any other relationship. Abraham is called the friend of God, and there is no way to top that. The Bible puts friendship on a very high level, and sometimes even above family ties. Even pagan authors recognize this as true to life. Euripides wrote, "A friend welded into our life is more to us than twice 5000 kinsman, one in blood." Engel the German said, "Blood relationship is sweet, but how much sweeter are alliances of the soul?"

Similar statements can be found from every land and people from ancient times to the present. Emerson said, "A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature." We are designed by God to be social beings, and so there is a hunger in all people for friends. And ancient Jewish proverb said, "Friends, though they be as Job's friends, or else death." The Russian poet Dimitriev wrote, "I've been seeking a friend! There's none below. The world must soon to ruin go." I do not exaggerate when I say I could go on for hours just quoting the praises of friendship from philosophers and poets from around the world. We would expect that Jesus would have something to say about such an important subject, and we find this to be the case. In fact, Jesus is unsurpassed in His exaltation of friendship. He raised it to the highest possible level by making it a

relationship that can be had between God and man. In Christ God becomes our friend. We have the testimony of Christ's enemies to support this, for they called Him a friend of sinners. They meant it as slam, but it is, in fact, a compliment, for had He not been a friend of sinners He would have been a friend of no one, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Jesus was a friend to the friendless, and you see Him befriending those sinners and victims of sin that the Pharisees shunned. They would toss coins to them and give them advice, and even pray for this scum of the earth around them, but to befriend them was a definite no no. And to eat with them was unheard of. That is how they thought they knew Jesus was not divine, for had He really been deity He would have known to have better taste than to eat with an befriends with such sinners. Listen to this testimony from the great Jewish scholar Montefiore. He is looking at Jesus from a non-Christian point of view:

"The rabbis attached no less value to repentance than Jesus. They sang its praises and its efficacy in a thousand tones... They too welcomed the sinner in his repentance. But to seek out the sinner, and instead of avoiding the bad companion, to choose him as your friend in order to work his moral redemption, this was, I fancy, something new in the religious history of Israel."

The Jews set up shop and said come and get it, but Jesus, like a Shepherd, went out to seek and save the lost. He went after them because He was their friend. Friendship evangelism started with Jesus. The idea of winning people to God by first of all winning their friendship was His strategy from the start. Most Christians do not win others to Christ because they think they need the gift of evangelism, or some special training. The fact is, all you really need is to be a friend. Walter F. Isenhour wrote,

**You may not stand in the halls of fame
With many honors to your name;
You may not own a lot of wealth,
Nor even have the best of health;
You may not reach some earthly throne,
Nor claim a mansion of your own;
You may not master some great art,
Nor rank with those the world calls smart,
But you can be friendly.**

**You may not be a scholar great,
Nor with the learned highly rate;
You may not wear a pretty face,
Nor fill a great, important place;
You may not write a book or song,
Nor have the praises of a throng;
You may not ride in Pullman cars,
Nor reach through eloquence the stars,
But you can be friendly.**

Studies show that the vast majority of people who attend church do so because of friends. Eliminate friendship from the picture and you eliminate most church growth. Every church wants to be known as the friendly church because it is a known fact that friendship is the source of growth. If a church is not friendly it will not grow. Dr. Wilbur Chapman did a study of the people who were healed by Jesus and he found this same truth. Of the 40 specific people Jesus healed of a disease, 34 of them were brought to Jesus by friends, or he was brought to them by friends. In only 6 cases did people come on their own. The point is, people do come on their own to Christ and the church, but the vast majority come because of friends. The most likely way any Christian is going to touch another life for Christ is by means of friendship.

As vital as this aspect of friendship is, it is not the theme of our text. Jesus is not speaking in public here but in private with His chosen disciples. He is not talking about their friendship evangelism and relationship to the world, but of their relationship to one another. Jesus is teaching that friendship is to be on the very highest level among Christians. In fact, it is to be on the level of divine love, which is unselfish and self-sacrificing love. Jesus starts with the love of God for the Son. Then He says that the Son loves the disciples with this same love, and then the disciples are to love one another with this God-like and Christ-like love. Agape love and Philia love are one here. Friendship is lifted to the very heights of divine love. To get to a level higher than this is impossible, and so friendship has the capacity of being the highest degree of love possible.

Jesus says that greater love has no one than that of laying down his life for a friend. Jesus was about to go to the cross and do just that, and so He is telling us here that the cross was the greatest act of friendship in all of history. It is theologically accurate to say that the greatest word in human language is friendship, for it was by this loving act of friendship that Jesus made eternal life possible for fallen man. Everything that we love and treasure is ours because of the friendship of God revealed and carried out by Jesus. Now Jesus says in verse 14, "You are my disciples if you do what I command you." And what He commands in verses 12 and 17 is that we love one another. If we want to be a friend of the Greatest Friend, we must be friends of those who are His friends. It is failure at this point that is the source of every problem in the church.

When Christians are not friends they lose the friendship of Christ, and they are not then agents of friendship in the world, but are part of the problem. Every problem you can think of can be traced back to a lack of friendship. And every blessing can be traced to the presence of friendship in some form. This subject is

not a mere minor talk to children to be nice to one another. This is the very essence of the Christian life. The key to all relationships being their best is friendship. The more we grasp this the more we will pray a prayer like that of Brennon Manning:

**Father, you have so many
Wonderful friends.
Thank you for sharing them
With me.
Thank you for sending me
People to love;
People who love me.
Thank you for sharing them
With me,
These friends of yours,
Who have done so much
And make me happy.
Thank you, Father, for Jesus
And the gift of His friendship.**

The English word friend comes from the Anglo-Saxon word meaning one who loves. Elizebeth Seldon in the Book of Friendship says, "There is so much friendship in love, and so much love in friendship, that it would be futile to ask where friendship ends and where love begins." Biblically, friendship doesn't end, for it is a part of the very love of God. Friendship is everlasting, and the more we get in time the more we enjoy heaven on earth. Friendship love is not a love that is to be excluded from other levels of love. It is to be included on all levels in order to enrich them. In other words, we are to aim at the goal of making our mate our friend, our children and grandchildren our friends, our parents and grandparents our friends, and our God our friend. The goal of all relationships is to get to the level where they are friendships.

Friendship has to do with intimacy that is not just physical. Eros is sexual intimacy, but that can be had with a harlot. It is not really a sharing of one's self except on a superficial level. An in depth sharing of who you are and what you know is intimacy on a higher level, and Jesus calls this friendship. In verse 15 He says, "I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." When you open up your inner being and share that with another, you make that other a friend. If you do not share your deepest interests and insights with another person, you are saying to them that they are not your friend. A friend is one who gets to see the real you that is hidden to those who are only acquaintances. The more you can feel comfortable in sharing with another, the greater the degree of friendship.

The disciples were deep friends of Jesus, for He says that everything He learned from His Father He made known to them. Jesus held nothing back, but became an open book to them. He told the crowds a great deal, but He had an intimacy with His disciples that made them special. What we see is that friendship is a complicated concept because it is like a color. It comes in so many different shades. There is almost an endless number of shades of red, and so it is with friendship. You have for example:

- 1. Single purpose friends. You go fishing or hunting together, or you shop and swim together. They get to share just certain aspects of your life.**
- 2. Multipurpose friends. This is a deeper friendship, for you enjoy many different things with them. Mates are sometimes just single purpose friends and so you do not have as deep a friendship with the one you marry as one you enjoy many things with, for you have so many common interests.**

Every couple needs to work at becoming multipurpose friends to deepen their intimacy. Couples tend to settle for being single

purpose friends because that was the intense emotion that brought them together in the first place, but as life changes they need to expand their levels of friendship. The more levels of intimacy they develop, the more likely their relationship will grow rather than decline with time.

Every relationship is enriched by friendship. St. Augustine developed a friendship with his mother so that could share the joys of nature and travel, and even have theological discussions together. They had a friendship that was so deep and inspiring that Ladislaus Boros in his book Meeting God In Man devotes a whole chapter to unique friendship. There was no rebellion or resistance to each other, but only a common joy in being together. That is friendship that is an ideal for all Christians to strive for. Helen Steiner Rice wrote,

**Friendship if a priceless gift
That cannot be bought or sold,
But its values is far greater
Than a mountain made of gold,
For gold is cold and lifeless,
It can neither see nor hear,
And in the time of trouble
It is powerless to cheer.
It has no ears to listen,
No heart to understand,
It cannot bring you comfort
Or reach out a helping hand.
So when you ask God for a Gift,
Be thankful if He sends
Not diamonds, pearls or riches,
But the love of real true friends.**

These true friends may be your mate, parents, or children.

They are the best potential friends, for they already know you at your worst, and one of the concepts of a friend is that they are someone who knows the worst about you and still love you. They know of your spots and wrinkles, and they aggravating idiosyncrasies of your behavior, but they love you just the same, and you love them. This mutual acceptance of the flawed selves is what friendship is all about. If we come to Jesus and confess our sin, He will forgive, for He is our Friend, and He will accept us even with our flaws, when others would not. That is why He is our greatest Friend.

17. THE MISSING INGREDIENT Based on John 15:11

Edna Ferber makes a character in one of her novels say, "I like people with a splash of splendor in their makeup." Many people would be surprised to know that this is what should characterize every believer in Jesus. The world often gets a perverted concept of Christ just because Christians themselves are victims of false concepts. So many Christians are brought up to believe that godliness is such a serious matter that it is incompatible with a life of laughter and happy delight. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth.

John Wesley knew what he was saying when he stated, "sour godliness is the devil's religion." The facts of life will back that statement up, as well as the judgment of Henry Van Dyke who wrote, "The lack of vital joy in the church is the chief cause of indifference in the world. The feeble energy, the faltering and reluctant spirit, the weariness in well-doing with which too many believers impoverish and sadden their own hearts, make other men question their reality and value of religion, and turn away from it in

cool neglect." Joy is the missing ingredient.

The Biblical ideal of godliness is, in both the Old and New Testament, a life of joy. I counted 187 references to words like joy, joyful, and joyous. Haufman Kolher in the Jewish Encyclopedia says there is no language that has as many words for joy and rejoicing as does the Hebrew. In the Old Testament there are 13 Hebrew roots found in 27 different words for some aspect of joy. The book of Psalms alone is a treasury of joy and rejoicing, often even in the midst of great trial and sorrow. There is not the slightest hint that God has any pleasure in the a gloomy soul. God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all, and the more we become partakers of the divine nature the more we will be completely free from persistent sadness and depression. Jesus told His disciples to keep their faces bright and alert even when they were fasting, and not sad and stern like the Pharisees.

The New Testament has even more words for joy. There are 326 terms for joy in the Greek N.T. Paul who suffered great sorrows and hardships uses 132 of them. He practiced what he preached and rejoiced in the Lord always, even when he was miserable. Joy does not depend upon circumstances like happiness, for it goes deeper and is based on what circumstances can never change. Aldous Huxley said, "If he were a millionaire, he would finance research for the ideal intoxicant that would abolish inferiority, fill us with love for our fellow men, make life seem divinely beautiful, and enable us to wake up the morning after without any hangover or damaged constitution." The N. T. says there is not a need for such research for it is available if we just see it. Paul urged, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." The fruit of the Spirit is joy, and this joy which comes from the Spirit of Christ will enable us to be joyfilled as was our Lord.

Christians seldom recognize that pessimism and sadness can be

sinful. Robert Louis Stevenson was an incurable optimist in spite of his constant suffering, but sometimes even he could not escape the snare of depression. But listen to the way he referred to this state when in 1884 he wrote to his father: "I fear I have been a little in the dumps which, as you know, Sir, is a very great sin. There is no more abominable sin then this gloomy, this plaguey peevishness."

There have been many famous Christians who have been plagued with a nature easily depressed, but they never accepted it as anything but an obstacle to be overcome. Charles Spurgeon, the most famous Baptist preacher, for example, was preaching to his people on the need for Christian joy, and he made this confession: "I am the subject of depression of spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to, but I always get back again by this--I know I trust Christ."

**I know that safe with Him remains
Protected by His power,
What I've committed to His hands
Till the decisive hour.**

In spite of their depression, men of God have known the joy and peace of believing. They have never accepted their infirmity, but fought it with joy.

Pessimism is never an option for the believer. It is of the kingdom of darkness, and must be recognized as such. Spurgeon could say after his confession, "There is an obligation upon a Christian to be happy. Let me say it again: There is a responsibility laid upon a Christian to be cheerful. It is not merely an invitation but it is a command. "Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, ye righteous." "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice." In spite of the one thousand and one things that drag us down and seek to crush our cheer and silence our song, we owe to God and this sad world a radiant life.

Kierkegaard, the great Danish theologian said to the dead state church of his day, "Everybody is too serious for me, at heart the religious man is humorous." The New Testament supports his conviction, for it is the most joy filled book in the world. Someone wrote, "It opens with joy over the birth of Jesus, and it ends with a superb picture of a multitude which no man could number, singing Hallelujah Choruses. No matter where you open it, amid fortunate or discouraging circumstances, you always hear the note of joy. Even when a company of friends gather at a farewell supper, before their Leader is crucified, he says to them, "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might be in you, and that your joy may be made full." Even when their best friend had gone, the mourners 'take their food with gladness, and with singleness of heart, praising God.' If they are flogged for their faith, the disciples depart from the council, 'rejoicing that they are counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name.' When an apostle is put in jail overnight he passes the time singing, and if you listen to him in his Roman prison, you will hear him dictating, 'rejoice in the Lord always; and again I will say, rejoice.' There is enough tragedy in the New Testament to make it the saddest book in the world, and instead it is the joyfulest. The religion which expresses itself in this book and which issues from it, is the most joyful religion on earth."

If you don't enjoy your faith there is something wrong with your faith or with you. It is hard to sell anything by exhibiting a poor example. It would be hard for a dirty bum to sell soap, or for a bald man to sell hair tonic, and it is hard for a joyless Christian to sell people on the joy of salvation. Paul Tournier, the famous Christian psychologist says many Christian people have come to a life of sterility because of false concepts. He writes, "All joy has been replaced by the pursuit of duty. They have come to the point of doing nothing that gives them pleasure, as if God, who loves us never required any but disagreeable things of us! They make incredible efforts, but win no victories. They are always comparing

themselves with those they look upon as their betters."

But some may be objecting in their minds, you can't be joyful all the time, for even Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. This only leads to further confirmation of the truth that the believer must always be joyful. Jesus said that when we are reviled and persecuted we are to rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is our reward in heaven. The Christian is to look always beyond the sorrow of the present to the glorious reward of the future, and, thereby, be joyful even in sorrow. Jesus was no less joyful as a man of sorrows, for we read in Heb. 12:2, "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross." Jesus was the most joyful man that ever lived, for He was joyful even as He went to the cross.

One of the most laughable perversions in the history of the church is that which gives us an image of Christ as one who never laughed or told funny stories. The way some artists picture Jesus you would think He was a sour and solemn Pharisee rather than a radiant redeemer who walked among men sharing His abundant life. He was a center of many a banquet; the common people heard Him gladly; the children flocked around Him and sat on His lap. Wherever He went He saved and healed and left people with hearts overflowing with joy. From His birth to His death the good news of great joy was the major theme of His life. One of the fruits of the Spirit is joy, and Jesus was filled with the Spirit, and, therefore, was filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Jesus wept with those who wept. Can we imagine that He did not rejoice with those who rejoiced? There was no mere splash of splendor in Jesus for He was splendor incarnate. To be more like Christ is to be more joyful.

Henry Van Dyke wrote, "Every great revival of Christian power-like those which came in the times of St. Francis of Assisi, and John Wesley-has been marked and heralded by a revival of

Christian joy." John tells us in verse 4 that the second basic reason for his writing this book was that believers might have fullness of joy. In other words, joy is a very important quality in a believer, and this part of the Bible exists for the purpose of increasing this essential quality. If the truths John writes of in this book do not add a splash of splendor to our makeup, then we are failing to listen to the voice of God speaking through this book. The first thing we want to look at about Christian joy is that-

I. CHRISTIAN JOY CAN BE COMMUNICATED.

Christian joy is not a matter of mere feeling, but is a matter of fact. It has its basis in knowledge that can be communicated from one person to another. It all begins with Jesus Himself on the night of His betrayal. In the upper room that night Jesus taught His disciples much valuable and eternal truth, and He said in John 15:11, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." That is a source of all Christian joy. Jesus said that by His communicating these truths to the disciples they would share in His joy, and their joy would be complete. Now John is saying that I am now relating to you what we heard that these some truths that gave us fullness of joy might be yours also, and that you too might have fullness of joy. John is being a channel by which the truths of Christ can be communicated to us.

The important thing for us to see here is that this process of communication must go on. No link in the chain must be broken. Jesus shared His joy with the Apostles; the Apostles shared them with the believers of their day, and believers of every age through their writings. Now, believers of every age must continue to share with those of their generation. Witnessing is not trying to persuade people to join a society for the promotion of solemnity, and the prevention of hilarity. On the contrary, we are opening up the very

road they are searching for-the road to joy and happiness and abundant life. The catch, of course, is we must have fullness of joy ourselves if we are going to communicate this message to others.

**Thy soul must overflow if thou another soul would's't reach,
It takes the overflowing heart to give the lips full speech.**

We sing, "If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy-let Jesus come into your heart." But before the unbeliever will respond, he wants to see this wonderful joy in us who have let Jesus into our hearts. If you exhibit the joy of the Lord in your life you will need little else to convince the lost you possess what they want. G Cambell Morgan told of a Yorkshire girl who gave her life to Christ and became radiant with His joy. As she was waiting for a train, she walked back and forth on the platform and several times passed the window of a wealthy and cultured lady. The lady called the girl and asked her what made her so happy? The girl told her simple story of her faith in Christ, and the lady who would have likely resisted other approaches was melted by the reality of joy and received Christ as her Savior. You cannot argue with joy.

"Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Joy is the fulfillment of both of these goals at the same time. Christian joy can be communicated, for its basis is in the reality of the historical Christ, and it is our highest obligation to the world to share this joy by communicating it in our lives and with our lips.

The second thing John tells us is-

II. CHRISTIAN JOY CAN BE COMPLETE.

This follows as a natural result from the first point. If Christian joy is a matter of facts, and a matter of knowing the truth in Jesus, then once one has all the available knowledge his joy is complete.

In other words, our joy in Christ is only as complete as our knowledge of Christ. Little knowledge means little joy, and fullness of knowledge means fullness of joy. John is writing in this book to give Christians the additional truths they need for completeness of joy.

We see then that Christian joy is not a matter of feelings, but a matter of fact. Feelings can change like the wind, but the foundation on which our joy is based is unchangeable and remains the same regardless of circumstances. Let the Sun be put out and the stars cease to shine and it will not effect our joy, for God is still light and Christ is still Saviour, and sin can still be forgiven and we still have an advocate with the Father. John has recorded for us truths that cannot help but give fullness of joy for they are eternal and absolute. Young wrote, "Beware of all joys but joys that never can expire." The joys that John writes of here are joys in Christ and they have no expiration date on them.

These truths bring us into fellowship with the eternal and thereby produce completeness of joy. Joy is the other side of the coin of fellowship. You have both if you have one. He who has fellowship with God and His children has fullness of joy. He who has fullness of joy has fellowship with God and His children. If we lack joy we can trace the reason to either a lack of knowledge of what God has revealed to us in His word or to a lack of fellowship. John wrote this book to fill up both of these lacks that Christian joy might be full. This ideal is possible to attain in this life. We can be as joyful as our finite nature is capable of being. The world offers only fleeting joy that soon burns out and leaves nothing but ashes. Byron wrote, "There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away." Man cannot be satisfied until he has a joy that is complete, and this can only be found in Jesus Christ.

This completeness of joy does not mean the Christian will never

feel sorrow and depression, and never have bad days. We still live in a fallen world where we have to endure much that is out of God's will and is the result of sin and folly and ignorance. I think it is well for us to consider seriously the thinking of this author:

Leo Rosten in Passions and Prejudices writes, "Once upon a time(oh blessed time!) sensible men simply knew that life, even at best, is beset with difficulties, that frustration or disappointment or defeat is natural and as inevitable as changes in the weather.

There was a time, in short, when we all had the good sense to realize that discontent, despair, even failure are normal, that squabbles--between men and women, parents and children-- are unavoidable; that not everybody was intended by God, or fate, or biochemistry to be contented all of the time. We even had the good sense to know that anyone who is happy all the time is nuts. One of the marks of good sense and good health is precisely the capacity to be unhappy when reality warrants it--to be unhappy soundly, without apology or rationalization.

All the people of joy in the Bible also had their sad times and felt negative emotions. This is legitimate and inevitable. This does not rob us of joy, when we know in our sadness that weeping last for a night but joy comes in the morning. In other words bad and negative feelings are real and we should feel them, but we sin if we let these feelings become a hindrance to our unchanging joy in the solid rock that we have in Jesus. The N. T. is filled with Christians who had terrible times yet always had joy because they had faith and hope in Jesus, and they believed that in him they would always come out winners in the end, and often in a short time even. They believed the promise of Christ to be with them always.

"Yea, I am with thee when there falls no shadow

**Across the golden glory of the day,
And I am with thee when the storm-clouds gather,**

Dimming the brightness of the onward way;

**"In days of loss and loneliness and sorrow,
Of care and weariness and fretting pain,
In days of weakness and deep depression,
Of futile effort when thy life seems vain;**

**"When Youth has fled and Death has put far from thee
Lover and friend who made the journey sweet;
When age has come with slowly failing powers,
And the dark valley waits thy faltering feet.**

**"When courage fails thee for the unknown future
And the heart sinks beneath its weight of fears--
Still I am with thee--Strength and Rest and Comfort,
Thy Counsellor through all Earth's changing years.**

**"Whatever goes, whatever stays,
Lo, I am with thee all the days!"**

The goal is not to be joyful because you have no troubles but to be joyful in the midst of all your troubles. This is what we see in the N. T. Paul writes in IICor. 7:4, "I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds." And it was not just him, but ordinary Christians did the same, for he wrote of the Macedonian Christians in IICor. 8:2, "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity." They did not have it made at all. They suffered and were poor, yet were filled with joy and were generous even in their poverty to help other Christians.

**Joy and deep poverty! Truly strange blending.
Fulness and emptiness! Contrasting themes.
Spiritual richness and temporal leanness!**

None but the Spirit could wed such extremes.

J. Danson Smith

Completeness of joy does not depend upon life being free of troubles and trials and a host of things you wish were different, but on your trust in Jesus.

**Oh Christ, in Thee my soul hath found,
And found in Thee alone,
The peace, the joy I sought so long;
The bliss till now unknown.**

**I sighed for rest and happiness,
I yearned for them, not Thee;
But while I passed my Saviour by,
His love laid hold on me.**

**I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,
But ah! the waters failed.
E'en as I stooped to drink they'd fled,
And mocked me as I wailed.**

**Now none but Christ can satisfy,
None other name for me;
There's love, and life, and lasting joy,
Lord Jesus, found in Thee!**

This is what happened to the once famous athiest C. S Lewis who found Christ and wrote his autobiography calling it Suprised by Joy, for in Christ he found the joy he could find nowhere else though he searched the world over. Only in Him is there completeness of joy.

This then is to be our goal for the coming year: to aim for completeness of joy that we might communicate more effectively the

joy of salvation to a lost world. The Westminster Shorter Catechism has this interesting remark. "There may be orthodoxy, rectitude, heritage and tithing in the church, but if the note of joy is not present it is no true church." We want to be a true church and be authentic Christian witnesses in the coming year and this means we must grow in our joy. Billy Graham's wife Ruth urges Christians to enjoy God more and quotes Ps.37 where we are told to delight ourselves in the Lord.

Ray Ortland, a well-known pastor of our day writes, "We Christians are abnormal and disobedient if we are anything but joyous people. We must never think of God as rigid and emotionless. He has feelings, sorrows, and the Scriptures tell us He gets angry, has pleasure, and also rejoices. Zephaniah illuminates the heart of God Almighty to us:

"The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing" Zeph. 3:17

Here God is breaking forth as a God of song, our singing Lord, the God of melody. So few really know Him as this. Do you think of God this way? Many times our guilty hearts put a stern face on God. We do Him a disservice, God is not unfriendly and austere. It takes a glad God to give us glad tidings. Our Father is a God of joy."

The Bible clearly supports his view, for we read in Ps.16:11, "Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." Ps. 68:3 says, "Let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God; yea, let them exceedingly rejoice."

In Rom 14:17 we read, "For the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

There is much more of joy in both testaments, but these are sufficient to make it clear that it is a Christian duty to be joyful, and it is a goal we should all aim for to be more joyful until our joy is complete, making us better witnesses of the Gospel of joy we are to communicate to the world. May God motivate each of us to make the coming year, regardless of its troubles and trials, a year of joy so that in our lives this will not be a missing ingredient.

18. ALONE, YET NOT ALONE Based on John 16:29-32

Bjornsen, the great Norwegian poet, who received the Nobel Prize for literature was once asked what incident in his life gave him the most pleasure. He replied that it was an occasion when his house was attacked and his windows broken. This sounds slightly odd and paradoxical, but before you jump to conclusions about his sanity listen to the details concerning this painful incident which brought him pleasure. Bjornsen had aroused the anger of the Storting, which was the Norwegian Parliament, over some issue, and certain members of that body were so aggravated that they went to his home and smashed his windows. Having expressed their contempt for Bjornsen, they then marched away singing the Norwegian National Anthem, "Yes, we love this land of ours."

Bjornsen chuckled to himself in spite of the damage, because he was the author of the National Anthem. They could smash his windows, but they had to sing his song. The paradox is double, for not only did Bjornsen get pleasure out of this persecution, because the persecutors sang his song, but because the persecutors expressed their pleasure by singing the song of the one they had just persecuted. Here is a good example of the saying that truth is stranger than fiction. The facts of history and experience

demonstrate over and over again that paradox is a part of the reality of life. That is why we find so many paradoxes in the Bible.

The title of my message is a paradox, for to say, alone, yet not alone seems to contradict itself. How can two opposites be true? How can one be alone and yet not alone at the same time? This is only one of several paradoxes of Jesus in the closing two verses of chapter 16. He also says His disciples are to have peace in tribulation. They are to be of good cheer in spite of His prediction that they will forsake Him and suffer. Then He tops it off with a proclamation of victory when in a matter of hours he was going to be nailed to the cross in apparent defeat. This passage is a paradise for those pursuing paradoxes. Practically everything Jesus says here sounds like a contradiction, but each is a profound truth that can be experienced in life. We are going to take just one of these paradoxes for our study now. Jesus makes the statement of being alone, and yet not alone, and this opens to us two channels for exploration concerning the subject of loneliness. First let's consider-

I. THE REALITY OF LONELINESS.

Jesus knew what it was to be left alone. He knew the feeling of being forsaken by all, including those He most loved. He is about to go into the garden of Gethsemane and face the most agonizing inner struggle of His life, and He will have to do it alone. His disciples will be careless and indifferent, and they will sleep rather than watch with Him. It is likely that no one has ever experienced the depth of loneliness like Jesus did. Alexander Maclaren does not hesitate to say, "Jesus was the loneliness man that ever lived... He knew the pain of unappreciated aims, unaccepted love, unbelieved teachings, a heart thrown back upon itself." Jesus spent much of His public ministry in the midst of crowds, and yet He was alone, for not only His foes, but His family and friends misunderstood

Him, and could not share His deepest thoughts and goals. Jesus experienced to the fullest the reality of loneliness.

In a Peanuts cartoon, Linus is admitting that he is afraid to go into the public library. His friend Charlie Brown is trying to comfort him by explaining that everybody feels lonely in some place or another. When Linus asks, "What is your place?" Charlie Brown replies, "Earth." In another cartoon Charlie is asked, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" He replies, "Lonely." Studies in many fields show that Charlie Brown has a vast crowd with him in the same boat, for earth seems to be the place where the majority of people are lonely. It is one of the great paradoxes of our world that loneliness is a major problem side by side with the problem of population explosion. No number of people can change the fact which Amiel writes of in his journal. "In all the chief matters of life we are alone: We dream alone, we suffer alone, we die alone."

This was the reality experienced by Jesus. He bore His ideals and His suffering alone, and upon the cross it was alone that He died. So it is with all of us. However much we rub elbows with the crowds, we are still essentially Robinson Crusoes on the lonely island of self. You can be perfectly healthy, and have a well rounded personality like Adam and Jesus, and still be very lonely, for it is normal to be lonely. Matthew Arnold wrote-

**Yes, in the sea of life exiled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless, watery wild,
We moral millions live alone.**

Like all the atoms of the universe, no two of which touch each other, so are we as persons. As close as we are crammed together in large cities, we are yet islands with vast spaces between, and many

cry out like the Ancient Mariner,

**Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.**

Billy Graham said that loneliness plagues more people today than any other single problem. Many doctors say it is the major malady of our time. One doctor went so far as to say, "Ninety-nine out of a hundred individuals is lonely. The one who says he isn't probably is." A poet put it-

**Way down deep within our hearts
Everybody's lonesome;
Far within their secret parts
Everybody's lonesome;
Makes no difference how they smile
How they live or what their style;
Once in a little while
Everybody's lonesome.**

This may be too strong, but if we consider the loneliness that comes at different stages along the path of life, it is certainly close to the truth to say that everyone at some time is lonely. We all know of the child's longing for love and security, and how they can find comfort in a doll, teddy bear, or blanket when they are left alone. But there is no substitute for real persons who can give love and affection in return. A child who is not given this love can become insecure and lonely for the rest of life. No parent wants to banish their child to a lonely island, but they accomplish the same sad end by neglect and lack of affection.

What is surprising is that the supposedly independent carefree

teenager needs attention as much, if not more, than a child. Studies indicate that the liability to loneliness is at its peak in adolescence. The teenager fears loneliness like the plague, and yet they are constantly struggling with it. You asked why they are so willing to go along with the crowd, and do even the most foolish and destructive things? It is because they cannot stand to be alone, to be left out, and to be different. The teenager lives constantly in the fear that he or she is different and possibly not normal. They worry about whether or not they are developing and maturing as they ought. They will do just about anything to demonstrate that they are. In their desperate attempt to be mature they often do what is very immature. They wrestle with their sins and inner thoughts about the future all alone, and they feel that no one really understands them. At no time in life does one need to sense love and concern more.

The facts indicate that both parents and society, as a whole, are too busy trying to escape their own loneliness to give youth what they need to come through this crisis period. Parents are like the disciples of Jesus. They walked with Him along the smooth path, but when the road got rough they fled, and they left Him alone. So parents enjoy the years of innocence with their children, but tend to forsake them in the turmoil of the teen years when they wrestle with the forces of temptation on every side. Thank God, the teenager who knows Christ has the company of one who understands.

The battle with the reality of loneliness goes on even after the period of adolescence, however, and, in fact, never ends. Thomas Wolfe, the American novelist, once thought that only he and a few others experienced loneliness, but after some study he wrote, "The whole conviction of my life now rests upon the belief that loneliness, far from being a rare and curious phenomenon, peculiar to myself and to a few other solitary men, is the central and inevitable fact of

human existence. As youth looks ahead in fear, those who have reached middle age look back in frustration. They feel lonely because of what might have been, but isn't. They could have done this or that, and now it is too late, and they regret it. Ideals have been unattained, and dreams unfulfilled.

Rupert Brooke was leaving Liverpool and he felt lonely for everyone seemed to have somebody on the dock waving goodbye. He went and found a boy who was dirty but unoccupied by the name of William, and he paid him to wave. When the ship pulled out he shouted goodbye William, and as the vessel slid away the last object to be seen was a small boy faithfully waving his handkerchief. Such is the measure men will go to in order to hide the reality of loneliness.

Older people feel it ever more intensely. Life has passed, and they feel they have been set aside on the shelf. They fear to face the short future alone without family and friends. The point of all this is that loneliness is a reality, and it is a reality that Jesus experienced that he might know and understand a basic problem that all people experience, and more important, that He might provide a remedy. That is our next point.

II. THE REMEDY FOR LONELINESS.

Jesus was left alone, and yet He says He was not alone, for the Father is with me. The ultimate remedy for loneliness is to be aware of the presence of God. All other remedies give moderate and temporary relief, but this alone will insure one of never being alone however lonely they might be. Only those who practice the presence of God can go through every experience and stage of life alone, and yet not be alone.

The Apostle Paul knew what it was to be alone, yet not alone. He

wrote in II Tim. 4:16-17, "At my first defense no one took my part; all deserted me....but the Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the Word fully, that all the Gentiles might hear it." All deserted him, and yet he was not alone and defenseless, for the Lord was by his side. Paul, like us, never saw Jesus in the flesh while He walked this earth, but he claimed the promise of Christ to be with him always. Maltbie Babcock expressed Paul's feelings-

I need not journey far this dearest friend to see.
Companionship is always mine, He makes His home with me.
I envy not the Twelve; Nearer to me is He;
The life He once lived here on earth He lives again in me.

This can be the experience of all who have opened their hearts to Christ. The Christian has this remedy for loneliness, for he has the only friend who can fully understand him, and who is also ever present. This does not mean that Christians are never lonely, for they are still social creatures made for fellowship and companionship with other people, and when this is lacking they will be lonely, even as Jesus was. The Christian, however, no matter how lonely, is never alone, for God is present, and this can make the difference between defeat and victory.

Christina Forsyth, who was called the loneliest woman in Africa lived for 30 years alone in a native village seeking to win the people to Christ. She could say, "I am never alone." She was lonely, but not alone. This paradox is repeated over and over in countless lives through the centuries. Men and woman have experienced the full force of the reality of loneliness, yet, because they have also experienced the remedy in the presence of God, they were alone, yet not alone. Being active in the service of others has been the way many Christians have overcome the waste of loneliness. It is not wasted when you use it to get motivated in service. The world is full of need, and much of it is being met everyday by people who are

lonely, but who are using their loneliness to be a blessing to other. There are 40 people who are specific people healed in the New Testament, and 34 of them were brought to Christ by friends. Only 6 came on their own. This is a marvelous witness to the power of service, for so much that happens in this world is because of people who care enough to help others find God's best.

Bernard Shaw in his *St. Joan* has Joan of Arc say as she is led away to the stake to be burned, "Yes, I am alone on earth. I have always been alone...But do not think you can frighten me by telling me that I am alone....It is better to be alone with God: His friendship will not fail me, nor His counsel, nor His love. In His strength I will dare, and dare and dare until I die." She went through great loneliness, but she did not go through it alone.

Once having discovered this ultimate remedy for loneliness, the Christian who follows the leading of the Lord soon learns to make an asset of his experience of aloneness. Those who have not yet opened their heart to the presence of Christ, but seek to solve their problem of loneliness by self-prescribed remedies often try and follow the "Isn't this fun," method. They go here and there, and everywhere joining in whatever the action. They try to impress themselves and others that life is really a ball. They are afraid to stop because they fear to be alone. The Christian should be one who learns to enjoy being alone. A famous philosopher felt that the real test of one's faith is in what he does with his solitude.

One can by a wise use of solitude make more friends of eternal benefit than in any other way. I have a whole host of godly friends who counsel me, guide me, inspire me, and fill me with greater devotion to Christ. I have never even met them. The list begins with Moses and includes Matthew, Peter, Paul, and John, and thousands more living and dead. No one has a richer heritage than the Christian, and no one can find greater riches and more friends

through reading than can the Christian. In fact, the Christian can make the paradox even greater, and say as one did, "Never less alone than when alone." Every Christian can say, "Alone, yet not alone." But only the Christian who is a seeking, praying, and reading Christian can say, "Never less alone than when alone." Not only is God present to the seeking Christian, but so are hosts of His chosen servants who can guide us to a greater fulfillment of His will.

The Christian is one who must find value and meaning in all of the realities of life, and that includes the reality of loneliness. Jesus was lonely, but He did not waste it. He used it to wrestle before God in prayer, and He gained a victory that enabled Him to go to the cross with both peace and joy. Never was so much value gained for so many by a wise use of solitude. Everyone of us is obligated to follow Christ, and use our solitude for the glory of God and the good of man. We need to stop wasting our loneliness, and begin dedicating to God. There is no total escape from loneliness, for it is a part of the reality of a fallen world. Jesus could not escape it either. But in His loneliness he expressed His love, and this is what He will guide us to do if we claim His presence in our loneliness.

Alone, yet not alone am I,
Though in this solitude so drear;
I feel my Savior always nigh,
He comes the weary hour to cheer;
I am with Him, and He with me
Even here alone I cannot be.

Author unknown

Albert Einstein was not a Christian, but he had something to teach Christians. He wrote, "I have never belonged wholeheartedly to country or state, to my circle of friends, or even to my own family. Such isolation is sometimes bitter, but I do not regret being

cut off from the understanding and sympathy of other men. I lose something by it, to be sure, but I am compensated for it in being rendered independent of the customs, opinions, and prejudices of others, and I am not tempted to rest my peace of mind on such shifting foundations." Einstein found values in his loneliness, and he used his solitude to fulfill the goals to which he dedicated his life. How much more ought Christians to say with Wordsworth, "I must be, else sinning greatly, a dedicated saint." A Christian as dedicated to Christ as an Einstein was to math will be able to face the reality of loneliness with a remedy for loneliness, and be alone, yet not alone.

19. CHRISTIAN WARFARE Based on John 18:1-11

William H. Taft, the 27th President of the United States, was a big man in more ways than one. When he was inaugurated in 1909 at age 51 he weighed 325 pounds. His goal was not to become President, however, but to be the chief justice of the Supreme Court. In 1921 he achieved his goal and became the only man in the history of our nation to hold the countries 2 most powerful offices. Peter was like Taft in being the big man among the Apostles. He was physically a big fisherman, but he was also the only man selected to be the head of the 12, and the only man to be considered the first head of the church.

The Catholic Church considers Peter to be the first Pope. Peter also had the reputation of being the biggest human power on earth with the keys to the kingdom. All of the stories about coming to the golden gate of heaven involved dealing with Peter, and so he was like Taft in the Christian realm. He was the only man in Christian history to ever hold the 2 highest offices. He was the President of

the 12 and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Christian faith. He could bind up or set loose and so determine who would or would not be in heaven.

Peter was a big man, but as we have seen in previous studies, he made more mistakes than all the rest of the Apostles put together. A big man can make big mistakes and make himself look small, and Peter was a pro at it. His most violent mistake is the one we want to focus on. It happened in the account of the arrest of Jesus. In Peter's impulsive act of drawing his sword and cutting off the ear of the servant of the high priest, he taught a multitude of lessons about the Christian and violence. We can only look at some of them.

No situation is necessarily like another situation. Peter could have said that Gideon with just a handful of men defeated a large army, and so even though we have only two swords among us, by God's power we can defeat this army of enemies who come to take our Lord unjustly. It is a biblical truth that God can lead the minority to victory over the more powerful majority. It runs all through the Old Testament. This is the setting we have here in the arrest of Jesus. We need to get the picture to see the high side Peter was taking in coming to the defense of his Master. Peter was being as bold and courageous as he ever was in his life, but it was zeal without knowledge. The fact is, he was demonstrating his willingness to die for Jesus. All 4 Gospels reveal this scene, and Mark and Luke both used the word multitude. There was a vast crowd of people who came to arrest Jesus. John tells us of the band of soldiers and officers of the chief priests and Pharisees, but the other Gospels tell of a multitude of people with swords and staves. Matthew even calls it a great multitude.

Get the idea out of your head that the arrest of Jesus was by a hand full of Roman guards, and that it was like a police officer

picking up a disturber of peace. This was a crusade, and the troops were lined up to march as to war. We are talking hundreds of people ready to engage in fierce battle to subdue and take Jesus into custody. The enemies of Jesus expected and all out conflict with heavy casualties, and so they came with an army. Peter had delusions of grandeur to think he could fight this army. It is a wonder he was not cut to ribbons. Jesus did a quick miracle to restore the one victim of Peter's violence. Otherwise Peter would have been killed on the spot.

The point here is that you cannot just transfer truth to any situation and try to apply it where it does not fit. Every piece of a puzzle fits somewhere, but it does not fit everywhere. You can't take a biblical truth or principle and just squeeze it in anywhere you like. It is true that one man with God is a majority, and that God can use one man, like Samson, to win a battle over a thousand Philistines. Does this mean a Christian can in every situation take on a thousand enemies and be assured of victory? Not at all. A Christian can take on foe, and if he uses violence out of God's will, he will be a loser even if he draws first blood as did Peter in this context. There is a time for war and a time for surrender, and this was a time for surrender for Jesus. If Peter would have stopped and talked with Jesus, he would have known that Jesus was ready to surrender and go the cross.

Peter saw the setting as a power struggle, but that struggle was already over and Jesus told Peter to put up his sword. He was ready to drink the cup the Father had given Him. This was a setting where fighting was not appropriate. When the disciples grasped this they all fled, and their lives were spared. Matthew records that Jesus said to Peter that he could have called for 12 legions of angels. One angel destroyed an army of 85 thousand in the Old Testament. 12 legions equals 72 thousand angels. Jesus is saying that if the issue here was power I have at my disposal enough

power to wipe out the entire human race millions of times over. Jesus told Peter to put up his sword for violence only leads to more violence.

Violence only produces revenge and retaliation, and the end result is that everybody eventually loses. Peter was probably aiming for the whole head, but as a fisherman he was not skilled in swordsmanship. John tells us that the man's name was Malchus. He has the distinction of being the only person who suffered injury in this mini-war. He could have been the only man among the enemies of Christ who ever experienced a miracle. Jesus made sure His enemies did not suffer any loss. This was His last miracle before the cross. Malchus is the only New Testament victim of Christian violence. This is the only battle in history I am aware of where one side guaranteed that the enemy would lose no blood, while the other side would shed the most important blood in history.

It is no wonder that the disciples fled the scene, for they could not understand what Jesus was doing. We know the whole story and so we can understand, but for them it was pure mystery. Jesus calls Judas friend, and then He heals the injured enemy, and rebukes the only one to strike a blow in His defense. Whose side is Jesus on anyway? Would be the question in their minds. The only record of Jesus ever doing any miracle surgery whereby He attaches a body part back on is done here in the context of His arrest. This was an eraser miracle to undo one of Peter's mistakes. Peter had to be shocked at the action of Jesus. It is true that one less ear in an army does not lessen its strength measurably, but a few more whacks and he might have got in a direct hit, taking Malchus out of the battle. But Jesus commanded him to put up his sword. Jesus stopped the fight before it even got a start.

The Christian does not win in the war with evil by making the

enemy suffer. He wins by suffering for the sake of the enemy. This is the new message of the cross. You don't make the enemy pay for their evil, but you pay the penalty for them and offer them peace. You won't find this in any military manual or strategy for warfare, but this is the principle for Christian warfare. The blood now shed is not to be that of the enemy, but it is to be your own for their good. The goal is not to win over them, but to win them over, and to make them a part of the Christian army. The cross way is the only way to win an enemy.

Jesus could have won the victory easily if defeating the enemy was His way. He could have won in second, and all of the enemy would have been dead or prisoners of war. It could have been the fastest won war ever fought, but that was not the way Jesus wanted to win. Someone said, "He who strikes the first blow admits he has run out of ideas." Peter was quick to run out of ideas and strike the first blow. Peter felt violence was justified because it was self-defense. They were minding their own business. It was a normal response of self-defense. Any of us would defend ourselves if attacked, and so Peter is just told to put up his sword and not take that approach. Self-defense can be legitimate, but there are times when even that only adds to the misery of friend and foe alike.

Satan almost used Peter again to wipe out all the labor of the Son of God and sink His church in one battle. Starting a war, even for the right reasons, can be foolish, for nobody wins most wars. Wallace Viets says that asking who won a war is much like asking who won the San Francisco earthquake? You survive a war, but you seldom win a war, for as Jesus said, those who take the sword will perish by the sword. War is never the best answer. It may be an answer forced on you that you cannot prevent, but it is never the best. Jesus has a better way.

Bernard Clausen, the great Baptist preacher back in the 50's and

60's, served in World War II on an American sub chaser. One of the German subs, which they encountered was led by Captain Martin Niemoller. One of the best things to come out of their battles was the same thing that came out of the encounter of Jesus with His enemies in Gethsemane, for nobody was injured or lost. Clausen went on to become an American pastor and Niemoller went on to become a German pastor, who became famous for his opposition to Hitler. These two men could have killed each other, but by God's grace they did not, and they became a part of God's team to fight evil the world over. Malchus and Peter could have gone at it and killed each other had Jesus not prevented it. Such a loss Jesus was not going to let happen, but Christians like Peter have gone their own way and have suffered such loss.

Marcus Aurelius said, "The best way to avenge yourself is not to become like the wrong doer." The enemies of Jesus took the sword. There were likely hundreds of swords in the multitude coming to take Him. If Peter's way was to be permitted, there would be loss of life on both sides, and all would lose, for nothing of value would have been accomplished by a battle. Jesus prevented a battle of swords and illustrated His own teaching by loving His enemy and healing one of them. Augustine said, "In no way can thine enemy so hurt thee by his violence as thou dost hurt thyself if thou love him not." Peter hurt himself more than Malchus, for Malchus was restored and lost nothing, but Peter lost his chance to be Christ like in loving his enemy.

If you want to know why Christians do not always do what is wise and beneficial, but often do what is folly, look to the life of Peter. We learn from him, the number one Apostle, that Christians often just do not listen to their Lord. They have their own agenda, and their own value system, and they operate on that rather than submit to the Lordship of Christ. This minor incident in the garden is much ado about nothing. It had no impact on the arrest of Jesus

or His crucifixion. It led to a quick miracle, but nobody seemed to be impressed. It is seldom seen in books dealing with miracles. It accomplished nothing, and yet it is recorded in all four Gospels, and this is very rare for such a minor incident with no obvious value or purpose.

Peter made enough other blunders, and so we really didn't need this one to convince us that he was the king of mistaken judgments. I am convinced that the Bible has a number of trivial details in it because God wants us to pay attention to details and realize that there are valuable lessons for life in things we tend to dismiss as irrelevant. For example, this little incident reveals something we seldom think of. A Christian can be sincerely wrong in his defense of the faith, and do more harm than good. This text becomes the basis for self-criticism. Can we so approach the non-Christian in a way that we do injury to them? Can a Christian be a part of the problem, and actually drive the non-Christian away from the faith? Why are there so many people in the world who claim to be injured by Christians? Malchus was restored, but even so he probably resented the fact that he almost died at the hands of Peter. The miracle only got him back where he was before, and apparently did nothing to turn him toward the faith. Those who wish for more miracles in the world to change the world live in fantasy, for there is no evidence that miracles move men to faith.

We cannot say that any good came out of this miracle except that it teaches us how wrong we can be as Christians when we are not sensitive to the purpose of our Lord. Zeal without knowledge is a major problem in the history of Christianity. When Christians choose to use force to fight evil they often become a part of the evil rather than the answer to it. It is not likely that Malchus is the only victim of Christian zeal. He is the only one in the Bible, however, and we can assume that he is there as an example of how risky it can be to fight for the Lord when his goal is peaceful surrender.

I believe that self-defense is right, and that the just war is right, but the fact is, most victims of war are like Malchus. They are people who have no choice. They are in the midst of violence because of the choices of their leaders. Most victims of war are innocent of the cause of the war. The people who actually cause wars often escape the hell of them, while people who don't even know why there is a war get killed and maimed. Therefore, it is rare for violence to be justified unless you know it can be done in such a way as to punish the guilty and not the innocent. Violence toward innocent people is an injustice that is greater than submitting to injustice.

Peter reveals the folly of risk that is not in obedience to Jesus. Peter was bold and was ready to risk his life for Jesus, but Jesus is not impressed, for Peter is ready to throw away all that Jesus had spent His life preparing for. Sacrifice can be stupid when it does not accomplish a purpose worthy of sacrifice. A Christian can make sacrifices that are more harmful than good because they only hinder the cause of Christ and give Satan the advantage. In the light of this John Calvin said, "..in the person of Peter, Christ condemns everything that men dare to attempt out of their own fancy....for nothing is more common than to defend, under the cloak of zeal, everything that we do, as if it were of no importance whether God approved, or not, what men suppose to be right." Calvin says that Christians are often so eager, like Peter, to do something great for God, and they end up doing more harm than good, as did Peter.

We would rather be wrong, however, than follow the way of the cross, for this goes against our grain. To surrender to an enemy and let them win over us is totally contrary to our human pride. But the fact is, that may be the only way you will win that enemy and make them a friend. We are often so busy trying to prove we are superior to the world that we seldom impress the world that we

love them. The message of Peter and Malchus is to make us look at our pride and recognize we can be as bad as the bad guy, and be as out of God's will as he is. Peter had good intentions, but his goal was as bad as his aim. His focus was on self and not on the enemy, or the ultimate goal of Christ. You do not win as a Christian by hurting an enemy. You only win by making that enemy a friend, and this means you don't sacrifice the enemy, but, like Jesus, you sacrifice self for the sake of the enemy. This is the message of the cross.

It is a Christian obligation not to hurt non-Christians. Jesus did not say to Peter that it is only a servant you hurt and so it is no big deal. He stopped him and healed that servant. He was going through the most momentous moments in history, and yet Jesus stopped to do His final miracle on a mere servant caught in the crossfire between Christians and Jews. Jesus never met an insignificant person. There was no one so insignificant that they are unworthy of His compassion and miracle power. In the midst of His greatest suffering Jesus never misses the chance to minister to the needs of others. It is not just the leading characters, but even the most minor players on the stage that He cares for. He heals Malchus, and soon the dying thief by His side will receive from Him the gift of eternal life. We tend to ignore the little guy and those who are of no importance to us, but Jesus loved them and was going to the cross to die for all people.

Peter cut off the ear of Malchus, but it was his own ears that were closed to the message of Jesus about compassion. Peter did finally get his ears back and later he wrote of the very lesson he had been deaf to. In I Peter 2:19-21 he wrote, "For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is the commendable before God. To

this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps."

Peter finally learned to stop doing for Jesus what Jesus does not need done. If Jesus needs to judge His enemies and wipe them out in wrath, He can do that at any time. What He needs is followers that will so love the enemy that they will suffer in order to win them. Peter went on to suffer for sinners and never again attack them as enemies of Christ. He took up the cross and suffered for them that they might see God's love and come to Christ as Savior. The way of the cross is not easy, but if you ever expect to win a non-Christian to Christ you are going to have to stop rejecting and attacking them. You need to suffer for them to win in Christian warfare.

You need to ask yourself if you are more concerned about fighting evil, or of saving evil people? Most of us are more concerned about fighting evil, but Jesus wants us to go the way of the cross. He wants us to be willing to pay a price to see that people are saved, and not only be concerned that people pay a price for their own evil. The way of the sword says, "I am going to make people pay." The way of the cross says, "I am going to pay for people." May God help us to choose the way of the cross and be successful in Christian warfare.

20. EQUAL BUT DIFFERENT Based on John 20:3-8

A well-to-do tourist stopped to get some souvenirs at Indian teepee. When he saw the poor old Indian chief sitting there barely making enough money to survive, he decided to give him some advice. He said, "Why don't you go to town and get a job in a

factory?" "Why," grunted the chief. "Well you could earn a lot of money." "Why," asked the chief. "Well," said the tourist, "If you work hard and save a lot you can build up a good bank account. Wouldn't you like that?" "Why," the chief asked? "For heaven's sake man," he shouted, "With a bank account you could retire and not have to work anymore." "Me not working now," the chief replied. And that was the end of the advice.

Here were two men who had very little in common. They were not equal in their possessions, in their opportunities, and in many other ways they were unequal. But they were equal in that one thing that made them both proud to be Americans. They were equal in their freedom. One was free to work hard and save, and the other was free to live leisurely and survive at best he could.

When we refer to the equality of all men we need to grasp that no one means by it that men are equal in every way. This is contrary to all the facts of life. Not even a fanatic for equality would argue that all are equal in size and strength. No one believes all are equal in their talents. Those who seek to destroy the concept of the equality of all men can find numerous illustrations to prove that men are not equal. They miss the whole point, however, for nobody is declaring they are equal in everything.

The question is not, can all women make equally good wives, but do all women have the freedom to try. The question is not, can all men bat equally well, but do all men have the freedom to play baseball? Elton Trueblood, the outstanding author and preacher, wrote, "The truth is that it is impossible to make a reasonable statement of the meaning of equality except in terms of freedom. Men are equal only because all men are intrinsically free..."

Once you depart from the issue of freedom, and try to prove equality, you quickly get into difficulty. There are many minor

areas of life where men are equal, but they are not a sufficient basis on which to build. Richard Armor gives us a humorous illustration of equality. A part of his poem goes like this:

**Of all the ills iniquitous,
The cold is most ubiquitous.
It comes to every national,
To sane and to irrational,
To debtor and to creditor,
Illiterate and editor.
And even royal highnesses
Have trouble with their sinuses.**

To this minor negative equality we could add the major negative equality of death. All men are equally marching toward the grave. Jesus descended to this level of equality with all men. In our text of John 20 we see two great men literally running toward the tomb, and in them we see a clear illustration of how men can be equal but different.

Peter and John were both in the inner circle of Jesus. Both were granted the privilege of being Apostles and authors of inspired writings. They were equal as great men of God, and they were the best of friends. And yet, they were very different from each other. They were both exalted by Christ, but in different ways. Peter was made the number one man among the Apostles as the spokesman for all. He was the one who gave the explanation on the day of Pentecost. John, on the other hand, was the Apostle whom Jesus loved in a unique way. John mentions this in verse 2, for it is the thing of which he is most proud. Peter and John were equal, but because of the age difference it was fitting that Peter be the leader, and John be the object of special love. John's youth captured the love of Christ.

We see that even though men are equal, their age makes them different in the roles they play. Unique leadership tends to go to the older, and unique love tends to go to the younger. Later in life John became the aged Apostle who, like Peter, had great respect, and authority. When he tried to assert that kind of authority as a youth, he was called a son of thunder. He tried to be equal to an older man of authority, and it didn't work. He was young and rash, and did not have the maturity to be in control of great power. He was ready to call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans, which was contrary to the spirit of Jesus. Christians are equal before God, but they still have to play roles on the stage of life that are fitting to their age and maturity.

We see this in verse 4 where both Peter and John are racing toward the tomb. Very seldom are people so anxious to get to a cemetery. What thoughts raced through their minds as their feet raced to the tomb? We don't know, but it is possible they were motivated by sheer anger that someone had robbed the tomb, as Mary had said. Possibly they had to see quickly because they feared Mary had relapsed again into demon possession, and was having hallucinations. Whatever the case, John tells us he outran Peter and got there first.

Almost every commentary says John got there first because he was so much younger that he could outrun Peter. They were equal, but their age made a big difference in their ability to run. This all seems rather trivial, and we may wonder why John bothers to share such details. As we continue to study this record of their experience on that first Easter Sunday I think we will see that John is deliberately, or under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but unconscious to himself, giving us a valuable portrait of how men of God can be radically different, and yet one in Christ.

It is so important to recognize differences in Christians, for to

fail to do so can lead to all kinds of problems. The Christians at Corinth had much contention and bitterness because they failed to recognize that the hand is different from the foot, but that both are equally important. The eye and the ear are both equally essential to the effective operation of the body, but they have radically different functions. The Corinthian Christians failed to see the truth of equality with differences, and it hurt the church. Christians with certain gifts and talents were rejecting Christians with other gifts and talents, and Paul had to say in I Cor. 12:21, "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you."

The best of Christians can hurt themselves and the church by not recognizing that equality does not mean sameness. We can be one in Christ, and equally called, saved, and sanctified, and yet be totally different in personality, interests, and gifts. Peter and John are not only good illustrations of this issue of equal but different, but they are excellent examples of how Christians should let their differences influence each other positively.

Before we leave verse 4, which refers to their differences in physical stamina and running ability, we should point out that this is the area which is most obvious. Christians are of great variety in physical ability due to age, health, and other factors. Even this can lead to problems in the spiritual life. F. O. Nillson was the founder of the Baptist General Conference. For years he labored to start small Swedish Baptist Churches in Minnesota. He did a great work, and lived a sacrificial life. When he got older and younger men came on the scene, and they began to get recognition, he became bitter.

It hurt him that he was being out run by some younger servant who didn't know what real sacrifice meant. He failed to adjust to the reality of life which makes youth outrun age. The result was

that his last years were spent in a negative spirit of doubt and despair. He wanted what can never be-equality and sameness. He wanted it to be that no one could rise to a place of honor and respect unless they did it by the same sacrificial efforts that he made. Life would not cooperate with his view, however, and he was hurt and rebellious. A good study of Peter and John could have helped him to avoid that tragic attitude.

Getting back to our text, we see in verse 5 that John comes to the tomb entrance first, but his nature is such that he does not go in, but merely stops and looks in. He is cautious and contemplative, but when panting Peter comes on the scene, he reveals his different personality by going right past the gazing John into the tomb to see for himself what was there. Peter did not in quiet reference approach the tomb, but presumptuously bursts in like a detective breaking into an apartment to get evidence. He didn't run all this way to meditate in the garden. He came to see what had happened, and that is just what he did.

A. W. Pink has an excellent comment on this. "Peter, more hot and zealous, impulsive, fervent, and forward, cannot be content without going into the sepulchre, and actually seeing with his own eyes. Both, we may be sure, were deeply attached to our Lord. The hearts of both, at this critical juncture, were full of hopes and fears, anxieties and expectations, all tangled together. Yet each acts in his own characteristic fashion! Let us learn from this to make allowances for wide varieties in the individual character of believers. To do so will save us much trouble in the journey of life and prevent many an uncharitable thought. Let us not judge brethren harshly, and set them down in a low place, because they do not see or feel things as we see and feel." John could have been offended with Peter, and called him a sacrilegious clown stumbling into sacred ground with an indifferent mind and insensitive heart. John didn't do that, however, for he loved Peter and accepted him

for what he was. He recognized the differences in their nature as God given differences.

In verse 8 we that Peter's action influenced John, and it brought him into the tomb also where he saw evidence that made him believe. I like Matthew Henry's comment which shows how these equal but different Apostles probably helped each other just because of their differences. He writes, "Perhaps John's quickness had made Peter run faster, and now Peter's boldness makes John venture further than otherwise either the one or the other would have done." Their differences complimented each other, and because they loved each other their differences were constantly influencing each other in a positive way.

In 1876 Horace Bushnell preached a sermon on verse 8 which he titled Unconscious Influence. It has been republished many times as one of the greatest sermons. The whole point of the sermon is that Peter, by being what he was, unconsciously influenced John to step into the tomb. Had John been alone he may have just looked in, but Peter's presence in the tomb drew him in also. From this we learn that our character and conduct is always having an influence on others just because we are different. Christians differ in their boldness, and so if a shy Christian associates with a bold Christian he is likely to do things he otherwise would not. This process of unconscious influence works for good or evil.

Many a man walks into a bar and never dreams that his conduct may be encouraging a friend who is afraid to do so to go ahead and do it. The person he has this unconscious influence may go on to destroy his life, and add a heavy burden of sorrow on to the lives of many others. He did not do it deliberately, but only by unconscious influence. Another man by faithful attendance in church can influence neighbors and friends in such a way that it could be a factor in their eventual coming to Christ. Again, it may have been a

completely unconscious influence. The point is, just to be alive is to be an influence constantly, and that is why we are warned to avoid all appearance of evil, and why we are to strive to constantly let the light of Christ shine through us in good works.

I was impressed the other night with one of those Frisbees that glow in the dark. If you hold it up to the light it absorbs the light, and then in dark it glows. It has no light in itself, and so it loses the light, and can only continue to glow by being brought near to the light again. So it is with us as believers. Only as we draw near to Christ and absorb His light can we shine in a dark world. If we are not perpetually under the influence of His love and grace, we will soon lose our light, and have no positive influence in the darkness of this world. We may be as different as Peter was from John in our personality, age, gifts, and numerous other ways, but we can be of equal influence for Christ if we learn to live in the presence of the living Christ, and to love one another as equals in Christ, even though often very different.

