

Commentary on the Epistle to the John

written by Murray McLellan

The Gospel of John

II. Jesus' Self-Disclosure in Word and Deed (1:19-10:42)(Part 1)

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A. The Witness of the Forerunner (1:19-34) - [To Top](#)

V. 19-20 Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

Here we receive some of the "testimony" or "witness" of John.

John the baptist must have caused quite a stir that a delegation of men would be sent by the religious leaders to see what he was all about. Since some people were thinking that perhaps he was the Christ, John vehemently denied any suggestion that he was the Messiah. "I'm not even worthy to loose His sandals," was His response to such a thought.

Throughout this testimony, we see the great humility of this witness of the True Light. He is, and we ought to be, clothed with humility (1 Peter 5:5).

V. 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not."
"Are you the Prophet?"

And he answered, "No."

When he is asked if he is Elijah, John responds with a definite, "No." Yet, when we read Matthew 11: 13-15, Jesus says that John the baptist is that Elijah. Jesus fully grasps the Scriptures! John the baptist proclaims more truth than he fully grasps. Even when he proclaims Jesus as the Lamb of God, I do not think he fully understood all the implications of the cross and the kingdom Jesus would bring in.

When John was asked whether he was "the Prophet," they were referring to the prophet Moses spoke of in Deut. 18: 15-18. This Prophet like unto Moses is Jesus Christ, God's own Son.

V. 22 - 23 Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the LORD,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

John identifies himself to them in quoting from Isaiah 40. He is a herald - a warning voice. In the original context, the call went out for a leveling of hills and valleys, and a straightening of curves to accommodate the return of the covenant people from exile. This serves as a type of a greater redemption. One event pictures the other. See Isa. 40: 3-9. The Scripture is full of such pictures, which often causes confusion for many readers. (i.e. Matt. 24 - where destruction of temple and Jerusalem becomes a picture of the second coming; and 2 Sam. 7 talking of Solomon - but also Christ).

V. 24-25 Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

They want to know why John is baptizing the already covenant people of God. They believed their circumcision already marked them as God's covenant people. They did not grasp that John was paving the way for the promised new covenant.

V. 26-28 John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose." These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

John baptized with a baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3-6; Acts 13:24-25; Acts 19:3-4). All sinners, whether Jews or Gentiles, need to repent. The flesh profits nothing and can make no one perfect before God. John's baptism and call to repentance was the preparation - a humbling of oneself under the mighty hand of God - for the Anointed One.

John testified that they did not know Jesus - the Christ. (Compare

John 1:11 - the greater part of Israel died in their sins). How many here will perish though there is a great Savior presented to you? The spirit of slumber is upon many and they do not behold the Lamb of God. Money and pleasure and the world they know, but they do not know Christ.

To know Christ is to be humbled. To know Christ is to repent, falling on your face and crying out, "Lord, what will you have me do?"

V. 29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

What a testimony! Remember Gen. 22? There God states that He Himself will provide a lamb. And John says that Jesus is that promised Lamb! He is the true (ultimate) Lamb. He is that which all the others foreshadowed. That old passover lamb which brought about the Old Covenant deliverance foreshadowed Jesus, the new Passover Lamb sacrificed for us to bring about the New Covenant deliverance. Every morning and evening under the law, a sacrifice of a lamb was made. The One of whom those sacrifices testified is here in Jesus. Behold Him! Look ye saints, the sight is glorious. Let us prize Him as our sacrifice! Jesus came to save sinners by taking their sin upon Himself. Thus He takes my guilt and carries my sin out of the sight of God and it is remembered no more, for He "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree" that they might be taken off me. He died under the judgment of God, accursed of God on the cursed tree. How can we not tear up as we behold our Savior? When we see the love of Christ on the cross, doesn't it make you think that if you were not saved, you'd want to be converted?

It is not looking at yourself and all your badness. Many look and behold their badness. It is not looking at yourself and all your goodness. Many look and behold their goodness. No - behold Jesus, the Lamb of God. And believers, let continually looking at Him keep you from sin. I hope that every time you leave here, you leave occupied with Jesus Christ. We don't want you to be occupied with looking at each other, because you're a mess, and I'm a mess. But there is One who is altogether lovely - perfect in every way.

Don't just look "at" but look "to." Look to Him as your sin-bearer and Lord. For example, let's say a wealthy man promises to help you. He tells you to call on him if you ever have a need. Your situation worsens and you find yourself in big trouble and go to his house. You watch the man come and go, and see others go to him and be helped and have their debts cancelled. You can look at the man all day, but until you look to him to help you, all your watching and holding back will not help you. The same is true of the Lamb of God in whom is the promise of hope. Go to Him. Humble yourself before Him. Submit to Him. Surrender to Him as your only hope. Behold the Lamb of God. Go to Him!

Poor lost sinner, this testimony is for you. This book is written that you

might "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name."

Where is your help and hope? Do you look to yourself? That would be very foolish. Do you look to others, who themselves are perishing? Do you look to the church as if it can dish out grace? Do you look to the preacher? Then you are doubly foolish! Oh, if you could see Him, the Lamb of God. If you ever saw your need and beheld Him who takes away sin, you'd run to Him. The God who saved Saul of Tarsus, the God who saved Murray McLellan can save you.

Jesus is the Savior of the world. He is the one official, God-appointed, Savior for the world. There is no other. Go to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

V. 30-33 This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

Jesus is the one who will pour out the Spirit as promised in the Old Testament Scriptures - in that great age of blessing that John is announcing and preparing the way for. (See Isa. 44:3-5, 32:14-19; Ezek. 36:25-27; 37:14)

V. 34 And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

See Isaiah 42:1-9 (and Psalm 2 and Isa. 9:6-7) - Jesus is that One!

Oh let us behold the Son of God - Jesus - the Lamb of God - for He is:

- the subject of Holy Scripture,
- the preacher's only message,
- the gospel's glorious revelation,
- the sinner's only hope,
- the believer's only rule,
- the worshipper's only object
- the embodiment and glory of the Triune God.

Are you burdened with sin? Behold the Lamb of God!
Are you troubled with affliction? Behold the Lamb of God!
Are you in need of comfort? Behold the Lamb of God!
Do you need reviving? Behold the Lamb of God!
Are you fearful for your soul? Behold the Lamb of God!
Are you concerned about the future? Behold the Lamb of God!

Do you need instruction in practical godliness? Behold the Lamb of

God!

What can be more inspiring to godliness than Christ crucified?

Do you want to learn how to give? Behold the Lamb of God!

Do you want to know what kind of father and husband you ought to be? Behold the Lamb of God!

Do you want to know how to set priorities and serve Christ's church and kingdom? Behold the Lamb of God!

Do you want to know how to love one another? Behold the Lamb of God!

Do you want to know how to endure and bear affliction? Behold the Lamb of God!

Do you want to know how to pray? Behold the Lamb of God!

Do you want to know how to live? Behold the Lamb of God!

Do you want to know how to die? Behold the Lamb of God!

Jesus Christ is the greatest, most glorious subject in all the world!

Trust Him. Worship Him. Love Him.

B. The Witness of the First Disciples (1:35-51)- [To Top](#)

V. 35-39 Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?"

They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?"

He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour).

Here we have two of John's disciples who come to faith in Christ through the public preaching of the word. This is certainly one way that God has used over the years to gather in His people. (Not just a pastor's preaching, but the public testimony of the saints.)

Jesus invites them to "come and see." (i.e. come and be acquainted with me!)

V. 40-42 One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone).

Simon Peter became a believer through the testimony of his brother. It is often difficult to witness to family members, and yet when backed up with a changed and holy life, many have been converted through members of their own family. May we pray for courage and zeal to talk to those who are closest to us. We want to testify to the truth of Christ, so we need to pray for courage and wisdom.

V. 43. The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me."

Philip gets a direct call from Jesus.

V. 44-45 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Nathanael is found by a friend.

As Andrew declared to Peter, "We have found the Messiah (i.e. the Christ)," Philip declares, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets wrote." Note how much of Christ is in the Old Testament Scriptures. Christ is the sum and substance of the Old Testament. He is the fulfillment. To Him every sacrifice pointed. Of Him every high priest was a type and every part of the tabernacle was a shadow. Every judge and deliverer of Israel was a figure. He is the Prophet like unto Moses, the Son of the virgin, the Lamb foretold by Isaiah, the Righteous Branch mentioned by Jeremiah, the true Shepherd foreseen by Ezekiel, and the Messiah who was to be cut off but not for Himself, as predicted by Daniel. The Spirit which was in them testified of Christ! (1 Peter 1:11)

V. 46. And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Philip doesn't dispute with him but rather calls him to "come and see." This is also a call to the reader to examine all John has recorded. John, also, is saying, "Come along with me and see!"

V. 47. Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"

"in whom is no deceit" - i.e. who is no Jacob (Jacob means deceiver)

Jesus calls Nathanael an Israelite who is no Jacob. He has no hidden agenda. He is a real and true seeker of God.

V. 48. Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

Being under the fig tree seems to be a place of studying and meditating on the Scripture on one's own. Only God would have known.

The fig tree symbolized a time of peace, safety, rest, and refreshing in the days of Solomon as king (see 1 Kings 4:25). The prophet Micah spoke of the coming days when the Lord will establish His kingdom and reign. "But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree,

and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. For all people walk each in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever. 'In that day,' says the Lord, 'I will assemble the lame, I will gather the outcast and those whom I have afflicted; I will make the lame a remnant and the outcast a strong nation; so the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on, even forever.' " (Micah 4: 4-7)

Nathanael was a true Jew anticipating that day!

Zechariah describes the day in a similar way.

"Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign; for behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH. For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,' says the Lord of hosts, 'And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day,' says the Lord of hosts, 'Everyone will invite his neighbor under his vine and under his fig tree.' " (Zech. 3:8-10)

V. 49-50. Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these."

Nathanael was amazed and convinced and acted upon what he knew. Jesus tells him he has only just begun to see!

V. 51. And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Jesus opens up this final statement with "most assuredly", which is literally, "Amen, amen." Jesus uses this to signal something that He really wants to emphasize as important truth. It is interesting to note that the word "you" now switches to the plural form in the original language.

I think that this statement is an unmistakable allusion to Genesis 28: 12 in which Jacob dreamed "and behold, a ladder set up on the earth and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending upon it." This may also indicate that perhaps this was the passage of Scripture Nathanael had been meditating upon under the fig tree. Maybe that is why Jesus specifically made the reference to Nathanael being no "Jacob" and why Nathanael was so amazed. Jesus is telling us that He is that ladder. He alone is the one Mediator between God and men. The word "open" is written in a tense that refers to a once for all opening. In other words, Jesus says that heaven will be opened and will stay open! Praise God. The veil is torn, we stand before God with open face in Christ and heaven is opened to us!

It was necessary that our Mediator be both God and man so that he might bring God and man together. It is by Christ, the Ladder, and

only by Christ, that believing sinners ascend to heaven and find acceptance with the holy Lord God (John 14:6). The distance between earth and heaven is infinite. How can we possibly get there? Behold, a Ladder! Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world that heaven might be opened to all who believe.

C. The Witness of the First Miracle (2:1-12) - [To Top](#)

The theme of Jesus' first signs is clearly that of 2 Cor. 5:17 - the old has gone and the new has come! Let us now take a look at the first sign that Jesus gave to those who have eyes to see. This is just the beginning of the greater things that Nathanael would see.

V. 1-2 "On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding."

The scene is the joyous occasion of a wedding celebration. It seems that perhaps Mary was involved in the arrangements in some way, since in verse 3 she is aware that the wine was running out and the fact that she gave orders to the servants in v. 5.

V. 3 "And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine.'"

I am aware that Roman Catholic doctrine uses this to back up praying to Mary. For they say that Mary gets Jesus to listen. But what about all the others who ask Jesus to do something and he does it? Why not use them for a Mediator, too? Mary is the mother of Jesus - His humanity. She is not the mother of God! [See Isa. 9:6 ? a child is born; a Son is given] He was the Son of God long before He was born of Mary. ["In the beginning was the Word?"] Also, there could be no immaculate conception of Mary to make her sinless to protect the sinlessness of Jesus. For then her mother before her would have had to have been sinless and her mother before her and so on all the way back. Also clear passages like Mark 3:31-32 reveal the false teaching of Mary's perpetual virginity. Mary had to be redeemed as a sinner (Luke 1:46-47!).

Tradition says that Mary was widowed and leaned hard on her first born son and His resourcefulness. Thus, she turns to Him when she realizes they have run out of wine. So John has now given us the facts. However, even as there was more to Jacob's ladder than first met the eye of Nathanael, so too, a greater message than simply a "miracle" is being set up. The prophet Joel called Israel to mourning and repentance for their sin had left them empty in a dry and thirsty land. As a result their wine "dried up" and was "cut off" from their mouth (Joel 1:5-13). Israel was in the same plight as the bridegroom - no wine. But Joel calls repentant Israel to look to the promise of the Lord, for the Lord promises a new day of rejoicing with the coming of Messiah. In that day, the vine will yield its strength and "the vats shall overflow with new wine!" (See Joel 2:21-32) Following this, Joel says that the Lord will pour out His Spirit. This is the passage quoted by

Peter at Pentecost in Acts 2 when he says that the fulfillment of Joel has come.

As we shall see, Jesus, through this sign, manifests that indeed He is the One "of whom Moses in the law, and also, the prophets, wrote." (John 1:46) This sign was "written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:31)

V. 4 "Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.'"

"Woman" - Ultimately, the only relationship to Jesus that counts is the one entered into through faith. Jesus does not just do miracles to meet the needs of His family or friends, but always to serve the purposes of God and the reason for which He came to earth. Mark 3:31-35 makes it clear that we have a relationship to Jesus closer than that which His own mother had with Him. We are His true family and He became one with us. Now as Jesus entered His mission, the prerogatives of motherhood no longer applied. She, like every other person, must come to Him as the promised Messiah - the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That hour will come (see John 13:1 and 17:1).

Jesus' is focused on more than just a shortage of wine for the wedding feast. He sees the lack of wine in Israel. Mary is thinking of the wedding. Jesus' mind is on His Father's business, and He is thinking of the Messianic age of the Spirit when wine would flow liberally - the new covenant (see Jer. 31:12 and Amos 9:13-14). This is always the mind and focus of Jesus. (i.e. ch. 3 - you must be born again; ch. 4 - you would have asked Me for a drink and I have food to eat of which you do not know etc.) Thus, in our passage here, the new wine in the old purification pots has something to say.

It is as if Jesus is saying that it is not yet hour when the great wine will flow; but it will!

V. 5 "His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever He says to you, do it.'"

When Mary approaches Jesus as His mother, she is reproached. Now when she responds as a believer who trusts Him fully, her faith is honored. She still doesn't know what He will do, but she has committed the matter to Him and trusts Him! Oh, if we would trust Him so. If we would look to Him - for just consider what He is able to do! But He will not be manipulated. Trust Him. He is good.

V. 6 "Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece."

Notice that these are old covenant cleansing jars, for ceremonial washings. This is significant. Their purpose provides a clue to the meaning of the sign. The water represents the old order - the law and the custom of Moses, which Jesus was to replace with something better when His hour came, on the cross. Jesus didn't have them throw the water out, but in the transformation, Christ shows the fulfillment of the shadows.

V. 7-10 "Jesus said to them, 'Fill the waterpots with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, 'Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.' And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, 'Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!'"

Here wine is received without money and without price (see Isaiah 55: 1-4)! What a picture of the abundance and all-satisfying provision of the new age. Jesus has not just provided a few bottles, but six huge waterpots. The wine of this world will end and leave you thirsty, but He who comes to Jesus will never hunger and he that believes in Him shall never thirst. In Christ is abundance of joy. Is there any doubt that He, who by an act of His will transformed, not only water into wine, but also has transformed our nature, is able to supply all your need according to His riches in glory? (Phil. 4: 19)

The way of the world is to give you the best first and then slowly it gets worse and worse. For those of us in Christ's kingdom, it is going to get better. Jesus whets our appetite in this incident by graciously making good the deficiencies of the unknown bridegroom in anticipation of the perfect way He Himself will fill the role of the Messianic Bridegroom. Oh, a better Bridegroom has come. The theme of the new creation begun in the prologue, continues and builds in this first sign!

Wine makes the heart merry. Indeed the new wine of the new covenant should make your heart merry! We're not drunk with wine. No, we're filled with the Spirit. This is the age of the Spirit - the age of the new wine. Oh, our cup runneth over!

V. 11-12 "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him. After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days."

Notice this is a sign, not just a display of power. A sign points beyond the powerful display to deeper realities, that can be perceived by eyes of faith. Chapter 2: 23-25 shows that many saw the power, but did not receive the Lord Jesus Christ for who He was.

We need to connect this sign with the purpose of the book as mentioned in John 20: 30-31. Is this not a great foretaste of a greater and more glorious marriage feast to be held when Christ Himself will be the Bridegroom and believers will be the bride? Blessed will they be in that day who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!

Be assured, the feast of this world will come to an end. The world will run out of wine. Come to Jesus before it is too late. In His presence is fullness of joy. At His right hand are pleasures forevermore. You don't have to ration yourself with Christ. Drink all you can of Him! He's not just giving trickles of grace. Jesus is far better. His blessings are far superior to the fleeting and short-lived pleasures of this world.

D. The Witness of the Raised Temple (2:13-25) - [To Top](#)

The temple was the center of Judaism - the center of Old Covenant worship. It was the meeting place with God. There once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat. Everyday there was a morning and evening sacrifice. In the days of the Old Covenant, when one thought of God, the temple would come to mind. With the coming of Jesus, all that is going to change.

(i) The Temple must be cleansed (v. 13-17)

"Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!' Then His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.' "

If the Lamb come in meekness responded this way in the temple, what about when He comes as a Lion (Rev. 6:16-17)? Oh how we need the cleansing of the "destroyed temple!"

The money changers were actually doing a service for those who came to worship at the temple. After all we wouldn't expect a Jew from across the Mediterranean to drag a lamb along with his luggage. However, the problem that developed was that the business had so taken over that real worship was hardly possible. The environment was more that of a fair than a house of prayer for all nations. Though they kept the form (sacrifices etc.), they had departed from the worship of God Himself (see Amos 5:21-24).

Old covenant worship was tied to the temple and the sacrificial system. In the new covenant that all changes. Romans 12:1-2, clearly proclaims that worship is now bound up in all of life, for we are the temple of God - the place of worship. We are not to reduce "worship" to a so-called worship service or even worse, to the singing part of that service. Worship is being God-centered in all of life - from the

moment we wake up to the moment we go to bed. We are to live as worshippers of God all the time.

When people redefine "worship" as a special act performed at a special time, they are able to come in to "corporate worship" and yet nurture all their bitterness, or know they've just cheated on our income tax, or they've yelled at their children all the way to the "service", or they've no integrity - and yet "they're here to worship!" Oh, would not Jesus respond as He does here in this passage in John 2: 13-16? God is not interested in forms. He is interested in reality. He knows the hearts of men (see John 2: 23-25).

God's Christ does not win popularity polls in a fallen world. He was so devoted to and zealous for the cause of God. It was written of the Christ, 'Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.' Literally it states that 'Zeal for Your house has consumed Me.' I think that this is a foreshadowing of the cross. So zealous for the name of His Father was He, that He went to the cross to die there to demonstrate the righteousness of God. The fact that Jesus goes on to explain that the temple of His body must be destroyed and raised again, makes it very likely that He has the crucifixion in mind.

(ii) Jesus' right to cleanse the temple (v. 18-22)

"So the Jews answered and said to Him, 'What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?'

Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'

Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?'

But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said."

If Jesus had behaved like some vandal, He would have been arrested as by the temple police. However He did this, it was done with moral integrity and authority. (i.e. notice that there was no destruction of or loss of property to anyone; not even the doves were released to escape) The response of the Jews seems to indicate that their own consciences know that Jesus did the right thing.

In Jesus' response to them, He is referring to His body as the temple. Jesus Himself is the meeting place between God and His people! He is the temple! Jesus says if you know Him, you know God. In fact, we see item after item from the Old Testament Scriptures picked up by John, who declares Jesus as its ultimate fulfillment.

- He is the true and ultimate Light.
- He is the true and ultimate Lamb of God.
- He is the true and ultimate Sabbath.
- He is the true and ultimate Bread.
- He is the true and ultimate Shepherd.
- He is the true and ultimate Vine.

- He is the true and ultimate Temple - the meeting place of God!

He has come to fulfill the law and the prophets! (Matt. 5:17) The new Temple makes the old one obsolete, even as the new priesthood made the old obsolete (See Heb. 7:11-12, 17, 19). This was already announce in the Old Testament Scriptures (see Psalm 110:4). The prophets announced that there would be a new covenant (i.e. Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:7-13). When would this occur? These things would be made obsolete when the Messiah arrived on the scene!

What Jesus is proclaiming to those Jews and to us, is that if you read the Old Testament Scriptures right, you will discover the pieces all point in one direction - to Me! Jesus presents Himself as the fulfillment of all the Bible. Jesus Christ is the ultimate meeting place of God and His people. There is no other temple. There is no other sacrifice. He is it! In fact, it is Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection that establishes Him as the ultimate meeting place between God and His people (John 2:19). Jesus is the tabernacle (John 1:14). Jesus is the temple. He really is the place where you meet with God. And not just in His incarnation, but in His destruction and resurrection. The temple is the place of sacrifice. Jesus' body is the temple and He Himself is sacrificed. In the New Testament Scriptures, Jesus is presented as the Priest, as the temple, and as the Lamb who is sacrificed. They all come together in this One who is Christ. The very fact that this temple (His body) is destroyed, is why He becomes the meeting place! The ultimate meeting place with God is the cross! It is here God and sinners are reconciled! Here we meet.

Where is the sign of Jesus' authority? Jesus states His authority will be made manifest when they destroy the temple of His body and He raises it from the grave in three days! It will be manifest in His resurrection and ascension as Lord! They will destroy His body, but He'll be raised as their Lord! (See the horror of Acts 2:36-37; 4:10-11; 5:30-31; 2:23-24!!!)

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up," was Jesus declaration of His power. (See John 10:18; and Rom. 1:4)

Why did Jesus answer them in such a riddle, such a mystery, such a parable? He knew their hearts! (See v. 23-25) He answered fools according to their folly (Prov. 26:5).

What a sign He'd give them - His resurrection! Jesus is saying to them, "If I do not rise, then you need not believe that I am He. But if I do rise, you will be without excuse if you do not believe in Me!" (See also Matt. 12:39!)

V. 20 "Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?'" You can almost see the sneers and hear the mocking tone. Unregenerate man gives the words of our God a physical interpretation, when our Lord always gives them a spiritual interpretation!

V. 21 " But He was speaking of the temple of His body." In grace, we who believe in Jesus, have been placed into Christ. We, as members of His body, are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). If it was wrong to defile that old temple of wood and stone and gold that perishes, how much more wrong is it to defile by sin the temple of the Spirit which is eternal?

V. 22 "Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said." As the temple of God, Jesus was misunderstood by the Jews and even His own disciples. Not even they, understood at the time Jesus spoke these words. Like other Jews, they were looking with expectation of a political ruler who would restore the glory of Israel and rule powerfully. They just didn't have a place for Christ's suffering and death. Peter proclaimed that Messiah can't die. The devil himself did not understand. While everyone thought God was losing and while the body of Jesus was three days in the tomb, God had triumphed! This shows us the progressive revelation they had. First they saw dimly (men like trees walking). Afterwards, with the coming of the Spirit, the light pierced them and they saw clearly.

Truth can lay dormant for a long time in the hearts and minds of men, without doing them any good or service. If the Holy Spirit waters it, suddenly it may do good, even long after the teacher is dead! Let us not grow weary in teaching and proclaiming truth. One day, every hearer will remember the words of this gospel. God's word will always come to pass. One day you will remember and know what is true. I pray that it will not be in torments in Hades that these truths are remembered, for then it will do you no good.

Jesus told them what would happen before it happened. You cannot escape the history of the resurrection. What do you do with someone who claims to be God and then comes back from the dead to prove it? What do you do with witnesses who once fled for their lives, who would now die for what they had seen?

(iii) The reason for the riddle (v. 23-25)

"Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man."

The hardness of the Jew's hearts is made manifest in that a second cleansing of the temple is needed three years later on the week of the crucifixion. Christ knew their hearts.

Many want a "power" religion. They "believe" (for the Scriptures says that they do), but Jesus does not treat their belief as true belief. There is "belief" and then there is belief in John's gospel. There is a belief which Jesus views as enduring and persevering and genuine, and there

is a belief which Jesus views as spurious - which is interested in superficial things.

So many people were fascinated by Jesus' power. They were fascinated by the miracles; by the signs; but they did not come to grips with a suffering servant who would be destroyed. They did not have a faith which took them to the cross - which they take up, dying daily. Jesus calls for disciples to follow Him - outside the camp! This is the kind of faith that embraces the fellowship of His sufferings.

Revelation 21:22 speaks of the glorious New Jerusalem: "But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." Isn't that wonderful? You don't have to approach God through some rite or structure. Jesus Himself is the temple, and there we will meet with God - face to face. There is no temple in the New Jerusalem but Jesus Himself. In the new covenant we have entered into His life, never to be removed or separated from He who is our life. How great to be a citizen of the Jerusalem which is above and which is free! (Gal. 4:26)

E. The Witness of the New Birth (3:1-21) - [To Top](#)

Being "born again" is a term recognized by many in our culture today. However, I fear it is greatly misused and misunderstood. In this chapter we will see Jesus' teaching of the necessity of being born of the Spirit.

V. 1-2 "There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.'"

Here we have a man as mentioned in chapter 2:23-25. He is a man who believed in Jesus' name when he saw the signs Jesus did. Yet, Jesus did not commit Himself to him, for He knew his heart. Now Nicodemus by all standards was no doubt a good man. As a Pharisee, he would have been scrupulous about following the law. Also, no one attained to the position of a ruler of the Jews (i.e. in the Sanhedron) without a tremendous knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures; even memorizing much of its contents.

John selects this episode with Nicodemus and the next with the sinful adulteress woman at the well, as representative of people from one end of the spectrum to the other. All are sinners before a holy God. It matters not where you fit on the scale, when weighed by the holy God of righteousness, you are found wanting. You must be born again!

John uses language in the most symbol-laden ways as we have already discovered. I believe that his use of the term "night" is no different. In fact, if you read through the book, you will find that John continually contrasts "light" and "darkness", and "day" and "night" (i.e.

see John 11:9-10). In the 13th chapter of this gospel, John describes Judas going out to betray the Lord "and it was night." That's not just a chronological marker, for we know it was night. Judas went out into the blackness of rebellious, dark, sinful night. (See also 1 Thess. 5:4-5). In like manner, Nicodemus comes in the darkness picturing the need of man (as per John 3:19-21). The point: Despite Nicodemus' status, knowledge, and power, he is spiritually blind and ignorant. He comes, not just in absence of sunlight, but in absence of spiritual light. Nicodemus knew not that he was wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. He needs to be born again. He needs to be born of the Spirit that he might see.

V. 3 "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'"

Nicodemus recognizes Jesus as someone special - a teacher or prophet from God. However, though he sees the powerful displays and miracles, he does not see their significance. He does not see the kingdom of God. He needs to be born from above that He might have spiritual eyes to see the reality of the kingdom of God. Jesus is telling Nicodemus, "It is not learning from a "teacher" that you need, it is, first and foremost, new life. God is spirit. Natural man cannot comprehend the spiritual realm. Messiah's kingdom was not a temporal one but a spiritual one needing a spiritual birth. (See also John 1:12-13). The kingdom, which to the world (and even sometimes to us) may appear small and weak and despised, and not much of a kingdom; yet it is great and glorious and will be unveiled as such in that day of the unveiling of the sons of God - when even creation itself is delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. We are saved in this hope and thus, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

V. 4 "Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' "

Nicodemus shows the blindness of his heart to spiritual reality. The truth is, even if you could go back into your mother's womb and be born again physically, it wouldn't matter. "That which is born of flesh is flesh." (v. 6) If I was born of my mother a hundred times, I would still not be fit for the kingdom of God. I'd still be born in my self-centered and sinful flesh. I'd still have my corrupt nature inherited from my parents and thus, alienated from God. A thistle will not bring forth grapes. It is not two physical births we need. We need to be "born of water and the Spirit."

V. 5 "Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. "

What is this saying, "born of water and the Spirit" ? Some think it is baptism, but Christian baptism hadn't even been established yet, and John's baptism wasn't enough according to Acts 19. Some say it is natural birth (i.e. physical birth and spiritual birth), saying that it refers to the amniotic fluid. However, no Jewish or Greek literature

that I am aware of ever speaks of natural birth as a birth of water.

I think that we can find the answer in the pages of Scripture itself. First, notice the parallel between verses 3 and 5.

Verse 3 "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' "

Verse 5 "Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.' "

Looking at the two verses, we see that being born of water and the Spirit is parallel to being born again. Therefore, it would be one birth of water and Spirit, not two births. The Greek grammar supports this as there is one preposition governing both of the nouns. If it was two births, the Greek would normally read, "born of water and born of the Spirit" or "born of water and of the Spirit."

What does born of water and the Spirit mean? Verse 10, tells us that one who knows the Old Testament Scriptures should know the answer. "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?'" (John 3:10) So, the answer is not found in medical books that teach about amniotic fluid, but in the Old Testament Scriptures. Nicodemus should have understood on the basis of Scripture, for he was an "expert" in the Scripture.

Ezekiel 36-37 is one of the many New Covenant passages. In chapter 36 we told of the New Covenant and then chapter 37 follows with the valley of dry bones vision, which illustrates the New Covenant and new life give to those who were now dead. This is the illustration of being born again.

In Ezek. 36:24, we read God's promise of the New Covenant, "For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. " God did that in the resettling and rebuilding of Jerusalem (See Ezra and Nehemiah)

Verse 25-27 continues, "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments to do them."

In the New Covenant, there would be a cleansing with pure water and a transformation (new hearts). There is a pouring out of water to cleanse and a pouring out of the Spirit. This is the new birth. This is being born again - born from above.

V. 6-7 " That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." "

Galatians chapter 4 provides us with the perfect example of the difference between being born of flesh (Ishmael) and being born of the Spirit (Isaac). There is great mystery in both births. The sperm is

implanted into the ovum and it begets physical life. Physical birth gives us all the attributes of physical life. In spiritual birth, the Word of God (seed or sperm of God) is implanted in the ovum of the heart and the Spirit begets life.

Nicodemus, as one who knew the Old Testament Scriptures should not be surprised (i.e. "Do not marvel") at this truth. However, the problem of Nicodemus is that he read the Scriptures through a literal and fleshly grid.

"You must be born again." Jesus says, "You must." This is an absolute need. It is not a way, it is the way.

V. 8 "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.' "

Although you don't see the wind or know its origin, you do see its effects. In like manner, we might not be able to explain and analyze all the issues of the new birth, but you can't deny its effects! One cannot be born again and still live like the devil. Yes, people do backslide and there are different rates of growth, but ultimately Jesus says, "By their fruits you shall know them." The new birth is a clean-up job with power to change. True conversion changes people.

James Montgomery Boice, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, gives the following story from the life of Harry A. Ironside.

"One Sunday as he was walking through the city he came upon a group of Salvation Army workers holding a meeting on the corner of Market and Grant Avenues. There were probably sixty of them. When they recognized Dr. Ironside they immediately asked him if he would not like to give his testimony. He did, giving a word about how God had saved him through faith in the bodily death and literal resurrection of Jesus.

As he was speaking Dr. Ironside noticed that on the edge of the crowd there was a well-dressed man who had taken a card from his pocket and had written something on it. As Ironside finished his talk this man came forward, lifted his hat, and very politely handed him the card. On one side was his name, which Ironside immediately recognized. The man was one of the early socialists who had made a name for himself lecturing, not only for socialism, but also against Christianity. As Ironside turned the card over, he read, 'Sir, I challenge you to debate with me the question, "Agnosticism versus Christianity" in the Academy of Science Hall next

Sunday afternoon at four o'clock. I will pay all expenses.'

Ironsides reread the card aloud and then replied somewhat like this. 'I am very much interested in this challenge. Frankly, I am already scheduled for another meeting next Lord's Day afternoon at three o'clock, but I think it will be possible for me to get through with that in time to reach the Academy of Science Hall by four, or if necessary I could arrange to have another speaker substitute for me at the meeting already advertised. Therefore I will be glad to agree to this debate on the following conditions; namely, that in order to prove that Mr --- has something worth fighting for and worth debating about, he will promise to bring with him to the hall next Sunday two people, whose qualifications I will give in a moment, as proof that agnosticism is of real value in changing human lives and building true character.

'First, he must promise to bring with him one man who was for years what we commonly call a "down-and-outer." I am not particular as to the exact nature of the sins that had wrecked his life and made him an outcast from society - whether a drunkard, or a criminal of some kind, or a victim of his sensual appetite - but a man who for years was under the power of evil habits from which he could not deliver himself, but who on some occasion entered one of Mr. ---'s meetings and heard his glorification of agnosticism and his denunciations of the Bible and Christianity, and whose heart and mind as he listened to such an address were so deeply stirred that he went away from that meeting saying, "Henceforth, I too am an agnostic!" and as a result of imbibing that particular philosophy found that a new power had come into his life. The sins that he once loved, he now hates, and righteousness and goodness are now the ideals of his life. He is entirely a new man, a credit to himself and an asset to society - all because he is an agnostic.

'Secondly, I would like to thank Mr. --- to promise to bring with him one woman - and I think he may have more difficulty in finding the woman than the man - who was once a poor, wrecked, characterless outcast, the slave of evil passions, and the victim of man's corrupt living ? perhaps one who had lived for years in some evil resort, ? utterly lost, ruined and wretched because of her life of sin. But this woman also entered a hall where Mr. --- was loudly proclaiming his agnosticism and ridiculing the message of the Holy Scriptures. As she listened, hope was born in her heart, and she said, "This is just what I need to deliver me from the slavery of sin!" She followed the teaching and became an

intelligent agnostic or infidel. As a result her whole being revolted against the degradation of the life she had been living. She fled from the den of iniquity where she had been held captive so long; and today, rehabilitated, she has won her way back to an honored position in society and is living a clean, virtuous, happy life - all because she is an agnostic.

'Now,' he said addressing the gentleman who had presented him with his card and the challenge, 'if you will promise to bring these two people with you as examples of what agnosticism can do, I will promise to meet you at the Hall at the hour appointed next Sunday, and I will bring with me at the very least 100 men and woman who for years lived in just such sinful degradation as I have tried to depict, but who have been gloriously saved through believing the gospel which you ridicule. I will have these men and women with me on the platform as witnesses to the miraculous saving power of Jesus Christ and as present-day proof of the truth of the Bible.'

Dr. Ironside then turned to the Salvation Army captain, a girl, and said, 'Captain, have you any who could go with me to such a meeting?'

She exclaimed with enthusiasm, 'We can give you forty at least from just this one corps, and we will give you a brass band to lead the procession!'

'Fine. Now, Mr. ---, I will have no difficulty in picking up sixty others from the various missions, gospel halls, and evangelical churches of the city; and if you will promise faithfully to bring two such exhibits as I have described, I will come marching in at the head of such a procession, with the band playing "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and I will be ready for the debate.'

Apparently the man who had made the challenge must have had some sense of humor, for he smiled wryly and waved his hand in a deprecating kind of way as if to say, 'Nothing doing!' and then edged out of the crowd while the bystanders clapped for Dr. Ironside and the others. "

V. 9-11 "Nicodemus answered and said to Him, 'How can these things be?'

Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness."

Jesus uses the term 'We.' Perhaps the witness of the Triune God, or the witness of John the Baptist and Himself (John 1:6-8), or as Nicodemus uses 'we' in verse 2 (i.e. "we" those of his nation v.s. "we" - Jesus and those of His nation).

V. 12-13 "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. "

If Nicodemus can't grasp the things that are to happen on earth under the New Covenant right now, how will he grasp the heavenly realities? How will he grasp the kingdom of heaven, if he can't even grasp the condition for entering it?

Jesus has come from heaven, so He knows what He is talking about. Notice, one of the deep heavenly realities of this One who was with God and was God. Jesus is talking with him and yet "is in heaven." Jesus is saying, "I am He who fills heaven and earth. I am so much more than simply a teacher sent from God."

V. 14 -15 " And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Jesus turns to the very Moses the Pharisees revere, for he has pictured and foretold of Christ and His work of salvation. Read Numbers 21:4-9 to read the whole context of this event. In that day, the Israelites rebelled, rejecting God's provision. The fiery serpent bite is certainly a reminder of the serpent in the garden (Rev. 12:9). The only cure for those dying Israelites was to look to the bronze serpent on the pole. They had no hand in it, nothing to pay for it, nothing to do, no distance to walk, no effort to put forth - no matter how near death they were, if they looked, they were cured. Nicodemus and the Israelites of his day, were also under the judgment of God, and only through God's provision can they be saved. The sin in both cases is the same - rebellion against God; unbelief; distrust; making God out to be a liar. The punishment is death and certain agonizing burning death in the fire that is never quenched. Moses became the mediator and intercessor for those Jews in the wilderness. We have a greater Mediator. We have One to intercede and He does not just make an image, He Himself is lifted up. Our Deliverer, as the bronze serpent, takes the image or likeness of the destroyer. Through one man sin entered the world. Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh. On the cross, we see our condemnation and our pardon - our sickness and our cure. If Christ be not lifted up on Calvary and subsequently to heaven as Lord, we would have no salvation - no hope - no life. Israel's physicians could do nothing for those bitten. The look at the serpent on the pole did it all. Jesus calls to sinners, 'Look unto Me!' (the look of faith? v. 15-16). There is no other remedy for the human condition. Turning over a new leaf, promising to stop the murmuring, won't get rid of the poison of sin in you.

If you ran a business and a customer with a huge unpaid debt tells you that he is reforming and that he is only going to pay by cash from now on, you would still expect him to pay back his old debt.

The term "lifted up" is introduced here but will be referred to again in passages such as John 8:28 and 12:32-33. Jesus is God's provision and people look to Him and they get new life! Though the piece of brass was totally unworthy of worship (see 2 Kings 18:4), the Son who was lifted up, first on the cross to die and then on high as Lord, is worthy to be worshipped! Relics are useless.

Jesus came to die. He MUST be lifted up or there is no hope, no salvation for sinners. No one would ever enter the kingdom and have life. Through Christ alone can God's demands of holiness and righteousness be met. Jesus is a man who eats with sinners. Aren't you glad that is true?

Read Acts 3:14-15, 24-26. To you this Word of salvation - this word of blessing - is preached. Look unto Christ. Come unto Him in repentance and faith and He will bless you and heal you from all your iniquities. If you perish, it will not be because God did not provide a Savior. It will not be because there is no help or no hope. It will be because of your heart rebellion and refusal to believe (see 3:18). If you remain in your condemned state, after hearing John's gospel, you will perish, like a man with cancer refusing to take a known and proven cure. It will not be the refusal to take the cure that killed him. It was the cancer. However, his foolishness and rebellion is made evident by his refusal of the cure.

Are you so proud that you'd rather perish for all eternity in the torments of hell-fire, than to humbly acknowledge your stupidity and in repentance look unto Jesus, the Blessor of all who humble themselves under His mighty hand? Jesus' coming into the world did not condemn you, but if you reject the gospel, having heard, you have no excuse for your ignorance. You are doubly condemned. Oh, sick and guilty and dying sinner, I implore you to repent that you might be reconciled unto God.

Eternal life is received through faith in Christ. Eternal life is equated with the new birth. The new birth begets eternal life. Though this is like telling a blind man to look, or a lame man to walk, this is exactly what Christ does.

V. 16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Here we have the reason for this gift of salvation. It is simply astonishing that God loves us. Our generation seems to have no problem with the love of God, but does with the wrath of God. The Scripture is the opposite. There we easily see why God's wrath would

be directed towards us - but His love? Now that is amazing!

The measure of God's love to us is Jesus. God so loved that He gave His only begotten Son. God the Father so loved us. God is full of love. God is love. It is not hard to love someone who is lovely. It is also quite possible to love someone who is unlovely. Some do that occasionally. But to love someone who is rebellious, proud, arrogant, corrupt, ruthlessly independent, and who will crucify your only son - that is the kind of love we see God demonstrate to the world.

The question to ask is not, "Did Jesus die for me?" It is "why won't you believe when the Scripture is so clear?" (v. 15-16) Why will you not believe when it is commanded of you? If you hear this gospel and perish, it will be because you, in hardness of heart, refused to believe in Christ.

V. 17-20 "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed"

Jesus came to save men who were already condemned. This is the state of both a Nicodemus and the woman at the well (ch. 4). The woman is saved through the same gospel. The great middle wall of partition has been torn down. Believe in Christ, the only hope of religious and moral teachers, and harlots and adulterers. (See Eph. 2: 12-22)

Men behave just like a bug who has been exposed from a lifted rock. The bug scurries back to the darkness. It doesn't like the fearsome exposure of the light. They don't want to go there - to the reality as shown by the light.

To believe not is blasphemy. Why will you resist? Your unbelief is declaring God to be a liar. Don't blame God. He has opened a door of mercy wide before you in Jesus Christ. And don't confess your unbelief as if you are somehow honoring God by being "honest." Your unbelief exposes your proud hatred of God and your mockery of the blood of Christ and your disdain for the grace of God. You are one who spits in the face of God and then brags about it. And the only reason you are not saved is that you will not come to Christ. Oh, worm of the dust, can you overcome your Maker? Let us reason together. Though your sins be red as scarlet, yet they can be made as white as snow. Come to Christ. Every moment of unbelief is defiance to His face. You can strive with me and win, but it is not to me you must answer.

Oh worm, there is a hell - a place where the worm does not die. Sinners in hell are not the fools they were on earth. In hell, they do not laugh at everlasting burnings as they did on earth. They have

sobered up immensely in the torment of the pit. Do you so despise yourself that you would turn away from the open door of heaven and eternal bliss for an eternity in the everlasting fire? Sober up now and then you can rejoice now and forever in the fullness of joy in fellowship with the Best of beings! If you are impressed at all, this moment, do not suppress the truth. It may be your last warning. What a sorrowful thing to perish with the gospel message in your ears.

To defy God is like the story of a man coming across a small bird, a sparrow, lying on his back on the road. There he was, this scrawny little thing with two thin legs pointed skyward. At first the traveler thought it was dead. When he saw, however, that the bird was still alive, he went over to him and asked, "Are you all right?"

"Yes," the sparrow answered.

"Then what are you doing on your back with your legs pointed upward at the sky?"

"Haven't you heard? The heaven is going to fall."

"If it does, surely you don't think you're going to hold it up with those two scrawny legs?"

The bird looked at him with a solemn face for a moment and then retorted, "One does the best one can."

There are many such sparrows in the form of men, who think they can hold off the wrath of divine judgment. Oh sinner, why do you resist?

"He who believes in Him is not condemned" (v. 18). NOT CONDEMNED! Think of it! What does that mean? He is pardoned, acquitted, justified, cleared from all guilt, delivered from the curse, no longer counted as a sinner, but reckoned perfectly righteous in the sight of God. "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13: 38-39) Apart from Christ, we are condemned with no chance of forgiveness, and only a breath away from hell. If you die in your sins, don't blame Adam. You have the words of life in your ears right now. Believe in Christ and you will be saved. "There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8: 1)

Everyone - even a moral man like Nicodemus - needs the salvation found only in Christ. Is he willing to be exposed - to have his heart examined by the Holy One? That light will expose why he does not come to the light - that which he does not want to give up or have discovered and reprov'd. How those who refuse to come to the light will one day disdain that which kept them from Christ for all of eternity!

V. 21 " But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds

may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.' "

For any good we ever do, God gets the glory. It is His doing. Any bad - well, that's us. That's the way it is (1 Cor. 4:7, 1:30-31).

F. The Witness of the Friend of the Bridegroom (3:22-36) - [To Top](#)

Again we are going to continue to see how Jesus fulfills and surpasses Judaism. He is the new and better wine, making obsolete the stone waterpots of purification. He is the new temple - the ultimate point of mediation between God and man, and thus, replaces the old temple. He fulfills the prophecies of a "water and spirit" regeneration, and in His death, He is the ultimate antitype of the bronze serpent lifted up in the desert. Now we will see that Jesus surpasses John the Baptist and any baptism or rite of purification that he might represent. Don't miss the theme of this section. It is not baptism. It is Christ!

V. 22 - 26 "After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. And they came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified - behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!' "

We see that the early part of Jesus' ministry overlapped with John's. We see here that even some of John's disciples missed his message. Their fear seemed to be that soon John would have no followers as all were coming to Christ. Hearers can definitely miss the message of the preacher!

V. 27 "John answered and said, 'A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.'"

Paul reiterates this truth when he says in his letter to the Corinthians, " For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7)

John is content with the role that God had given him. He was pleased to be the friend of the bridegroom! Does someone else or your flesh suggest to you that you should have a higher position or are you glad to fulfill your God-given role that Jesus be exalted over all?

We are going to see the joy in humility as we listen to John's words in the next few verses. Humble people are bold in the faith, as evidenced by John the Baptist, for they care not about their own reputation. They

are not crippled by what others think of them, their concern is Christ. Pride gives us a fear of man. I dare say that some (and maybe much) of what is called "shyness" today, is pure fear of man grown out of pride and self-centeredness. This does not come out of love but out of self-absorption. This shy withdrawal is not being an "others-centered" person or one who looks to the needs of another. Jesus Himself is the most humble, and He is definitely not "shy". Moses was humble, but not "shy". John the Baptist, though humble, is definitely not "shy".

V. 28-29 "You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, "I am not the Christ," but, "I have been sent before Him." He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. "

John is not disturbed by news of Jesus' popularity, but rather rejoices. He finds His greatest joy in the bride and the Bridegroom being united.

The church belongs to the Messiah! This was the promised glory of Israel (Isa. 62: 3-5; Hosea 2:16-20). Glory to God, we, too, believing Gentiles, have been gathered into Israel's glory! We are Israel - the new covenant people of God - through faith in Christ. The New Testament Scriptures pick up on the Old Testament promise of the marriage covenant and proclaims it fulfilled in Christ (see Eph. 5:25-27, 32; Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17).

The rising prominence of Jesus, floods John with surpassing joy. This is proof of his friendship! The friend of the bridegroom rejoiced to hear the bridegroom's voice. How much more should the bride rejoice! Let us hear His voice. His words are precious. Each word is a gem, a treasure, and a joy! This is the Father's beloved Son, hear Him! Hear Him in these days of confusion. Hear His voice among the chaos of human views. Dear saints, betrothed to this Man above all men, let us respond as in the Song of songs. "The voice of my beloved. Behold he comes? My beloved spoke and said to me, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away?" Go forth and see the greater King than Solomon with the crown? on the day of His wedding; the day of the gladness of His heart.

V. 30 "He must increase, but I must decrease."

This must be because?

V. 31 "He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all."

He is above all - all the shadows, all the previous expressions. He is the pinnacle of the purposes of God. Everything and everyone else is earthly, physical, and temporary. John is a man - mere dust and clay. Jesus has come from heaven and is above all.

V. 32-33 "And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true."

Jesus gives us the truth about all things. His is a first-hand testimony (yet people aren't receiving His testimony). Though crowds flock to Him, yet, as time reveals, there are very few who truly believe in Him.

To not believe Jesus is to call God a liar (John 12:44-50; 1 John 5:10). Whose testimony do you want about life? A Hollywood director's? A philosopher? One who is earthly? Or that of Jesus, the One who comes from above and is above all? This is no second-hand information. God has sent His own Son. We'd better listen.

All those who have "received His testimony" have "certified that God is true." (i.e. to His promises in the Old Testament Scriptures.) Jesus is the fulfillment!

V. 34 " For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure."

To Jesus, God gives the Spirit without measure. Elijah had a portion and Elisha a double portion. However, Jesus is not just a prophet. He is much more than a prophet. Men, like John the Baptist, know in part and prophesy in part, but in Jesus' humanity we have the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Jesus is the possessor and the dispenser of the Holy Spirit (See Isa. 11:1-2; 42:1, for He will do a far greater thing?v.5-7; 61:1-2).

V. 35 "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand."

This Jesus who is getting a following, is the Son, eternally loved by the Father, and into whose hands all things concerning man's salvation has been given. He has the keys of death and hell in His hand. It is good that God, in His infinite wisdom and love, has given all things, including our salvation, into His hands. We are so weak and feeble that if anything was left in our hands, we should never be saved. But Christ will take care of all committed to His charge. It seems to me then, a very wise thing indeed, to commit all things to Him (2 Tim. 1:12). He is no mere man. He is the Son of whom it is written, "Kiss the Son lest He be angry and you perish in the way when His wrath is kindled but a little." (Ps. 2:12) He is the Son to whom the Father has said, "I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel." (Ps. 2:7-9) And God has put all things under His feet. Kiss the Son, for you are under His feet. Do you dare taunt the One who will one day stomp down and trample all unbelievers under His feet in the great winepress of the wrath of God? Do you forget He is righteous and the hour of His judgment is coming, and it will come swiftly, like a thief in the night. If you have not already done so, go straight to Him now. There is safety in Jesus

Christ and no other. Go to Him in repentance, with all your worthlessness and evil. He is willing to bless and able to save to the uttermost.

John tells his disciples that instead of being jealous of His increase, you should serve Him with fear and rejoice before Him with trembling. (Ps. 2:10-11) God has united believers to His beloved Son. Thus, He is greatly desirous of blessing us, for in blessing us, He is honoring the Son of His love. What security for blessing this gives us - the Father's love to His own Son! We are sure of blessing because we are sure that the Father loves the Son.

V. 36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.' "

We read of two vastly different alternatives in this verse to close off this chapter. Life or death; heaven or hell; all turns on believing in this Jesus who was then in the land of Judea baptizing.

In this verse we see that believers already enjoy the eternal life that will be consummated in the resurrection of their bodies at the parousia. Unbelievers stand under the looming wrath of God that will be consummated in their resurrection and condemnation. The one who does not believe in the Son will not see life. He will have no true happiness. Unless he turns to Christ, there will be no escaping that wrath that abides on him even now. Such is the miserable condition of the sinner without Christ. That wrath and curse that fell upon Adam, as a result of the fall, and resulted in the man and woman being cast out from the presence of God and the tree of life; this wrath remains on those who disobey - who do not believe in the Son. Whoever believes in Him has life! (See Rev. 22:1-5)

There are two alternatives: genuine belief or defiant disobedience, which is really what the term "not believe" declares. The word translated "not believe" is a strong word that means to defiantly disobey; to refuse to believe and bow. The same word is used in Romans 2:8 - "but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness - indignation and wrath?" It is also used in Rom. 10:21 and 1 Peter 2:8.

So, unbelief is clearly a rebellious, defiant, disobedient act worthy of God's wrath and condemnation. That's why you were a child of wrath as long as you were in unbelief (Eph. 2:3). We were born in sin; children of wrath. Our sins are all upon us, unpardoned, unforgiven, and untaken away, until that day when we believe in the Son of God and are made children of grace.

Some tell us that there is no more anger in God - that He is only love. However, in this verse (v. 36), we are plainly told of "the wrath of God." It is clear God hates sin. There is a hell. God can be angry. Sinners ought to be afraid.

br> He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath

of God abides on him. God's wrath constantly abides on him - abides on him without end. Oh what despair - to have no hope - to have no relief. Dear unbeliever, will you not repent and believe in the only Son of God and thus escape God's wrath of eternal torments? Consider what it is to suffer extreme torment forever and ever. From one age to another, in pain and wailing and lamenting and gnashing of teeth, your body full of wracking torture without ever the possibility of getting ease or moving God to pity with your tears. There will be no possibility of hiding yourself from Him. You will never be able to divert your own thoughts from your pain. You will be utterly destitute of any possibility of help or change for the better.

Wicked men will not let their carnal lusts go, but death will knock it out of their hands. Oh the endless despair that is coming to the damned soul. Wake up, sinner, that you not be consumed in your iniquities. The lepers reasoned in 2 Kings 7:3-4, "If we sit here, we'll die." Arise, sluggard, shake off your excuses. As the angels said to Lot, "Arise, lest you be consumed. Escape for your life." Let reason prevail. Is it a reasonable thing to contend with your Maker or to harden yourself against His Word, as though the Strength of Israel would lie? Should the man God has nourished and brought up, rebel against Him? Judge for yourself. Is it reasonable for briars and thorns to set themselves in battle against the devouring fire? Come, let us reason together - though hundreds perish at your side into endless perdition - will you not hear me? Will you not immediately turn and repent, believing in the Almighty Deliverer? Do not be deluded by your sincerity. You need a Savior. "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness." (Prov. 30:12)

Why do I speak so much of this? How can I leave you alone when you are ready to perish? As the Lord lives, I have not the least hope of seeing your face in heaven except you be converted. Better to never have been than to not be converted. Oh, you need the righteousness of Another - a perfect righteousness. Christ alone has this. Will you not forsake all to have a part with the righteous? Will you not go to Jesus who can cleanse the most defiled and clothe the most wretched sinner with the robes of His own righteousness?

How can you stay in this state of resistance? If Baal is god then serve him, but if Jesus the Lord is God, and even now extends the offer of mercy and pardon, go to Him in repentance and faith. "He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." (Prov. 29:1)

I think of the horror that came upon Samson as he played with the harlot once too often. This prideful man woke up too late and found his hair gone and the Philistines upon him. How many multiplied times worse will your horror be! That water you drink from will become wormwood. If God is against you, who can be for you? All God's attributes are against you. His justice is like a flaming sword unsheathed against you (Deut. 32:41-42). Justice cries out, "Bind him hand and foot; cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting

fire" (Matt. 22:13; 25:41). The holiness of God is against you (1 Sam. 6:20). The power of God is mounted like a mighty cannon against you (Rom. 9:17). God will display His power in His abiding wrath against you, impenitent one (Isaiah 45:9). The wisdom of God is set to foil your plans. He has ordained His arrows and prepared instruments of death, and made all things ready (Ps. 7:11-13; Jer. 18:11). The truth of God is sworn against you. He is faithful to His threatenings as well as to His promises (Matt. 5:18). Sinner, all the attributes of the infinite God are bound by an oath to punish you. Oh, despair of yourself and flee for refuge to lay hold of the only hope a sinner has. Flee to Christ!

Unbeliever, your life is but a continual gathering of wood for fuel for your own burning. You are such a slave to your lusts that you go on anyway. Though you see it will be to your condemnation, you continue to go your own way. What a pitiful and sorrowful state. Consider. There is One who can set the captives free! Do not blind your eyes. Do not deceive yourself. See your misery while it can yet be prevented. Think of what it is to be a vile outcast; a vessel of wrath into which the Lord will be pouring out His tormenting fury onward into eternity where there is no recovery. (See Heb. 10:28-29)

Even now your pride is resisting. Your flesh is trying to hang on to its mastery over you. The devil himself is seeking to blind you - to silence your awakening conscience. Has he bewitched you? Do you not see these are not true friends? Will you perish for the sake of your pride? What will your pride be in that day of judgment when every knee will bow? Humble yourself. So what if all the world sees? When Christ at once takes off your shackles and sets you free, you will rejoice with the angels in heaven! We, who are already rejoicing in our salvation, are no different from you. We are all deserving of death. We, too, loved darkness rather than light, but the truth will prevail! God will prevail! Let the truth break you that you might lose your life and truly find life!

We consider a man a fool who plays with death. How much more so, one who toys with the second death - who ventures out on a limb over the lake that burns with fire and brimstone? "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." (Isa. 55:6-7) There is but one door of escape. The Lord Jesus is the Door (John 10:9).

If the Lord Himself has not spoken these things, then ignore me. But if it is the very Word of God - that all this misery is about to befall you - what a state you are in! I am not saying these truths to torment you before the time, but in order to have you make your escape. Do you not realize that your sin is poisoning you while it is pleasing you? Break away from Delilah's embrace before you are undone. Though she flatters you, she will destroy you in the end.

God has set before you the way of life - Jesus Christ dying on the tree. My aim is to set Him before your mind's eye that you might be saved

and not go to that awful place of torment - though you stand tottering on the brink of the bottomless pit. As Paul cried out to the Philippian jailer, "Do yourself no harm. ? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

Do not think that your praying, reading, hearing, confessing, or amending, will bring about the cure. Christ alone is the cure.

Consider the perfections of Christ. Consider the One who will receive you as a bride:

To be loved and cared for to the uttermost for all of eternity!

To have Christ Himself satisfy our every longing and to be our overflowing happiness!

To have such a protector as the Sovereign Lord Himself!

Will you not be content to depend upon His faithfulness? Will you be content to labor and to suffer and will you have the patience to wait for the reward to come? What do you say to this? Will you have this God to be your God? Will you be content to live by faith and trust Him for unseen happiness, an unseen heaven, and an unseen glory?

Come to Christ as your Prophet , Priest, and King. Do you not approve of His terms? May His love overcome you. Unworthiness is no hindrance. In fact, it is a prerequisite! Will your unwillingness be your undoing? Surrender - for happy is the man whose God is the Lord! Do you not see the treasure in this field? Do you see the value of such a Pearl as He is? (Matt. 13:44-46)

Do not quench the Spirit whose word is the Scripture. In fact, let one from hell itself preach to you and call you to repent ...

"Then he [a certain rich man in torments in Hades] said, 'I beg you therefore, father [Abraham] that you would send him [Lazarus - a comforted believer in Paradise] to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' " (Luke 16:27-29)

The same message that I am trying to impart to you is coming from one who is already in hell. Please hear Moses and the Prophets. Please hear the Word of the living God. Do you see that the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever? Is this where you will take up residence? It will be, unless you repent and believe in the Son of Man who was lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life!

Please weigh these things and consider. Does not your conscience tell

you that it is most reasonable that you should repent and believe in Christ, the Lord of tender mercies? The King holds forth the golden scepter that you might approach today. Approach - run to Him - before the thread that holds your life from tumbling into the pit breaks in death. Let go of your hold on the world and lay hold of eternal life, and you will be made happy forever. God will be a Father to you and withhold no good thing from you. How long will you linger in Sodom? He provides all we need. We were poor, but He provided a salvation we buy without money and without price. We were naked and He clothed us with white clothing. We were blind but He anointed our eyes with eye-salve that we might see.

I am so happy being saved! I wish for you this happiness, my friend. Behold the Christ in whom is mercy, pardon, blessedness, and life. What hinders you from being saved?

It is hard for me to make an end of my exhortation to you, if I must leave you as I found you - if you are but only "almost persuaded to be a Christian." Will you reject the compassion and mercy of the Savior? I can only entreat you and warn you. I cannot make you to be happy for all of eternity. If I could, I would. But the witness of God, should you continue in self-deception, is that it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, indeed for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the Day of Judgment than for you!