

MINI BIBLE COLEGE

BOOKLET TWENTY-EIGHT

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

(Part 6)

VERSE BY VERSE

(Chapters 17 - 21)

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the last in a series of six booklets, which are providing notes for those who desire to study the Gospel of John verse-by-verse. As I begin my final booklet in this series of commentaries, which provide notes for those who have heard our one hundred and thirty radio broadcasts, for continuity, I encourage you to obtain the previous five booklets in this series. Contact us and we will send you the other five booklets so you can study and teach this Gospel verse-by-verse and chapter-by-chapter.

I remind you that the Apostle John made his purpose very clear when he told us why he wrote this fourth Gospel: “And truly, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” (20:30,31)

In this study we begin with the seventeenth chapter, which is the Holy of Holies of the Gospel of John. Let us now conclude our study of how John presents Jesus the Christ to us that we might believe and have life in His name.

Chapter One
The Lord's Prayer

(17:1-5)

Chapter Seventeen is where we find what should be called, "The Lord's Prayer." Many people call the prayer Jesus taught His disciples "The Lord's Prayer." (Matthew 6:9-13) That prayer should actually be called, "The Disciples' Prayer." He did not pray the way He taught His disciples to pray. For example, He would not ask for the forgiveness of sins. We are now approaching the prayer the Lord did pray - and the prayer we should call "the Lord's Prayer".

There is another prayer we should call "The Lord's Prayer". It is found in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). Before facing the cross, Jesus "sweating as it were great drops of blood," prayed this prayer: "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Your will be done." (Luke 22:42)

This prayer in John Chapter Seventeen could be called, "The High-Priestly Prayer of Jesus." Having been in the upper room with the eleven at what I have called His last retreat with them, He now pronounces a benediction on all that teaching as He prays for the men with whom He has spent the last three years and His last hours before dying on the cross.

His prayer begins: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You as You have given Him

authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work, which You have given me to do. And now, Oh Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." (1-5)

John writes in the opening verse of the chapter: "Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said ... " The words John is referencing here are the teaching Jesus gave in the upper room. This opening statement of John relates the longest recorded prayer of Jesus to the longest recorded discourse of Jesus - His discourse in the upper room.

I would now like to begin our study of the longest recorded prayer of Jesus with an overview of the prayer. The prayer should be divided into three sections. The first five verses, which I have quoted above, are the first division of the prayer. Verses six through nineteen are the second part of the prayer. The third section of this great prayer begins at verse twenty and concludes at verse twenty-six.

In the first five verses of the prayer, after He addresses God as His Father - which is the way He instructed us in the "Disciples Prayer" to address God - His first words to the Father were, "The hour has come." As I observed in my commentary on Chapter Twelve, this is a phrase Jesus uses throughout the Gospel of John.

That phrase culminates in Chapter Twelve and in the first statement of Jesus in this prayer. That “hour” is obviously not a sixty-minute hour, but the time of His cross when He would die for our salvation.

In these first five verses He defines one of the purposes for which John has written this Gospel. John told us that his objective in writing the Gospel is that he wants us to believe Jesus is the Christ so we may have eternal life (20:30,31). In the first verses of this prayer Jesus tells us that (eternal) life is to know the Father, and the Christ, Who has been sent by the Father.

Jesus also presents His own life and work before the Father. As we listen to Jesus praying about His own life and ministry, He tells us how we can glorify God. He glorified the Father by finishing the works the Father assigned Him in his thirty-three years of life. Obviously, we glorify God the same way. As Jesus was concerned about His life and work on earth, you and I should be concerned about our lives and our work on earth after we come to know Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

When the Apostle Paul emphasized the truth that we were not saved by good works, he also emphasized the truth that we were saved for good works, and God before ordained that we should do those good works for our Lord and Savior (Ephesians 2:8-10).

That means when God saves us, there is a purpose for our salvation in this life. Of course, there is a purpose in the eternal state or in the life to come, but from the time He saves us until He takes us home, there is a present purpose for our salvation. It is the work for

which He has chosen us, for which He has saved us and to which He is calling us (John 15:16; Ephesians 2:8-10). As Jesus prayed for the work the Father wanted Him to do, we ought to be praying about the work the Lord has chosen us to do for Him.

His final petition in this first part of the prayer tells us something about creation and about the person of Jesus Christ. The creation account, which is found in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, in Hebrew uses plural pronouns when referring to the Creator. We read, “Let us make man in our image.” From studying the Upper Room Discourse, we conclude that God exists in three persons, revealed to us as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When we hear Jesus pray, “And now, Oh Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was,” we know that Jesus existed before the world was created and participated in the miracle of creation. (John 1:3) Since we are told that the Spirit hovered over the first stages of the creation, we can assume that when God created, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit worked together in perfect harmony in the miracle of creation.

We also learn from this petition that Jesus did not begin to exist when He was born in Bethlehem. Scholars call this the pre-incarnate existence of Jesus, which simply means that He existed before the eternal Word became flesh and lived among us (John 1:1, 14). Jesus actually existed in five different forms. He existed before He became flesh and was born in Bethlehem. He lived in a body for

thirty-three years. There was the glorified risen body in which He lived for forty days after His resurrection.

Three of the apostles were with Jesus on what we call “The Mount of Transfiguration.” Matthew writes that Jesus was transfigured before these apostles: “His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.” He conversed with Moses and Elijah and He was completely changed. The word “transfiguration” Matthew uses here is actually the word “metamorphosis” which is the word we use to describe the way a caterpillar becomes a beautiful butterfly (17:2). As we consider the various forms in which Jesus existed, we must include His Transfiguration.

After establishing the reality in the first chapter of his short letter that he and the other apostles had seen and handled the resurrected body of Jesus, the Apostle John writes that it has not yet been revealed what we shall be because we will be like Him and see Him as He is now (I John 3:1,2). This leads us to ask the question, “In what form does He exist now?” In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter tells us that Christ is sitting at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33). Paul writes that our only hope is that Christ lives in our hearts today (Colossians 1:27).

The final petition in the opening paragraph of this prayer is indeed a profound petition that moves us to ask a question the apostles asked when they lived three years with Jesus: “Who is this man Jesus?” (Mark 4:41)

In the second section of the prayer (6-19), He prays for these eleven men in whom He has invested so much. He recruited them and for three years we might say that He taught them, He showed them and He coached them. He is now about to commission and then empower them to reach the world for Him. They have been with Him continuously throughout His three years of public ministry. Before He faces some unjust trials and the cross, the last thing He does for them is to pray for them.

The essence of the New Commandment Jesus gave the apostles at this last retreat with them was His burden that they establish a unique new spiritual community in this world. Observe how Jesus repeats the petition that they should be one. Five times as He prays for them and in the third section of the prayer for those who are going to believe through them, Jesus prayed that they might be one, even as He was one with the Father and the Father was one with Him.

The essence of the teaching in the upper room was, "I am in the Father and the Father is in Me. Every work I do and every word I speak is a result of the fact that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me." In the second and third sections of this prayer, the essence of the prayer is that His disciples might have that oneness - with Him and with each other.

In this second division of the prayer, observe the way He describes these men for whom He is praying: “I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours; You

gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your word. Now they know that everything You have given Me comes from You. For I gave them the words You gave Me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from You, and they believed that You sent Me.” (6-8)

In Chapter Sixteen, He almost gave the impression that they have not yet believed in Him. But, as He prays for them, He says that they have accepted His Word, they have obeyed His Word and they have believed. Perhaps He sees them as they are going to be when the Holy Spirit empowers them on the Day of Pentecost.

The world hates these men because they believe, accept and obey His Word. Jesus prays that the Father will now protect them as they remain in the world and He goes back to the Father. They are in the world but they are not of the world. He has protected them while He was with them but now He asks the Father to protect them from the evil one. In the Disciples Prayer, He taught them to pray every day, “Deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:13) Jesus consistently shows that the power of the evil one must be overcome by faith in the one Who has overcome the world (16:33; 1 John 4:4; 5:4).

Jesus Emphasizes Giving

He describes these men as those whom the Father has given to Him. Make the observation that the Father gives to the Son. The Son gives to these men, and the Son prays that the apostles will give

to this world all that the Father has given to the Son and the Son has given to them. In this context, observe a profound definition of the New Testament word “fellowship”. This word literally means “partnership”.

In an equal business partnership, all that you have belongs to your partner and all that he has belongs to you. Jesus makes this application to His relationship with the Father and to the relationship He has with these men: “All I have is yours, and all you have is mine.” The devotional blessing in this definition is when we say to Christ, “All You have is mine.” The challenge is to say to Him in prayer, “All I have is Yours.”

In the World but not of the World

He prays that the Father will not take them out of the world, but protect them from the evil and dangers they will face in the world. The emphasis now becomes the glorious reality that will soon be in place. Like candles on the candlestick of His choosing, He is sending them into the world with the commission to make disciples in every nation on earth.

He gives us another devotional gem when He prays that they will be sanctified or set apart to the Father by truth. Every pastor or spiritual leader should be challenged to pray this prayer as they pray for those over whom the Holy Spirit has made them a shepherd: “For them I sanctify Myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” (17:19)

In this context, He gives my favorite definition of and insight into how to approach the Word of God. He asks the Father to sanctify them through the truth and then He makes the declaration: “Your Word is truth.” (17) According to Jesus, the Bible is truth, and we should approach the Bible looking for truth. So many read the Bible asking the question, “What is it?” In other words, “What is the literary form of what I am reading? Is it history, poetry, sermon, parable, allegory, myth or fable?”

Jesus told us earlier in this Gospel that we should approach His teaching looking for truth with the commitment that we are going to apply the truth we find in His teaching. It is when we apply the truth that we prove the teachings of Jesus are the Word of God. If we want to prove that the entire Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God, I believe we should read the Bible looking for truth. It is when we make the commitment to apply and obey the truth we find in the Bible that we prove that the entire Bible is the Word of God. Jesus realistically taught that the knowing does not always lead to the doing. He taught, and my experience has been, that the doing always leads to the absolute conviction that the Bible is the Word of God.

Jesus Prays for His Church

In the third part of the prayer (20-26), He is praying for the people who are going to believe because of these eleven men. That means He is praying for you and me because, for more than twenty

centuries, people have believed and become part of the Church Christ has been building through the witness of these eleven men.

In the final section of this prayer He is praying for you and me: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in Me. May they experience this oneness to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.” (20-23)

As you consider this third part of His prayer, first of all, make the observation, that the oneness He desires for us is modeled by the way in which He and the Father are one. He told us in the tenth chapter of this Gospel that He and the Father are one (10:30). Now their oneness models the way we are to be one with the Father, with our Savior and with one another.

Jesus was not praying for the kind of unity many proclaim today, which can actually be based on the sad reality that they can have unity with those of other faiths because they no longer believe the basic doctrines of their faiths. It is not difficult to agree about what we no longer believe.

The primary interpretation and application of this oneness is the dynamic source of the works and words of Jesus that result from the miraculous reality that He and the Father are one. Jesus told

these apostles in the garden, through His metaphor of the vine and the branches: “I am in Him and He is in Me. In the same way, you can be in Me and I in you.” (21) That is the way Jesus described the oneness He asked the Father to give the apostles and those who believe and become part of His Church throughout church history.

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory, the glory You have given Me because You loved Me before the creation of the world.” (24)

In this verse Jesus declares He wanted these eleven men to be with Him that they might see His glory. He promised to be with those who preach the Gospel and make disciples for Him throughout church history (Matthew 28:18-20). We can assume that even as He gave His glory to those eleven men, He has and will continue to give His glory to those who call Him Lord and Savior until He comes again.

That the World May Know and Believe

In the upper room Jesus told these men that when they experienced this oneness, they would do greater works than He had done. Now we learn why He has invested three years in the training of these men. He wants them to experience this oneness and do these works because He wants the world to know and believe two specific truths: that the Father has sent Him into the world and that the Father loves them as much as He loves His only begotten Son! I emphasized these petitions for you in verses twenty to twenty-three,

which I have quoted above, because I believe they are the basic and most dynamic focus of this prayer.

In many ways, the key to understanding the focus of this prayer is found in the last two verses: “Oh Righteous Father, the world does not know you. I know you, and these men know that you have sent Me. I have made You known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I Myself may be in them.” (17:25-26)

As Jesus prays this prayer, the focus of His prayer is for the world. Even though He tells the Father that He is not praying for the world, He mentions the world nineteen times in this prayer! The burden of His prayer is found in these words, “Oh righteous Father, the world does not know You!” He declares that He is not praying for the world because the world does not know.

He prays for these apostles because they know, and they are His way of convincing this world of two Gospel (Good News) facts He has modeled and preached for three years: Fact number one is that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world for the salvation of the world. Fact number two is the amazing truth that God loves the people of this world as much as He loves His only begotten Son.

These two Gospel facts are recorded for us in the third chapter of this Gospel. Jesus told Rabbi Nicodemus: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (3:16)

Jesus was actually praying for these apostles in the first five verses of this prayer when He prayed for His own life and work because there is a sense in which these men have been His most important work. Five centuries from the time He prayed this prayer, the entire Roman world had embraced the faith that was proclaimed by the apostles. This magnificent prayer was answered when the Father mightily blessed the strategy of His Son for reaching the world through these apostles and those who have and will believe through their preaching.

Chapter Two

“The Arrest of Jesus”

(18:1-27)

As we approach the final chapters of this fourth Gospel, we are beginning a study of the most thorough record of the death and resurrection of Jesus that is found in the four Gospels. As I have observed, John prioritizes approximately half of his Gospel to record the thirty-three years of the most important life ever lived and approximately half of his chapters to record the last week of the life of Jesus Christ. Beginning with the twelfth chapter he gives us a very thorough account of that last week Jesus lived.

In his last four chapters, John will report in detail the arrest, trials, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. My commentary on these final chapters will be in the form of a summary of what they report to us regarding these vitally important events in the life of the only begotten Son of God.

The first of these last four chapters describes the arrest of Jesus. As we begin our study of the eighteenth chapter we read: "When He had finished praying, Jesus left with His disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and He and His disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed Him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with His disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

"Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to Him, went out and asked them, 'Who is it you want? Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'I am He,' Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, 'I am He,' they drew back and fell to the ground. Again He asked them, 'Who is it you want?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth. I told you that I am He,' Jesus answered. 'If you are looking for Me, then let these men go.' This happened so that the words He had spoken would be fulfilled: I have lost not one of those You gave Me.'

"Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name

was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, 'Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?'"(18:1-11)

Observe the way John remarks that Jesus was fulfilling Scripture and the hour for which He had come into this world. John continuously inserts commentary that places these events and happenings in the context of the Providence of God. For example, Jesus knows all that is going to happen to Him, and He fulfills Scripture when He spares the lives of His apostles.

The question Jesus asks Peter emphasizes the awesome reality that He is simply about to drink that cup the Father has willed that He must drink (11). Those who write the other Gospels – especially Matthew – add the same kind of commentary to their inspired biographies of Jesus.

John also continuously emphasizes the truth that Jesus was more than a man. That point is made in this passage when John reports that those who came to arrest Jesus fell back when Jesus spoke the words, "I am He." (6) These words are the words for Jehovah: Essentially, "I am He Who was, is and always shall be."

An important word in the passage above is the word John uses to describe the number of soldiers who come to arrest Jesus. The word John actually uses here, which is translated "detachment" is actually the word "cohort". A cohort means there were six hundred Roman soldiers who came to arrest Jesus.

It was typical of the Roman military to send great numbers of soldiers when they made an arrest. In the Book of Acts we read that

four hundred and seventy Roman soldiers escorted the Apostle Paul from one prison to another (Acts 23:23). These soldiers who arrested Jesus may have brought many weapons because they feared that the disciples of Jesus would fight and that Jesus would use miraculous powers to resist arrest.

This makes the response of Peter remarkable. The word John uses for the sword drawn by Peter is actually the Greek word for a long knife. What was Peter doing with such a weapon? Did he join some of the other apostles in their conviction that Jesus was going to overthrow Rome and establish His kingdom on earth? (Acts 1:6)

Peter's response to the arrest of his Lord can be interpreted several ways. One interpretation could be that Peter demonstrated incredible courage when he drew a weapon against six hundred Roman soldiers. Another would be that Peter did not have the Holy Spirit anointed courage and strength to apply the teaching Jesus gave on the mountaintop - that we should love our enemies and not resist evil (Matthew 5:39, 44). This second perspective is supported by the words Jesus has for Peter that he should put away his weapon.

John continues: "Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound Him and brought Him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people.

"Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in. 'You are not one of His disciples, are you?' the girls at the door asked Peter. He replied, 'I am not.' It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself." (12-18)

We should not be too hard on Peter because every one of these eleven apostles fled when Jesus was arrested. I will be making more observations and sharing more insights into the denials of Peter when I summarize the last chapter of this Gospel.

John gives us an account of the appearance of Jesus before Annas: "Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teaching. 'I have spoken openly to the world,' Jesus replied. 'I always taught in synagogues or at the Temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why are you questioning Me? Ask those who heard Me. Surely they know what I said.'

"When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck Him in the face. 'Is this the way You answer the high priest?' he demanded. 'If I said something wrong,' Jesus replied, 'testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike Me?'

Then Annas sent Him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest." (19-24)

The way Jesus is bound and treated by these Roman soldiers was standard procedure when they made an arrest. What is extraordinary is the fact that they took Him to Annas before they took Him to Caiaphas the high priest. Why was Jesus summoned before Annas who was not the high priest?

Annas was the power behind a very corrupt religious system that exploited Jewish pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for their many holy days and feasts, which required them to offer animal sacrifices. The animals that were to be offered as sacrifices were examined by priests and declared to be clean or unclean animals.

Annas controlled the sale of animals in the over 4.5 hectares Temple courtyard as well as markets in Jerusalem where these pilgrims were charged seventy-five times the normal price for the animals they purchased. Unless the pilgrims had purchased their animals in a market owned by Annas, their animals were declared unclean by the priests and could not be offered as sacrifices. Obviously, these priests were controlled by Annas. When the Romans completely destroyed Jerusalem forty years later, they found in the Temple safe the equivalent in American money of five million dollars.

This was extremely corrupt and profitable religious extortion, which possibly earned Annas millions of dollars annually. We can well understand why Jesus, expressing much righteous indignation,

cleared that large courtyard while flinging over tables and driving the merchants away with a whip He had fashioned from a rope. His words also have great meaning when we understand this wicked extortion of devout religious pilgrims by this man Annas: “It is not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?’ But you have made it a den of thieves!” (Mark 11:17)

This information provided by scholars helps us to understand why Annas summoned Jesus to appear before him immediately after He was arrested. We can also appreciate the hard reality that when Jesus cleansed the corrupt marketplace the Temple had become, He was directly confronting this wicked man named Annas. His appearance before Annas was not a trial. It was a compulsory, face-to-face confrontation with His worst enemy!

Jewish law stated that no defendant could be asked questions that could be answered in a way that would incriminate himself. Annas immediately shows us that this is not a legal trial when he asks Jesus questions. We then understand why, when Jesus responded, “Why are you asking Me questions?” One of the Temple guards then slaps Jesus in the face!

The Jewish people were conquered and were suffering the harsh realities of Roman occupation. The religious rulers of the Jews were permitted to hold religious trials regarding the endless laws and restrictions they had added to the commandments of God given through Moses. However, Rome did not give these religious courts the authority to execute anyone. Since the Jews wanted Jesus

crucified, in addition to a religious trial, Jesus had to have a Roman trial. The religious trial takes place when Annas sends Jesus to appear before Caiaphas. The other Gospels record the religious trial of Jesus. John does not tell us about that trial but reports in depth the details of the Roman trial of Jesus before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate.

John Resumes His Account of the Triple Denial of Peter: "As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, 'You are not one of His disciples, are you?' He denied it saying, 'I am not.' One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, 'Did I not see you with Him in the olive grove?' Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow." (18:25-27)

Since John is primarily concerned with reporting the arrest and the Roman trial of Jesus, he does not tell us that when that happened, Peter rushed out into the darkness and wept bitterly. Luke gives the touching account of how they brought Jesus from the cruel treatment before Annas and He looked at Peter. It was when Peter met the look of Jesus, with the crown of thorns on His head and obvious signs of abuse on His face, that the cock crowed and he then ran out into the darkness and wept bitterly (Luke 22:60-62).

Why did the Holy Spirit use Peter mightily to preach the great sermon on the Day of Pentecost? I am convinced it was because Peter had learned something weeping in the darkness that made him a vehicle and channel of the energizing power of the Holy Spirit. In

one word, what Peter learned can be called "brokenness". Jesus expressed the same concept when He taught the first beautiful attitude that makes us the salt of the earth and the light of the world: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3)

Scholars tell us that the word "poor" in the first beautiful and blessed attitude can be translated "broken" in spirit. The second attitude that God blesses is that those who mourn are blessed (Matthew 5:4). At least one application of the second blessed attitude is that we mourn while we are learning to be broken, or poor in spirit. Peter was used greatly on the Day of Pentecost because, when he went out into the darkness and wept bitterly because he had denied his Lord three times, he mourned and was broken in spirit. Peter was chosen to be the vessel used by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and to lead the New Testament Church because he had learned and experienced the first two truths Jesus taught on that mountaintop in Galilee.

I paraphrase the first two blessed attitudes with this confession: "I can't, but He can!" I am convinced that God used Peter mightily as the leader of the first generation of the church of Jesus Christ because, while he was weeping in that darkness he learned to confess, "I can't, but He can!" Obviously he experienced the second attitude God blesses while he was learning the first one. We will learn much more about Peter in the last chapter of this Gospel.

Chapter Three

"The Roman Trial of Jesus"

(18:28-19:16)

John writes that the Roman trial of Jesus began this way: "Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and asked, 'What charges are you bringing against this man?'

"If He were not a criminal,' they replied, 'we would not have handed Him over to you.' Pilate said, 'Take Him yourselves and judge Him by your own law.' 'But we have no right to execute anyone,' the Jews objected. This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death He was going to die would be fulfilled." (28-32)

Remember, when we study this narrative of John, we only have written words without being told about the inflexion that was used when they were spoken. We are also rarely told about the facial expressions and body language of the one who is being quoted when we read the Scriptures. If we knew these dimensions of the communication between Pilate and these Jews, it would be obvious that Pilate hated these Jewish religious leaders and they hated him.

Before I summarize the Roman trial of Jesus, I believe it is important for us to know this Roman Governor named Pontius Pilate.

The Jewish historian Josephus, who wrote his Jewish history and lived his life during New Testament times, informs us that Pilate became the governor of Judea in the year 26 A.D. and was governor there for ten years. He got off to a bad start with these Jewish religious rulers, because the first time he visited Jerusalem from his headquarters in Caesarea in Palestine, the soldiers who escorted him flew flags that exhibited bronze busts of Emperor Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus.

Since the emperor was considered a god by Rome, and after their captivity in Babylon the Jews were determined to never be idol worshippers again, they were fiercely committed to the proposition that they would never worship the image of a god. They therefore objected to these busts of the emperor, which the Romans worshipped and the Jews were to greatly respect. They continuously sent delegations to Pilate insisting that these images of the emperor be removed from the flags of his soldiers. As a Roman governor, Pilate was not about to do anything to appease these religious leaders.

When the tension over this issue reached its highest point, he summoned the leaders to meet him in an amphitheater to discuss this controversy. He had the amphitheater surrounded and it was his plan to massacre all these leaders. But they were so fervent in their protest that many of them got on their knees, bared their necks and said, "We would rather have our heads cut off with your swords than to see these idols in our holy city."

We are not sure why, but Pilate backed down on that occasion. That was a victory for these Jews. However, given the enormous ego and pride of a Roman governor, we can assume that their relationship was more hostile from that day forward.

The second incident that strained their relationship was when he built an aqueduct to improve the low water supply in Jerusalem. To finance the cost of the aqueduct, he robbed the temple treasury. Even after Pilate had taken so much from the Jewish treasury, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem forty years after this trial took place, they still found the equivalent of five million dollars in the Temple treasury.

Once when there were riots in the streets, Pilate had soldiers infiltrate the mobs in plain clothes with concealed weapons. On a signal from him they clubbed and stabbed to death hundreds of Jewish people. This incited a fiery hatred for Pilate in the hearts of these Jewish leaders.

A third incident occurred when Pilate deliberately equipped his soldiers with golden shields in the palace of Herod with the image of the emperor on them. There was such an outcry about this that the emperor himself ordered Pilate to have those images removed from the shields.

Josephus writes that after the death and resurrection of Jesus a final incident brought the political career of Pilate to end. In 36 A. D. there was a revolt in Samaria, and Pilate put it down in such a

cruel way, that the leading Roman official in Syria informed the emperor, who then replaced Pilate.

While he was en route to Rome, the emperor Tiberius died. Caligula took over and since he was a mad man, we can only imagine what Pilate's fate could have been when he arrived in Rome. He vanishes from the pages of history at that point. I share this history lesson to help us understand the undercurrent of hostility between Pilate and these Jews. Pilate hates these religious rulers and they hate him.

The Roman trial of Jesus begins with Pilate coming out of his palace to address the Jews because they will not enter his palace. Because this would make them unclean, they would then not be permitted to celebrate the Passover. I find it fascinating that these Jewish religious rulers are concerned with being ceremonially sanctified while they are putting the Son of God to death.

Pilate comes out and asks the Jews what specific charges they are bringing against this man. They respond that if Jesus were not a criminal they would not have asked for this trial. Pilate responds that they should take Jesus and judge him themselves, according to their own religious laws. They reply that they do not have the authority to put this man to death and they want him dead. Pilate then probably realizes that this is not to be a trial but the act of a murderous mob.

This opening exchange shows us that the atmosphere of this Roman trial is a conflict between enemies and the relationship between Pilate and these Jews is filled with hostility. John inserts the

commentary that everything was happening in fulfillment of the way Scripture has prophetically profiled the death of Jesus, the Messiah (29-32).

Pilate then returns to the palace and summons Jesus to appear before him. They have a profound conversation in which Pilate asks Jesus if He is the king of the Jews. Jesus replies that His kingdom is not of this world. In the context of this exchange between Jesus and Pilate, Jesus makes a profound declaration about His mission in this world. He says, "For this reason I was born, and for this purpose I came into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me." (18:37)

That is when Pilate asks his famous question, "What is truth?" He does not wait for an answer but returns outside and announces to the Jews that he finds no basis for bringing any charges against Jesus. This could be because he is impressed with Jesus or it could be that he hates these Jews and simply will not do anything they want him to do.

In the eighteenth chapter of this Gospel, as we answered the question, "Who is Jesus?" our answer was that He is the faithful Witness, the One Who came to bear witness to the truth. Is it not tragic that when Pilate asked that question he was looking into the face of the One Who is the Truth and he did not even wait for an answer?

According to the Roman custom of releasing a prisoner in celebration of the Passover, Pilate then offers to release Jesus. They

shout that a prisoner named Barabbas should be the released prisoner (33-40).

The Roman governor then has Jesus cruelly beaten like a common criminal. This again was a standard Roman procedure – whipping a prisoner with a whip made with many leather straps with tips of metal or bone that tore the flesh of a victim. After being whipped, they put a purple (royal) robe on Jesus. He was blindfolded, mocked, beaten with the fists of the soldiers and a crown of thorns was placed on His head.

Pilate then brings Jesus out to the Jews and says to them, “Look, I am bringing Him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against Him.” We read: “When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, ‘Behold the man!’” (19:5)

In the original language, the spirit of these words is actually, “Behold this pathetic, poor, abused man!” The intent of Pilate is not known for certain. Some scholars believe Pilate was trying to arouse the compassion of these religious rulers. If that was his intent, he should have realized that people like Annas, or those who were part of his wicked system would not likely have compassion for Someone Who was threatening the survival of the economy of their religious schemes.

That is why I shared that lengthy history lesson with you. I am personally convinced that Pilate was filled with rage toward these Jews and everything he did was with sarcasm and scorn for Jesus and

these religious rulers of the Jews. We should not be surprised when we then read: “As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw Him, they shouted, ‘Crucify! Crucify!’ But Pilate answered, ‘You take Him and crucify Him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against Him.’ The Jews insisted, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because He claimed to be the Son of God.’” (19:1-7)

Is it not interesting and sad that some of the same people, who shouted their Hosannas when Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem at the beginning of this critical week in His life and ministry, are now shouting that Jesus should be crucified?

Pilate then returns to the palace and discovers that Jesus will not speak with him. When he expresses his amazement that Jesus will not speak with the one who has the power to crucify Him, or release Him, Jesus informs Pilate that he would have no power at all if it had not been given to him. (9-11) This reminder that God is in charge and in control is an emphasis of the author of this Gospel.

We read that from this point on, Pilate definitely wanted to set Jesus free. However, the Jews then put serious pressure on Pilate when they declared that anyone who would set this man free was no friend of Caesars. (12) There was a politically correct inner circle in Rome called "The Friends of Caesar." Pilate was not doing well in his political career as governor of Judea primarily because these religious leaders of the Jews were continuously complaining about him. They had the power to instigate an investigation, which Pilate

definitely did not want. Pilate did not want the accusation that he was no friend of Caesar to reach Roman ears.

They also put pressure on Pilate when they said that Jesus claimed to be a king. "Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar. That was a crime punishable by death in the Roman Empire. When these priests and other spiritual leaders declare, "We have no king but Caesar," I am truly amazed. (14, 15) When they opposed the first Roman taxes they fought a rebellion because they claimed that God was their King and they should never pay taxes to an earthly king. Their hatred of Jesus and their corrupt spiritual perspective reveals how very far from God they really were at this time in Hebrew history when Jesus walked among them.

Pilate comes out again and brings Jesus with him. We read that he sat down on the judge's seat. There was a seat of judgment that was built at the top of some elaborate steps. It was actually a throne where judgments were pronounced. When we read, "He brought Jesus out and sat down," the Greek words for "sat down," should be translated, "He sat Him down." Jesus had claimed to be the king of the Jews. To show his scorn for Jesus and to continue his mockery of Jesus, Pilate sat Jesus on this throne, and then said, "Here is your king!" (14)

When these Jews said, "Anyone who lets Him go is no friend of Caesar," and, "We have no king but Caesar," (15) Pilate literally washes his hands and delivers Jesus over to them to be crucified. (Matthew 27:24)

This counterfeit Roman trial of Jesus gives us some answers to our three basic questions: Who is Jesus? He is the Truth and He is the One Who came to bear witness to the truth. He is the King of the Jews and He is the Judge of all the earth. When I read of Pilate mocking Jesus by sitting Him on that judgment throne, I have been struck with the thought that one day Pilate will be judged by Jesus (5:22-24). Pilate will not mock Jesus then because he will be looking into the face of the Judge of all the earth - the King of kings and Lord of lords. (Romans 14:11, 1 Timothy 6:13-16)

What is faith? In Pilate we find a negative answer to that question. Pilate was a man who judged the life of Jesus by the standards of Roman law and declared three times, "I have found no basis for a charge against Him." Nobody ever considered Jesus more carefully than Pilate did even though he was forced by his circumstances to think about Jesus.

But Pilate did not believe even though he saw the truth about Jesus legally and objectively. He was looking right into the face of Truth and all he did was ask the question, "What is truth?" (18:38) As he does not even wait for an answer to his question, Pilate is a sad illustration of what faith is not.

As you are reading this Gospel of John with me, are you like Pilate? Are you looking into the face of truth and asking, "What is truth?" I was a truth seeker for years before I realized I was looking into the face of truth every time I thought about Jesus. I followed

Christianity for years while seeking for truth in theology, philosophy and psychology.

Someone has said, "Psychology that is not based on the truth Jesus showed and taught us is like looking in a dark room for a black bed. Philosophy without Jesus is like looking in a dark room for a black bed that is not there. Atheism, materialism, or any other attempt to explain life without God, as interpreted by Christ, is like looking in a dark room for a black bed that is not there and then shouting, "I have found it!"

The whole world is looking for truth. Truth is found in Jesus Christ! He was and is truth personified. He was the greatest Witness to the truth the world has ever seen. His life and teaching was and is the most profound truth this world has ever seen or heard. The One Who claimed, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (14:6) also told us in His priestly prayer, "Your Word is truth." (17:17) As you find the portraits of Christ and His profound teaching in this Gospel, may your search for truth end as mine did when you realize you are face to face with absolute Truth when you meet Christ by faith.

My experience has been and is that when our search for truth begins and ends in Christ, we have found at least one more answer to the question, "What is life?" Life is being in relationship with the One, Who is the Truth. Life is moving beyond the sacred page of the Scripture and finding fellowship with the Living Word, Jesus Christ. Especially for a truth seeker, life is finding and knowing the truth.

Life is: knowing that we know what is true. Life is: knowing that we are no longer looking in a dark room for a black bed that is not there.

Chapter Four

“His Hour Has Come”

(19:16-42)

Throughout the Gospel of John, the author of the fourth Gospel has made reference to one hour in the life and ministry of Jesus. John does not mean to imply that this hour is a sixty-minute hour. He is describing the hour for which He has come into this world. In the twelfth chapter, at approximately the half-way point of this biography of Jesus, John quotes Jesus telling His Father in prayer that His hour has come. (12:23) He quotes Jesus praying these same words to His Father when He prays that magnificent prayer in the seventeenth chapter: "Father, the hour is come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You." (17:1)

This hour is the hour of His death on the cross. His crucifixion is the most important purpose for which He came into this world (3:14-21). When the authors of the first three Gospels record the death of Jesus on His cross, they use only three words: "They crucified Him."

I suggested we emphasize those three words individually. The first word, “They crucified Him” raises the issue of who killed Jesus Christ. Was it the Romans? Was it the Jews? My answer was that God sacrificed His only begotten Son for our salvation (Isaiah 53:10; II Corinthians 5:21).

The second word, “They crucified Him” focuses the method used by Rome, the Jews and His loving heavenly Father to accomplish our salvation. The authors of the synoptic Gospels do not emphasize the gruesome details of crucifixion. This could be because they believe their readers are well acquainted with the horrors of that cruel form of capital punishment. Or it may be that the significance of His most significant hour was not the physical, but the spiritual agony or suffering He experienced in His soul on the cross that is important to the prophets and also to these authors and therefore emphasized in their Gospels. The prophet Isaiah wrote: “After the suffering of His soul ... He shall be satisfied.” (Isaiah 53:11)

The most important of these three words by far is the third of these three words: “They crucified Him.” Rome crucified hundreds of thousands of the peoples conquered. They sometimes crucified whole villages or cities that revolted or refused to pay their taxes. During the first three hundred years of church history, many thousands of Christians were crucified. Nero poured melted wax over believers after they were crucified to provide light for his garden parties.

The deaths of all those Rome crucified could not begin to atone for our sins or accomplish our salvation. Jesus was God incarnate when He died on the cross and that was what made His death the sacrifice God accepted for the salvation of all who believe. He was the Lamb of God Who died to take away the sins of the world in general and our sins in particular. (Ephesians 5:2, Hebrews 7:26-28, 10:10, 1 John 2:2, 4:10) They did not crucify many people in the capital city of the Roman Empire because Roman citizens could not be crucified. Crucifixions were mostly done out in the provinces, or in their colonies. This horrible form of capital punishment was mostly reserved for slaves, or for people who rebelled against Rome, like the Jewish zealots, who were guerrilla fighters and continued to fight the Romans, even though they had been conquered by Rome.

Crucifixion was reserved for the most despised and hated criminals. It was not only the most painful way that a person could die, but it was also the most shameful way. Victims were crucified naked and were left hanging on their crosses for a week or more until vultures ate their corrupting flesh. When victims were taken off the crosses, they were very seldom buried. They were left for the vultures and wild animals. It was a very horrible and disgraceful way to die.

In the Bible, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah and the New Testament apostles tell us the theological meaning of what was happening when “They crucified Him.” There are several verses in

the Fifty-third chapter of Isaiah that are my favorite Old Testament description of the prophesied meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ: "But He was wounded for our transgression, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. ... Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When you make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days ... He shall see the suffering of His soul and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. ... He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." (5, 6, 10–12)

The prophet Daniel gives us a great nutshell capsule description of the significance of what happened when Jesus died on His cross. According to Daniel, when Jesus died on the cross, He made reconciliation for iniquity, He brought in everlasting righteousness, He sealed up (fulfilled) vision and prophecy and the Most Holy was anointed in a very special way (Daniel 9:24).

In the New Testament epistles, the two great apostles of the New Testament Church give us beautiful interpretations and applications of the meaning of the death of Christ on the cross. Peter applies the chapter from Isaiah I have quoted above when he writes: "Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness - by whose stripes

you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (I Peter 2:24, 25)

In the fifth chapter of Second Corinthians, Paul writes that as Jesus was dying on the cross, God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, no longer charging their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the message and the ministry of reconciliation. (18, 19)

This means that as Jesus hung there on that cross, the whole world was being reconciled to God. A dynamic verse in this passage tells us that when Jesus finished His work on that cross for our salvation, from that very moment forward, God has not been charging our sins against us, because He charged them all against His only begotten Son (19). We must all individually and personally accept His sacrifice and confess Him as our Lord and Savior.

That is the heart of the Good News we are to tell the whole world. The Good News that we are to share with the lost people of this world is not that they are going to Hell because of their sins. The Gospel (Good News) we are commissioned to tell the lost we encounter in our personal world of relationships is that they do not have to go to Hell. (Mark 16:15) If they will confess and believe they will be saved because God is not charging their sins against them. (Romans 10:9-11) He charged them all against His only begotten Son when Jesus went to Hell and back for you and me on His cross.

That great fifth chapter of Second Corinthians ends with these words: "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." If we ignore the chapter division, the very next verses challenge us: "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we beg you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." (5:21; 6:1, 2)

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes the clearest statements in the Bible of what the Gospel is (15:3-4), which we are commissioned to preach to every creature on earth (Mark 16:15). As he begins that letter, he declares that when he came to Corinth, he was determined that he would preach nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified (2:1-2). Perhaps he meant that he would not quote Greek philosophers and poets as he had in Athens before he traveled to Corinth (Acts 17, 18).

When he concluded his first letter to the Corinthians, he reminded the church he had planted there of the precise Gospel that he had preached to them. He reminded them that this was what he had preached; this is what they had believed; this Gospel is what had saved them and if they did not believe this Gospel they were lost. Reminding them that the Gospel he had preached there was the foundation of their faith, he stated that the Gospel was simply two facts about Jesus Christ: Jesus Christ died and was raised from the dead for the forgiveness of their sins, according to the Scriptures.

Although John will also use those three words, after using them he gives us the most thorough account of the death of Jesus on

the cross that is found in these inspired biographies of Jesus. Now that we have considered the personal application of the meaning of the death of Jesus, I will now begin my summary of John's inspired narrative of the most important hour in His life and ministry.

Beginning at verse sixteen in the nineteenth chapter we read: "So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying His own cross, He went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called 'Golgotha.') Here they crucified Him, and with Him two others - one on each side and Jesus in the middle. So this is what the soldiers did.

"Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, 'Do not write "The King of the Jews," but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews. Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."' (16-22)

The Latin was for the Romans. Greek was the most common language of the day and the Aramaic was for the Jews. Many wonder why the three languages were not Hebrew, Latin and Greek. The answer to that question is that while the Jews were in captivity, they learned to speak Aramaic. If you surveyed the Old Testament with me, you may remember that Nehemiah was terribly upset because the Jews who had returned from captivity were not teaching the Hebrew language to their children (Nehemiah 13:23-25).

When a prisoner of Rome was being crucified, the Roman officer who was leading the procession would carry a sign that gave the reason why the prisoner was being crucified. When the prisoner was crucified, the sign was nailed to their cross. Roman justice decreed that if anyone in the crowd could prove that these charges were not true, they could come forward with their protest and there could be another trial. People would not do that lightly because, if they could not prove the innocence of the prisoner, they might be crucified too.

The record continues: "When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took His clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This undergarment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom: 'Let us not tear it,' they said to one another. 'Let us decide by lot who will get it.'" (19:23-24)

John continues to add his personal commentary in verse 25: "This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled which said, 'They divided My garments among them and cast lots for My clothing.'" (Psalm 22:18) As was the case in Roman crucifixions, this means that He was crucified naked. That is why we are told that He endured the cross, despising the shame (Hebrews 12:2).

Next we have an observation that is only made by this Apostle of love: "Near the cross of Jesus stood His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother there, and the disciple whom He loved

standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home." (19:25-27)

Since we were told that "All the disciples forsook Him and fled," (Mark 14:50) it is interesting to read that these four women and the Apostle John were there at the cross. His mother's sister mentioned here would have been the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John.

The narrative continues: "Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled" (John keeps insisting that all this is fulfilling Scripture), Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When He had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit." (28-30)

The other Gospel writers tell us His words, "It is finished" were a cry of triumph. They write: "He let out a loud cry," as He gave up His life (Matthew 27: 46, Mark 15:37, Luke 23:46). In the Greek in which John wrote, this loud cry was only one word - "Tetelestai". It simply means, "It is finished" or "It is accomplished!"

When a prison sentence was completed, the Romans wrote this word "Tetelestai" on the records of that prisoner. The meaning of the word was similar to our "paid in full" stamp when a debt has been paid. When a prisoner had been crucified, they often wrote this

same word on a sign, nailed it to their cross in place of the sign that described the reason for their execution. As that executed prisoner hung on that cross for as much as a week before they died, and long after they had died, that word "Tetelestai" exhibited Roman justice and inspired terror in the lives of the people they had conquered and wanted to control. How appropriate that Jesus would choose this word for His cry of triumph from the cross!

Remember that all the way through this Gospel, John has recorded statements of Jesus that show us He was concerned about the works the Father wanted Him to do. "I must work the works of Him Who sent Me while it is day. The night is coming when no man can work. (9:4) My meat is to do the will of Him Who sent Me and to finish His works." (4:34) In His magnificent prayer He prayed, "Father, I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the works You have given Me to do." (17:4) And when He comes to the end of His life and His most important work, His suffering on the cross, He shouts, "Tetelestai!" - "It is finished!" (19:30)

These are beautiful words, because they mean it is not necessary for us to add anything to what He finished for us on the cross to be sure of our forgiveness and reconciliation to God through Christ. May I ask you a question? Do you believe it is necessary, or possible for us to add anything to what theologians refer to as "the finished work of Christ on His cross?" The correct answer to my question is that since He clearly finished or accomplished on His cross all that was necessary to save us, all He has left for us to do is

believe in God and believe also in Him - as He exhorted the apostles at the beginning of His discourse in the upper room (14:1). We cannot add anything to the finished work of Christ on His cross - because it is already finished!

The book of Hebrews states that so clearly. "There can be no more offering (of sacrifices) for sins if the Sacrifice has been accomplished." (Hebrews 7:27, 10:12) If Christ declared "Tetelestai" and God has been satisfied, it is ignorance, folly, or blatant ingratitude to try to add anything to what our Savior did for us on His cross. When Scriptures teach that obedience to what we know validates authentic faith, they are not suggesting we can add to the finished work of Christ on His cross.

It is fascinating that when John writes: "He bowed His head and gave up His spirit," (19:30) the Greek words actually suggest that He laid His head back as if He were laying it on a pillow. If you research the physical details of crucifixion, you will realize that John is describing a miracle. When the hands of a victim are nailed to a cross, when they expire, their head drops down. But John tells us He laid His head back as He gave up His spirit.

This is one more way John is recording the miracle that His life was not taken from Him. Remember how John quoted Jesus in the tenth chapter referring to His own life: "I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. This command I have received from My Father." (18) He obviously laid His life down voluntarily. John is making the same point when he writes that Jesus

laid His head back and voluntarily gave up His spirit in obedience to and in alignment with the will of His Father.

The story continues in verse 31: "Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down."

Briefly considering the horrors of crucifixion, when a victim was dying by crucifixion, the pain in the hands and feet, which were bearing the weight of the body, as you can imagine were indescribably excruciating. With the weight of the body hanging from the outstretched arms the lungs collapse causing severe breathing problems. To try to breath, and to relieve the pain in their hands, shoulders and arms, the victim would struggle to bear weight on their feet.

Try to imagine the absolute horror of a victim of crucifixion suffering this way for five days or a week before they were rescued by death. You can see how it would hasten this horrible way to die if they broke the legs of the victim. They would then not be able to get any support from the lower part of their body. They would break the legs by using a large wooden mallet.

We read: "They came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a

spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe." (32-35)

This is John again adding his commentary to the narrative pointing out that this event fulfilled Scripture. "These things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: (Verse 36) 'Not one of His bones will be broken.'" This is clearly a reference to the Passover lamb, which was to have none of its bones broken (Exodus 12:46). Remember how John the Baptist introduced Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world." (1:29) That is the way John applies the meaning of this tragic event of the crucifixion of his Lord.

Some theologians find great significance in the "sudden flow of blood and water" when His side was pierced. They believe the blood represents the basis of our salvation - the sacred blood that was shed for the sins of the world in general and our sins in particular. They also believe the water represents our profession of faith in that sacred blood by our baptism in obedience to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). John will have more to say about that in his little epistle, which is found at the end of the New Testament (1 John 5:6).

The last paragraph in this nineteenth chapter tells us about two men - Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Nicodemus was the Rabbi we read about in the third chapter who came to Jesus by night. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who were both members of the

Sanhedrin, were secret believers because they apparently feared the wrath of their peers if they publicly confessed their faith in Jesus Christ.

The negative reality of this closing paragraph is that these men could have spoken up when the Sanhedrin held the religious trial of Jesus that condemned Jesus to crucifixion for the sin of blasphemy. The positive reality is that when they saw Jesus die, they could no longer remain secret disciples.

I find it to be very interesting that it was not what these two men saw in the life of Jesus that moved them to the level of faith that they openly confessed to be His disciples. It was His death that brought Nicodemus and Joseph to come out publicly profess to be disciples of Jesus. Jesus said, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." (12:32)

Scholars tell us Nicodemus was the brother of the Jewish historian Josephus and that his open profession of faith in Jesus changed his status from being the most renowned Rabbi in Jerusalem to the most despised Rabbi in Jerusalem. His profession of faith in Jesus resulted in personal poverty. The last reference made of him in history is that he was seen gathering discarded food so he could feed his family.

In this closing paragraph we read that, "Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus." (38) As I have already observed, the Romans did not bury their victims of crucifixion but left their bodies to the vultures and wild animals. Identifying with a prisoner

who had been crucified by the Romans could lead to your own crucifixion. As we learned from the grave clothes of Lazarus, their tradition was to wrap a dead body with bandages and they folded spices in the bandages to overcome the horrible odors that always accompanied death. When he asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, I believe Joseph of Arimathea probably appeared with enough spices to bury a king.

That is the way this awesome nineteenth chapter ends. Remember, as you read this chapter that it is not the gruesome physical details of crucifixion that are important. It is the spiritual suffering of Jesus on the cross that accomplished our salvation. That Fifty-third chapter of Isaiah tells us it was the suffering in the soul of Jesus when all our sins were laid on Him that accomplished our salvation.

Paul told us that God made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us. (2 Corinthians 5:21) That truth should be placed next to one of the last words of Jesus on His cross, which was quoted by Jesus from the Twenty-second Psalm: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Psalm 22:1; Mark 15:34)

It is the conviction of conservative Bible scholars that when the sins of every sinner living then, who had ever lived, or would live were laid on Jesus, since a holy God cannot look on sin, at that moment the perfect communion Jesus had with the Father was broken. That is when and why He cried out to the Father, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" The broken communion

with His Father was what caused the suffering in His soul that accomplished our salvation. The Gospel writers do not emphasize the horrible physical details of crucifixion because it was the spiritual suffering in the soul of Jesus when He died on the cross that saved us.

An English Bible teaching pastor illustrated the concept of our sins being laid on Jesus this way: “Imagine all the sewers of the world being emptied at once on the head of a person Who was immaculately clean and had an obsessive-compulsive zeal for cleanliness. Then you have some idea what Isaiah meant when he prophesied that all our iniquity and all the chastisement we deserved that we might have peace with God would be laid on the Messiah. You can then also appreciate these words of the Apostle Paul: ‘God made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us.’” (Isaiah 53:5, 6; II Corinthians 5:21)

A highly cultured woman was leaving the service when she said to the pastor, Dr. G. Campbell Morgan: “I think that was a hideous and ghastly illustration you used this morning!” The great Bible expositor replied: “The only thing about my illustration that is hideous and ghastly is your sin and my sin that made the sacrifice of our Savior necessary!”

Who is Jesus in this great chapter of the Gospel of John? He is the Lamb of God, Who came to take away the sins of the world.

What is faith according to this chapter? Faith is following the example of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus by coming out to be

openly and publicly identified with Jesus in His death and resurrection.

According to the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel of John, what is life? Life is the salvation the only begotten Son of God bought for all of us when He hung on His cross. Life is reconciliation and peace with God. What John calls, “eternal life” is the quality of life we experience when we are reconciled to God because we have personally made the commitment to place our trust in Jesus Christ.

Chapter Five

“He Is Risen Indeed!”

The Ultimate Sign

(20:1-31)

When we read the twentieth chapter of this Gospel, we find John describing the last of the miraculous signs, or evidences, that he is convinced will persuade us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Now we come to what may be the ultimate sign John presents in his inspired version of a biography of Jesus.

John cannot wait until the last chapters of his Gospel to present this ultimate sign that proves all the claims of Jesus about Who, what and why He came into this world. He tells us about this

sign in the second chapter. When Jesus was cleansing the Temple and the religious authorities asked Him for a credential/sign that demonstrated His authority for such severe action, Jesus replied: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again."

The other Gospels writers parallel this hostile dialog by telling us these religious leaders thought He was referring to the Temple of Solomon when He made this claim. However, they insert their commentary that He was referring to the temple of His own body. They tell us that He essentially told them: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign because it has no faith. As Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days, I will be buried for three days and then resurrected. This is the only and ultimate sign I will give you." (Matthew 12:39-41)

As we have seen, since this is the priority purpose of the Gospel of John, the beloved Apostle John has recorded Jesus presenting many sign evidences that validate all the claims He made regarding Who and what He is and why He came into this world. However, I am convinced that John deliberately began and concluded His presentation of these miraculous evidences in the second and twentieth chapters of this Gospel with this ultimate sign - the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!

I am also persuaded that this is why John tells us about the cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of his Gospel while the other Gospel authors place this event near the end of their Gospels. I am convinced that John did this for at least two reasons: first, this

miracle greatly strengthens the basic purpose for which John wrote his Gospel, which was to convince us that Jesus is the Christ, or the Messiah. His second reason for placing this sign at the beginning of his Gospel was to make his point that Jesus is God. John was not primarily interested in chronological order but in convincing all who read his Gospel of the basic truths he wants us to believe - which he clearly states at the end of this twentieth chapter.

The twentieth chapter presents the heart of the Gospel Jesus commissioned His apostles and disciples to preach to every creature in every nation on earth (Mark 16:15). Resurrection is the most exciting half of the Gospel. The Gospel is the death of Jesus Christ for our sins and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, when Paul summarized what the Gospel is, he essentially wrote: "This is the Gospel I preached when I was in Corinth. This is what you believed. This is the foundation on which you stand and if your faith is built on any other foundation, you are lost! This is the Gospel: Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He was buried and He rose from the dead according to the Scriptures." (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

The Gospel is basically two facts about Jesus Christ: The death of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and the resurrection of Jesus, which proves that He was qualified to be the Lamb of God Who's death took away all the penalties – past, present and future - we deserved because of our sins. In the nineteenth chapter of this

Gospel, John presents the first fact of the Gospel and in the twentieth chapter he presents the second Gospel fact about Jesus Christ - His resurrection!

The twentieth chapter reports three separate events. The first event is when the apostles - and those who were especially close to the crucified Jesus - discovered the glorious miracle that the tomb was empty! This first event takes place early on the morning of what we now think of as the first Easter Sunday.

The day Jesus was raised from the dead is not only the basis for what we call "Easter" or "Resurrection Sunday," but for the amazing phenomenon that caused these very Jewish apostles to change their day of worship from the Sabbath (seventh or Saturday) day to the first day of the week - Sunday. What could have possibly motivated them to change their day of worship? If we read carefully, we will find that they never call the first day of the week "The Sabbath". They refer to this very special day as, "The Lord's Day". They changed their day of worship because the first day of the week was the day Jesus was raised from the dead! The fact that believers have worshipped on Sunday for two thousand years is one of many proofs that Jesus was raised from the dead.

The story that describes this first event begins before dawn on the Sunday after Jesus was crucified. The second event described in this chapter takes place on the Sunday evening of that first Easter. The third event happens a week later when doubting Thomas learns and teaches us a vital answer to: "What is faith?"

This is the way John describes the first of these three events: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have put Him!'" (20:1, 2)

When Mary Magdalene comes to this tomb while it is still dark, we read that she saw the stone had been removed. In the Greek language, it is clear that this actually means there was a trough-like groove, or track in which this huge stone was rolled when the tomb was sealed. John is telling us that Mary saw that this huge stone had been removed from this track, which guided the stone when the tomb was sealed.

There are several Greek words for "seeing". The first word John uses here for "saw" means that she saw at a distance. It was only a casual observation. She immediately ran to tell Simon Peter. I am fascinated by this response from her. Peter had denied the Lord three times and yet she considers Peter to be the first one who should know about this problem. She apparently considers Peter the leader of the movement at that point.

This may mean that nobody knew about the denials of Peter but Jesus and perhaps one or two of the apostles. We also wonder how and where Peter spent the time between when he went out into the darkness and wept bitterly and he heard this good news of the

resurrection? Some scholars believe there is evidence in these Scriptures that show he spent that time with John. If they are right, that means John loved Peter enough to take him into his home. The Apostle of love who wrote this Gospel not only loved Jesus. He also loved Peter.

Mary Magdalene apparently still considers Peter the leader of the disciples. He was obviously the leader of this small circle of those who were close to Jesus and discovered the second half of the Gospel. The word "Gospel" means "Good News!" We can assume that Peter has not completely forgotten the promise of Jesus that Jesus would build His church on the reality that Peter could be a spokesman for God (Matthew 16:13-18). Because of his denials, Peter must have wondered how that promise could ever be fulfilled. We will find the answer to that question in the last chapter of this Gospel.

Mary runs to Peter and John, and tells them "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have put Him!" Who does she mean by "they"? She could be referring to the Jews who had her Lord crucified. She could also be referring to the Romans who literally carried out His execution by crucifixion. She says "we" because, as the other Gospels record, she did not go to the tomb alone.

The story continues: "Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first." (Probably because that other disciple, being

John, was younger than Peter.) This other disciple, John, "Bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed." (3-9)

This Apostle of love - who uses the word love far more than any other New Testament author - never got over the fact that when he met Jesus, he met Someone Who loved him as he had never been loved before. Sixty years after he wrote this fourth Gospel, when he dedicated the last book of the Bible to Jesus, the first remembrance he has of Jesus was that, "He loved us!" (Revelation 1:5). His inspired letter, which is found near the end of the New Testament, in one passage gives us ten reasons why we must love one another (1 John 4:7-21).

Church history tells us that John is the only apostle who lived to a very old age. At the end of his long life, he was so weak and feeble he had to be carried to the meetings of the church in Ephesus where he spent his last years. Looking very distinguished with a long white beard, this Apostle of love would raise his hand in benediction and say in a high-pitched and weak voice: "Little children, love one another!"

Remember that these words for "seeing" are different words (John 20:5-6). By examining the original Greek words when we read

that "he saw", we can get some idea of what really happened at the tomb where Jesus was buried. When Peter enters the empty tomb, John writes that he sees something. The word John uses this time means that Peter closely examined what he saw. Peter closely examined the greatest miracle in the four Gospels.

If you closely study this passage, you will find the scholars all agree that what Peter and John saw was that all those bandages that were wrapped around the body of Jesus were still intact, like a cocoon. The miracle was that Jesus was not in them anymore! They were not unwrapped - there was no pile of wrappings in the corner of that tomb. Try to imagine what they saw. They saw grave clothes that were still in the form of a body - shaped like an empty collapsed cocoon. The head wrappings were separate and were laid aside, but not in a way that suggested the grave had been robbed. When they entered that tomb, they immediately knew they were looking at the greatest miracle this world has ever known!

When we read that John "saw and believed" John uses yet another Greek word for seeing. This word means that he saw in the sense that we use the word for seeing when we say, "Now I see it and understand!" When we use the word that way we mean, "I comprehend and I believe what I see." We are actually expressing the concept of "seeing" in the same way John does when he writes that "He saw with a full realization of what had happened, and he believed."

Then John inserts this commentary: "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." He then continues his narrative: "Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying." (John 20:9)

Peter and John were apparently so ecstatic about what they had seen they ran right by Mary Magdalene. They did not stop to explain to her what they had seen and what it meant. Imagine what this good news would have meant to Mary. However, we can understand how in their excitement they left her still crying outside the tomb while they went back to spread the good news of that first Easter. The enemies of Jesus had destroyed the temple - the body of Jesus - to which Jesus referred when He declared to them His ultimate sign (2:19). Throughout this Gospel, John makes sure we know that Jesus laid down His body by His own deliberate choice. He had the power to lay down and to raise up His life again (10:18).

We read that as Mary wept, "She bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. "They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'They have taken my Lord away.'" Observe that at first she said "the Lord." Now she says "my Lord. And I do not know where they have put Him.' At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus." (20:11-14)

Make the observation that in these post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, those who knew and loved Jesus before His

death and resurrection do not recognize Him after His resurrection. His post-resurrection body was obviously different from the Jesus they knew. Jesus now speaks to Mary: "'Woman,' He said, 'Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking He was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will get Him.'" (The Greek words tell us that she actually says, "I will carry Him away.") (15)

We then read: "Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward Him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to Me, for I have not yet returned to My Father. Go instead to My brothers and tell them, "I am returning to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God. Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that He had said these things to her.'" (16-18)

This is a very touching story. In the other Gospels we read that Mary Magdalene was the woman out of whom seven devils had been cast. This is symbolic - seven being the number of perfection in the Bible - that she was completely possessed and Jesus had cast all those demons out of her (an exorcism) (Luke 8:1-3). Small wonder that she was at the foot of His cross, and her presence there was saying, "I will never forget what He did for me!"

Imagine if you had been possessed by demons and Jesus had delivered you from that awful torment, how much love you would have for Jesus. In one of the other Gospels, Jesus said of this Mary,

"She sinned much, and so when she was forgiven she loved much." Well, this Mary did sin much and she greatly loved the One, Who had saved (delivered) her from her sins (Luke 7:47-50). That is why she is there at the cross when His disciples had all forsaken Him.

Many wonder why Jesus said to this Mary, "Touch me not; for I have not yet ascended to My Father," when a week later He invited Thomas to touch Him (John 20:17; 27). What Jesus literally said to her was, "Do not hold on to Me." Or, "Do not clutch Me." When she realized that it was He, she apparently grabbed hold of Him. She was simply ecstatic with joy! So He literally says to her, "Do not clutch Me."

He had explained to the apostles in the upper room that there was going to be a new and more intimate relationship with Him after His death, resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit. He was going to be in them and they were going to be in Him and with Him in a more intimate way than they had experienced in their three years together. However, these truths had not been explained to Mary Magdalene.

He now refers to the apostles as His brothers as He breaks the news of His ascension to her: "Go and tell My brothers." He had told the apostles: "You have only one Master and you are all brothers." (Matthew 23:8) Now He refers to them as His brothers, when He tells Mary, "Go tell My brothers, I am returning to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God." (17) The author of the Book of Hebrews seems to be offering commentary on this passage when

he expresses his amazement that Jesus is not ashamed to call men His brothers (Hebrews 2:11).

Observe the distinction here: His Father and their Father - His God and their God. He could have meant this two ways. His relationship to the Father was unique. You seldom find Him praying with these apostles. He teaches them how to pray, but when He prays, He nearly always prays alone. He is the Son, not a son. Perhaps He meant it that way.

Perhaps He meant what He taught the apostles in the upper room: "My Father is the explanation for every word I speak and every work I do. I am the Way to the Father. Now He is your Father too. My God is the explanation for all the things you have seen Me do and heard Me say. Now you can be as close to the Father as I am."

So Mary Magdalene goes to the apostles and shouts, "I have seen the Lord!" (20:18) What glorious news that was! And she told them that He had said these things to her. Apparently meaning what He told her about His ascension.

The Great Commission in the Gospel of John

"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After He said this, He showed them His hands and His side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

"Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, even so send I you!' And with that He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'" (John 20:19-23)

This is a fascinating passage of Scripture. The doors are locked. The apostles are still fearful that the corrupt religious establishment that put their Lord on a cross could be coming after them. So they are filled with fear and meeting behind locked doors. Without the doors being opened, Jesus suddenly appears with them. Twice He gives them the blessing of His peace. Then He gives the Great Commission, according to John. It could be translated this way: "I am sending you into the world in exactly the same way the Father sent Me into the world." (17:18; 20:21)

While giving the Great Commission, He breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (22) Scholars disagree about how to interpret this passage. Some believe that He was simply telling them that when the day of Pentecost comes, they are to receive the Holy Spirit. The Greek suggests that He inhaled and exhaled, and then said, "Receive (or take in) the Holy Spirit." He could have meant that when the Holy Spirit comes, receiving the Holy Spirit will be as simple as breathing in and breathing out.

In the context of obeying the Great Commission He essentially says, "If you forgive a person's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive their sins, they are not forgiven." (23) This

teaching of Jesus can also be taken two different ways. Some people in church history have taken this to mean that the minister, the one who is preaching the Gospel to sinners and the Scriptures to believers has the power and the option to forgive or not to forgive. They believe that this person can say, "I absolve, or I forgive you." He also has the power and the option to say, "I do not forgive you."

That is not what this passage is teaching for only God can forgive sins. (Luke 5:17-25, Colossians 1:13-14) I believe the proper interpretation is that when we preach or teach the Gospel to sinners, or the Scriptures to believers, if they believe, we can assure them that God forgives their sins because of what Christ did for them on the cross. If they do not believe the Gospel, we can declare that their sins are not forgiven. As a pastor giving an invitation to sinners to accept God's forgiveness, I have done that many, many times. And so can anyone else who proclaims the Gospel.

Before John gives his purpose for writing this fourth Gospel, the third great teaching in this chapter begins at verse 24. This great teaching gives us a profound answer to the question, "What is faith?" We read that Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the apostles: "So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe it.'

"A week later (this is Sunday night a week later) His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the

doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then He said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe.'

"Thomas said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen Me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" (20:24-29)

We might call this declaration of Jesus to Thomas, "The Ninth Beatitude." We can add to the eight beautiful and blessed attitudes Jesus taught on the mountaintop, (Matthew 5:3-11) "Blessed are those who do not see, but believe." (John 20: 29) Do not be too hard on Thomas. It is because of this passage that we call him, "Doubting Thomas." Remember that when they were all afraid because Jesus was going back to Judea where the hostility of the Jews had become so intense that He was in danger, Thomas was the apostle who said, "Let us go and die with Him." (John 11:16)

Thomas had faith. Consider these words of Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" (28) This miraculous appearance of Jesus to His disciples is the last sign John records for us before he tells us the purpose for which he wrote this Gospel. All the way through these twenty chapters, John has presented miraculous evidences to convince us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. These words of Thomas the purpose for which John wrote this Gospel. John wrote to convince us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That is what Thomas confesses Jesus to be. Thomas is not only professing Jesus

as Savior. He is professing his faith in Jesus as his Lord and His God.

After giving His realistic assessment of the faith of Thomas, "You believe because you have seen," Jesus declares this ninth attitude that He blesses: "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." (20:29) As we should not be too hard on Peter for his denial when all the apostles abandoned Jesus (Mark 14:50), we should not be too hard on Thomas for believing what he saw as he followed Jesus for three years. So had all the other apostles. They believed because they saw the water become wine in Cana of Galilee. They believed because they saw the Lord still the storm, heal hundreds and raise Lazarus from the dead. That was why they believed. Jesus was not only teaching Thomas but all the apostles the answer to that question, "What is faith?"

However, consider this ninth blessed attitude: "Blessed are those who do not see but believe." Who are the people to whom this promised blessing applies? Not the other apostles - they believed because they saw. Jesus gave this ninth blessed attitude to Thomas and the apostles for the benefit and blessing of millions of believers He knew would follow Him throughout all the centuries of church history, who were going to believe in a risen, living Christ they would never see.

This faith teaching of Jesus is eloquently described in these inspired words of Peter: "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him

and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (I Peter 1:8, 9) This means that Jesus intended this ninth attitude He blesses to be the faith experience of believers like you and me. This is an attitude with a blessing that is promised and pronounced by Jesus on all those who believe in a risen Savior Who is, even though they have never seen Him.

John concludes this twentieth chapter by giving us his great statement of purpose. There is a sense in which we have now concluded our verse-by-verse commentary of the Gospel of John. Scholars are convinced that the systematic testimony about Jesus that is presented by John in this Gospel concludes with his statement of purpose at the conclusion of the twentieth chapter. The final chapter is an epilogue, or a postscript that in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is included because it teaches profound truth that relates to the implementation of the Great Commission Jesus gave the apostles as John recorded it in the twentieth chapter.

This epilogue is inspired and very important, as we will see in the last chapter of this booklet. However, the conclusion of what we might call the theme of this Gospel, from the first words John writes in the first chapter, through the twenty-ninth verse of the twentieth chapter is: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,

and that by believing you may have (eternal) life in His name."
(20:30, 31)

Epilogue

"Making Somebody Out of Nobody"

(John 21:1-25)

The epilogue to the Gospel of John begins: "Later Jesus appeared again to the disciples beside the Lake of Galilee. This is how it happened: A group of us were there - Simon Peter, Thomas, "The Twin," Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, my brother James and I and two other disciples.

"Simon Peter said, 'I am going fishing. We will come too,' we all said. We did, but caught nothing all night. At dawn we saw a man standing on the beach but could not see who he was. He called, 'Any fish, boys?' 'No,' we replied. Then He said, 'Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you will get plenty of them!' So we did, and could not draw in the net because of the weight of the fish, there were so many!

"Then I said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' At that, Simon Peter put on his tunic (for he was stripped to the waist) and jumped into the water and swam ashore. The rest of us stayed in the boat and pulled the loaded net to the beach, about 300 feet away. When we got there,

we saw that a fire was kindled and fish were frying over it, and there was bread.

"Bring some of the fish you have caught,' Jesus said. So Simon Peter went out and dragged the net ashore. By his count there were 153 large fish; and yet the net had not torn. 'Now come and have some breakfast!' Jesus said; and none of us dared ask Him if He really was the Lord, for we were quite sure of it. Then Jesus went around serving us the bread and fish.

"This was the third time Jesus had appeared to us since His return from the dead." (21:1-14)

Most scholars believe the systematic theme of the Gospel of John ends at verse thirty-one of chapter twenty. In this epilogue chapter, we read that Jesus reminds seven of the twelve apostles He had appointed - especially Peter- that He did not commission them to catch fish - but men! (Luke 5:10; Mark 16:7; John 21:15-25)

These apostles have been involved in a fruitless all-night fishing expedition. From the beach, the resurrected Jesus directed them to cast their nets on the other side of their boat. As soon as they followed His instructions, the net was filled with fish and they immediately knew the stranger on the beach was the Lord. We are given the precise number of the amazing catch of fish: "one hundred fifty-three large fish." (21:11)

What is the significance of this number? For centuries church fathers and scholars have tried to determine the symbolic meaning of this number. Some have suggested that at that time there were one

hundred fifty-three different kinds of fish to be caught. They believed the significance of this number was that Jesus was telling these apostles He was going to use them as fishers for men to "catch" every kind of person in the world (Matthew 4:19). The Gospel of salvation was not only for Jews or for certain special classes of people. As the angels had proclaimed when Christ was born, Jesus was reminding these apostles that the Gospel was for all people (Luke 2:10).

These early church fathers believed that the number one hundred was considered to be a number of fullness - as in the parable of Jesus about those who would bring forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty and some a hundredfold (Matthew 13:8). According to this interpretation and application, in the one hundred plus fifty, Jesus is predicting a catch or harvest of souls that will be far beyond anything they could possibly imagine.

They also believed that the three beyond the one hundred and fifty represented the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three would be the source of and the power behind this great harvest, or catch of fish, and the purpose for this great harvest would be to bring glory to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Some scholars over the years have believed there is spiritual significance in the fact that the net does not tear in this great harvest of fish. The interpretation and application for the apostles - and for us today as we fish for men - is that we will discover that none of the fish that are caught will fall through a torn net and be lost. As Jesus

taught elsewhere in this Gospel, the Father is the Prime Mover behind our response to Christ and we are secure within the hands of the Son and the Father when we respond to the Gospel and become one of His sheep (6:44; 10:28, 29).

The Affirmation of Peter

In the middle of this last chapter, beginning at verse fifteen we read a marvelous chapter in the New Testament history of the relationship Peter has with Jesus. In most translations, Jesus asks Peter three times, "Peter, do you love Me?" I am quoting from a paraphrase of these verses which brings out the clear meaning of the Greek words Jesus and Peter use in this profound dialog:

"After breakfast Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these others?' 'Yes,' Peter replied, 'You know I am Your friend.' 'Then feed My lambs,' Jesus told him. Jesus repeated the question: 'Simon, son of John, do you really love Me?' 'Yes, Lord,' Peter said, 'You know I am Your friend.' 'Then take care of My sheep,' Jesus said.

"Once more He asked Him, 'Simon, son of John, are you even My friend?' Peter was grieved at the way Jesus asked the question this third time. 'Lord, You know my heart; You know I am,' he said. Jesus said, 'Then feed My little sheep.'" (21:15-25)

As you read this passage, make the observation that in the presence of six of the men who heard Peter boast in the upper room that he would never deny his Lord, Jesus asked Peter three times,

"Peter, do you love Me more than these others?" The second time He asked the question, He does not include the reference to the others who are present.

Does Jesus ask Peter this question three times because, as God in human flesh, He does not know the answer? Of course not. When Jesus asked this question the first time, John quotes Him using the word "agape", which means the total, complete kind of love Paul profiles at the heart of what many call the love chapter of the Bible (I Corinthians 13:4-7).

When Peter replies that he does love Jesus, John quotes Peter using the Greek word "phileo", which is a quality of love that is inferior to agape love - a love which could be called merely a friendship. Peter is essentially answering the question of Jesus by saying, "You know the answer to that question. You know that I am merely Your friend." The quality of love Peter now confesses for Jesus is not the agape love Jesus commanded in the upper room - which comes from God and results in a total commitment.

The most important observation we might make about this interview is the change we see in Peter. When Jesus asks Peter if his love is greater than the love of these others, in his response to Jesus Peter is not now boasting that he loves Jesus more than these other apostles. It is almost as if the Lord is asking, "Peter, do you love Me with all your heart, mind, soul and strength?" And Peter is responding, "You know the answer to that, Lord. You know that my love for You only amounts to a superficial friendship."

Peter is experiencing something that can be described in one word and that word is "brokenness". Peter is broken in his spirit. Another way of saying the same thing is to say that he is experiencing the first beautiful attitude Jesus taught on that mountaintop in Galilee - what Jesus called being "poor in spirit". He coupled that beautiful attitude with mourning because, like Peter, we often mourn while we are experiencing brokenness, or while we are learning to be poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3, 4).

The Most Beautiful Verses in the Bible

Be sure to observe that when Peter confesses that his love for his Lord is merely a friendship, the Lord responds, "Feed My lambs, Peter." I think this is one of the most beautiful passages in the entire Bible. The essence of what the Lord is actually saying to Peter is: "I want someone like you, who knows what it is to fail, feeding My lambs, Peter. I do not want some perfectionist making unrealistic demands on My sheep. I want a broken person - I want a humble person to shepherd the sheep for whom I died. I want a compassionate, caring person feeding My sheep, who can relate to the failures of the sheep while he is shepherding the sheep I love so very much. I want someone like you feeding and caring for My precious lambs, Peter."

The second time the Lord asks the question, "Peter, do you really love Me?" John again quotes Jesus using the word "agape". The second time Peter responds that he loves the Lord, John again

quotes Peter using the word "phileo". In response to this second confession of Peter, John quotes Jesus responding to Peter using a Greek word that means, "Then shepherd My sheep, Peter." This word essentially means, "Then take care of My sheep. I want someone like you looking after the needs of My sheep, Peter." (21:16)

The intense drama of this dynamic conversation Jesus has with Peter on that beach reaches its climax the third time the Lord asks, "Peter, do you love Me?" This third time John quotes the Lord using the word "phileo". This means Jesus is essentially asking this future leader of the church, "Are you even My friend, Peter?"

When we understand these Greek words, we realize why Peter is grieved when the Lord asked this question the third time. We also appreciate the brokenness represented by this final response of Peter to these three questions of Jesus: "Lord, You know my heart. You know everything. You know that I at least have that much love for You. Surely You know that I am at least Your friend." (17)

As I have already observed, the most beautiful part of this dialog between Jesus and this apostle, who has denied his Lord three times, is that when Peter confesses his brokenness, the final response of his Lord is: "Feed My little sheep, Peter!" I think that is absolutely beautiful! If you have ever failed your Lord, you should also think these last words of Jesus to Peter are some of the most beautiful words in the Bible.

These words of affirmation Jesus speaks to Peter - which He also repeats three times - mean that the risen, living Christ does not want perfectionists perpetuating the myth of their perfectionism while making unrealistic demands on His sheep. The Pharisees were the only people on earth who drew the emotion of anger from the One Who was "God with us." One of the reasons our Lord was angry with the Pharisees was that they made unrealistic demands on the people of God (Matthew 23:13).

One of my many mentors told me: "You are not God, so allow yourself the right to fail and allow others what you realistically allow yourself. People who refuse to allow failure in themselves and others will drive themselves and others to despair." Another mentor told me that as he kissed his wife goodbye when he was leaving for work the first day he was the Chaplain of the United States Senate, he told his wife: "Every day I have lived has prepared me for this day!"

This dialog between Jesus and Peter is touching when we realize that Jesus is convincing Peter - and you and me - that our victories and our failures are tools He uses to develop our spiritual characters and convince us of a dynamic truth He taught at the Last Christian Retreat. When Jesus showed the apostles that vine and branches metaphor, He taught them - and us - that without Him we can do nothing - not a little good, or some good - but nothing at all! (15:5) As we follow Jesus, everything that happens to us can be part of His "seminary" education for us - and the "seminary" never ends!

Why did the risen Christ demonstrate great power on the Day of Pentecost through this man Peter? I believe that when we understand the dynamics of this interview Jesus had with Peter on the beach that morning we will find the answer to that question.

The Lord was teaching Peter three lessons that people of God must learn before they become instruments the hand of God uses mightily. First lesson: "You are nobody." Second lesson: "You are somebody." Third lesson: "Now let Me show you what I can do with somebody who has learned that he is nobody." In my booklet on Exodus, I demonstrate these three lessons in the life experience of Moses. (Booklet number one) You will find God teaching these three lessons to people He uses throughout the Bible. You will also discover that God is teaching these three lessons to people today. When God wants to use you He will teach you these same three lessons.

Another way of summarizing these three lessons is to say that people like Moses and Peter who learned them discovered the blessing that results from knowing four spiritual secrets:

"It is not a matter of who or what I am but of Who and what God is. What really matters is not what I can or cannot do, but what He can and wills to do. The important thing is therefore not what I want, but what He wants." When I learn these spiritual secrets, then I can look back when Christ uses me and say, "When I consider the value of my life, I realize that it was not what I did but what He did through me that will have everlasting consequences. It was only

when I experienced these spiritual realities that my life produced what Jesus called 'the fruit that remains'" (John 15:16)

A young man I know, who was a super over achiever before he learned these four spiritual secrets, reduced these four secrets to one by declaring: "Jesus Christ plus anything equals nothing; Jesus Christ plus nothing equals everything!" The Lord is using him mightily today as an international evangelist because He has learned what God can do with somebody who has learned he is a nobody.

I am convinced that the risen, living Christ chose to minister through Peter on the Day of Pentecost because Peter had learned that he was nobody. On the beach that morning Jesus convinced Peter that he was somebody God could use because he had learned that he was nobody. On the Day of Pentecost, the church and the whole world discovered what the risen, living Christ can do through somebody, who has learned that he is nobody (Acts 2:32 33).

The Will of God for Your Life (21:18-23)

In this setting, Jesus also taught a vital lesson about the will of God for the life of a disciple. John writes that the Lord says to Peter: "When you were young, you were able to do as you liked and go wherever you wanted to; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and others will direct you and take you where you do not want to go." (18)

Jesus could simply have been referring to old age and the fact that in old age people sometimes require total care. But, so that we

will not think that way, John goes on to write: "Jesus said this to let him know what kind of death he would die to glorify God." (19)

Jesus was obviously speaking here of crucifixion when He said, "You will stretch out your hands." That was an expression in those days like the expression "lifted up" which Jesus used in the third chapter of this Gospel that clearly meant crucifixion (3:14).

We then read: "Peter turned around and saw the disciple Jesus loved following (which would be John), the one who had leaned around at supper that time to ask Jesus, 'Master, which of us will betray You?' Peter asked Jesus, 'What about him, Lord? What sort of death will he die?'" (20-21)

Peter often boasted that he was willing to die for Jesus. We read in this epilogue chapter that the risen Jesus decided to tell Peter the manner of his death. If the tradition about the death of Peter is accurate, this means Jesus told Peter he was going to have the privilege of being crucified upside down for his Lord!

When Peter heard this, his humanity showed up when he pointed his thumb over his shoulder at John, who was his partner in the fishing business, and essentially asked Jesus, "I know you will give me the grace and the peace to endure that horrible death, but what about him? What is your will for his life and death?" Of course, Peter could have been asking this question because he loved John and John had shown him great love during this difficult time between his denials and then this reclamation and affirmation of Jesus.

Jesus responded by telling Peter in effect that His will for John's life and death was none of Peter's business. "Jesus replied, 'If I want him to live until I return, what is that to you? (23) You follow Me.'" In other words, the Lord was saying to Peter, "My plan for John is My plan for John. My plan for you is My plan for your life. Do not concern yourself about My plan for him. Your concern and your priority should be to discover My plan for you, and your business is to see to it that you follow Me."

Then we read: "So the rumor spread among the brotherhood that that disciple would not die! But that was not what Jesus said at all! He only said, 'If I want him to live until I come, what is that to you?' (23)

God throws the mold away every time He makes one of us a new creation through the new birth. We are His workmanship when we experience salvation (II Corinthians 5:17, 18; Ephesians 2:10). In the Providence of God we are all designed to be unique and distinct from every other person on earth (Psalm 139:16). We recover that unique individuality through our salvation (II Timothy 2:23-26; Philemon 19; I Timothy 4:16). Why then would we expect to find God's will for our lives - which will make us distinct from every other person on earth - by comparing His will for our lives with His will for the lives of other believers?

This is a beautiful truth because we all seem to spend so much of our time thinking about what the Lord is doing in the lives of other people. But, I am the one person for whom I am responsible

and the one person for whom I am accountable to Christ. I should therefore spend my time and energy concerning myself with whether or not I am doing what the Lord wants me to do, and not concern myself with His plan for other believers.

There is a metaphor used in the Scriptures that is not easily understood in democratic societies. Ancient cities like Rome had millions of slaves in their populations. The Old Testament prophets identified themselves as the slaves of God. In his great epistles, the Apostle Paul implies that we are all slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ when he begins his letters by introducing himself as the slave of Jesus Christ. In the culture in which Paul wrote his letters, a slave had no higher priority than to please and obey his master. In that context he writes: "Every slave stands or falls before his own master." (Romans 14:4) According to Paul, we are not to answer to our fellow slaves but you and I are slaves who should be answering to our Master, Jesus Christ.

Since Jesus was not only Peter's Savior but also his Lord, like Paul, Peter was the slave of his Master Jesus. As a slave of Jesus, Peter had no business asking his Master about His plan for another slave, the Apostle John.

In Summary

Some scholars believe this fruitless fishing expedition represented the terrible reality that these men were going back to business as usual and were forsaking the mission Jesus had

committed to them and for which He had invested three years of His time and life in them. In this post-resurrection appearance of Jesus, He is obviously reminding these apostles that He has not commissioned them to catch fish. He has commissioned them to catch men (Luke 5:10; Matthew 4:19).

The second truth taught by Jesus recorded in this epilogue is His challenge to Peter and these other apostles to be involved in the nurturing and shepherding of those who will be harvested at Pentecost. Paul writes that, "He appeared unto Peter." (I Corinthians 15:5) Paul probably had this interview with Peter in mind when he wrote those words. This statement of Paul makes the dialog Jesus had on the beach with Peter sound like a private interview. Although it seems that His dialog with Peter was private, Peter probably shared the essence of that time with those other apostles.

We certainly can read the results of this period of denial, affirmation and restoration of Peter by Jesus into the final words Peter addresses to elders in his inspired and inspiring letter that is found near the end of the New Testament: "Now the God of all grace Who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered awhile, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." (I Peter 5:10)

The second primary truth taught by Jesus and recorded in this epilogue was His challenge to Peter and these other six apostles to shepherd and feed those who would be born again several weeks after His resurrection and Ascension. In the upper room, the

emphasis of the teaching of Jesus was, "If you love Me, keep My commandments," and His New Commandment was for them to love one another as He had loved them for three years. After His resurrection, especially in His dialog with Peter, and for the instruction of all the apostles who are present at that breakfast on the beach, the emphasis is: "If you love Me, feed and shepherd My little lambs and sheep."

The third great teaching of Jesus for them - and by application for you and me - was to discover God's individual will for their lives and His corporate will for their churches as they and we obey the Great Commission.

The Last Words of My Favorite Gospel (21:24-25)

We now come to John's beautiful conclusion to his magnificent Gospel. All the way through this Gospel, with a beautiful humility, John has been referring to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved, or that other disciple - the disciple Jesus loved who leaned on Him and asked Him that question in the upper room. He never names himself. However, at the end of his Gospel he essentially writes, "I am that disciple I have been referring to all the way through this book. I saw all these things that I have recorded here. And we all, those of us in this brotherhood - we all know that my account of these signs is accurate."

Trace this humble signature of John throughout this profound fourth Gospel and then discover that in these concluding chapters,

John tells us plainly that he is that other disciple whom Jesus loved and who wrote this Gospel (13:23; 19:26; 18:16; 21:24).

He then concludes his Gospel with these amazing words: "If all the signs of Jesus were written down, the whole world would not be able to contain the books!" (25) My mentor, who was the Chaplain of the United States Senate, consulted one of the world's largest libraries, the Library of Congress in the United States, and asked them, "How many books have been written because of the life of Jesus Christ?" They were reluctant to give him a precise number because they told him the number would almost be impossible to calculate.

There was an old Rabbi who lived about the year A. D. 80. At the end of a long life of learning he wrote: "If all the sky were parchment, and all the trees were writing pens, and all the seas were ink, there would not be enough ink to write down the wisdom I have learned from my teachers; and yet, I have had the pleasure of learning only as much of the wisdom of the wise as a fly who plunged into that ocean of ink could take away from that ocean."

Think of that fly plunging into an ocean of ink, and of how much ink it would be able to carry when it flies away. The old rabbi gave us an eloquent metaphor through which he put in perspective for us what we know relative to what can be known. Another one of my mentors told me that my education for the ministry would be a process of moving from unconscious to conscious ignorance. The more we know, the greater our awareness of what we do not know.

That is the spirit in which John concludes this Gospel. His conclusion to this magnificent inspired Gospel is: "I have told you all these things about Jesus, but there is so much more to tell. I have only selected a few of these signs and recorded them so you might examine my accurate witness of these signs, and then receive eternal life because you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But I have not told you everything about Jesus. I have only told you a small fragment of all there is to tell and know about Jesus Christ."

Another appropriate concluding statement for this Gospel is written is written by the Apostle of love in the last chapter of his inspired letter, which is found near the end of the New Testament: "This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and that life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son does not have life." (I John 5:11, 12)

When a wealthy man died, since his estate was more than a billion dollars, his mansion was crowded with family, relatives, friends and business associates for the reading of the will. Before the presiding attorney began the reading of the Last Will and Testament, he announced that a portrait of the deceased man's son was to be auctioned before the reading of the will. The son had been an embarrassment to his father and very few people liked him.

An auctioneer began the proceedings. After an awkward silence with no bids for the portrait, an old woman who had been the governess for the son when he was a child made a bid of five dollars, which was all she could afford. Since there were no other bids

because no one wanted a portrait of this boy, she was given possession of the portrait. When the will was read, the opening statement was, "I have left all my earthly possessions to the person who has purchased the portrait of my son."

That story illustrates the spirit of the way John concluded his Gospel and the short letter, which he intended to be a sequel to this Gospel: "He who has the Son has everything and he who does not have the Son has nothing."

The Personal Application

We have now come through twenty-one chapters of this magnificent Gospel, asking and answering the question, "Who is Jesus?" John has presented us with a supernatural "art gallery" of portraits of Christ, which he calls, "signs" that conclusively prove the glorious reality that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and the only begotten Son of God!

Again and again we have asked and answered the question, "What is faith?" We have learned from this Gospel that faith is not merely intellectual. Faith is not simply a matter of adding up logical propositions and coming to logical conclusions. If that were all there were to faith, then anybody and everybody with a good mind would believe. All the advantaged people in terms of education would be believers and all the disadvantaged people would not believe. Faith relates to our wills and our freedom to make choices and not merely to our minds, according to the Christ we have met in this Gospel.

Faith is often based on our response to the Holy Spirit, Who is drawing us to salvation and into a relationship with the risen, living Christ. So, as you read through this magnificent Gospel, read to see Christ and realize that the risen, living Christ desires a relationship with you and a response from you. Since we have learned that the Holy Spirit is our Teacher, as you read this Gospel, ask God the Holy Spirit to reveal spiritual truth to you.

Isaiah began his great prophecy about the cross of Christ with that question, "Who has believed our report?" He answered his question when he wrote: "And to whom has the arm (or the power) of the Lord been revealed?" Those who believe are those to whom truth, like the truth we have examined in our reading of this Gospel, has been revealed (Isaiah 53).

As you have studied through this Gospel of John with me, has the Holy Spirit been making you know that these things are true? John has told us who Jesus is. He has told us what faith is. He has told us what life is. As John has repeatedly raised these three questions, have you found answers to these questions because the Holy Spirit has been answering these questions for you?

I especially challenge you regarding the last and ultimate sign John presented in the twentieth chapter. Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? The resurrection of Jesus means that He is. He not only was; He is, and He still does work in the lives of those who believe in Him and receive Him into their lives (John 1:12,13; Revelation 3:19, 20). It is possible to have a relationship

with the Christ you meet in this magnificent Gospel. As you have been reading and studying through the twenty-one chapters of the Gospel of John, has the Holy Spirit of Christ been making you know that this supernatural miracle is possible for you personally?

Although I have been studying and teaching this Gospel for fifty-three years, guiding you through this Gospel has profoundly affected me. As I have moved through this inspired art gallery of Christ portraits again, and as I have considered the beautiful answers of John to those questions: "Who is Jesus? What is faith? And what is life?" I find myself exclaiming:

"I believe that He is, while they are not even sure that He was. And while they are not even sure that He did, I know that He still does. The Jesus Christ of this fourth Gospel is everything He claims He is and He can do everything He says He can do for me and for you. You and I are everything Jesus Christ says we are and we can do everything Jesus Christ says we can do, because He is - and because He is with you and with me when we trust in and follow Him.

As I have already explained, this is the sixth and final booklet in a set of six booklets that provide commentary on one hundred thirty verse-by-verse radio broadcasts of this Gospel. If you do not have the other five booklets in this series, I strongly encourage you to contact us and receive the other five booklets. Together they will give you a devotional and practical commentary on the Gospel of John.

I have personally seen more people come to saving faith in Jesus Christ while teaching this Gospel this way than while teaching any other book of the Bible. There is much devotional blessing in this study for believers, but I also recommend this study in an evangelistic context. This has been my favorite Bible study for unbelievers, or for what I call, “Evangelistic Bible Study.”

Final Challenge

Do you want to be born again? Do you want to have that quality of eternal life, which John tells you about in this Gospel? Are you ready to make the greatest decision in the world, and believe the great declaration of Jesus Christ? Are you willing to offer an unconditional surrender of your life to Jesus? Have you decided that you now want to receive the greatest Dynamic in the world and make the commitment to begin moving in the direction of following Jesus the Christ? If you want to begin your spiritual faith journey with Jesus, sincerely from your heart join with me and pray this prayer to God:

“Loving heavenly Father, I confess that I am a sinner and I trust Your Son, Jesus Christ, to be my Savior. I place my complete trust in His death on the cross for the forgiveness of every one of my sins. I now forsake and turn away from all my sins. I want to reconcile my divorce from You.

I now ask by faith in His resurrection from the dead, that He will enter my heart and my life and have a relationship with me.

Right here and right now, I declare by faith that Jesus Christ is my Lord and my Savior, and I surrender my life, unconditionally, to His control and direction. Bring my life into perfect alignment with that great design You have always willed for my life. Help me as I follow Your Son, Jesus Christ, to rely on His power and authority, to live to exalt Him and for Your glory. Thank You for providing this great and eternal salvation for me. Amen.”

(John 3:3-8; 1:12,13; I Peter 1:22-3:3; Philippians 1:6; 2:13; Ephesians 2:8-10)

If you have prayed this prayer, write and tell us so we can provide you with more helpful literature to encourage you in your spiritual growth.