

COURSE SYLLABUS: John Part III

<u>WEEK</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>WEEK</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
1	I Am the Good Shepherd (10:1-21) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A Division of Mankind ▪ The Shepherd Motif in Scripture ▪ Jesus and Life & Death 	9	The Spirit of Truth (16:1-15) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persecution as Worship • Where are You Going? • The Spirit of Truth
2	My Sheep Hear My Voice (10:22-42) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chanukah – Feast of Lights • Elect of God • The Son of God 	10	I Have Overcome the World (16:16-33) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Little While... • Ask in My Name • I Have Overcome the World
3	TULIP in the Gospel of John <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited Atonement • Irresistible Grace • P(reservation) of the Saints 	11	The Lord's Prayer (17:1-26) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer of Consecration • Glory & Unity • In the World, Not of the World
4	The Raising of Lazarus (11:1-54) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did This Miracle Really Happen? • Pre-Resurrection • Lazarus Lives, Jesus Must Die 	12	Christ on Trial (18:1-40) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Betrayal in the Garden • Christ before Annas • Christ before Pilate
5	Swan Song (12:1-50) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anointing for Burial • Triumphal Entry • Now Judgment Has Come 	13	Crucified, Dead, and Buried (19:1-42) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilate Tries and Fails • Crucified, Dead, • And Buried
6	He Loved Them to the End (13:1-30) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foot Washing as Ritual • The Last Supper • The Betrayer Revealed 	14	He Is Risen! (20:1-31) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Witness of a Woman • Seeing is Believing • Believing is Seeing
7	The Way, the Truth, and the Life (13:31-14:31) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter's Fall • "You Know the Way" • The Spirit of Truth 	15	Epilogue or Postscript? (21:1-25) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Fish Story • Peter's Restoration • The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved
8	I Am the True Vine (15:1-27) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus as the True Israel • Fruitful & Unfruitful Branches • The Filoque Controversy 		

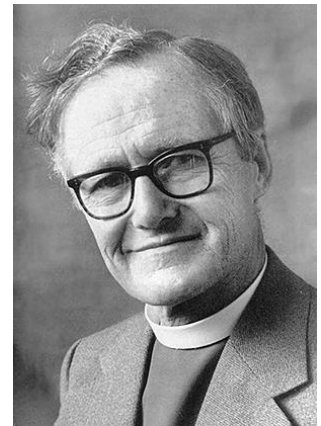
Week 1: I Am the Good Shepherd

Text Reading: John 10:1 - 21

*"All saving vocation in the kingdom of God
is based in him, mediated by him."
(Christoph Ernst Luthardt)*

Jesus is done disputing. The remainder of the Fourth Gospel is essentially devoid of the frequent debates with the Pharisees; events are now leading inexorably toward Jesus' crucifixion and His time is devoted mainly to His disciples. He has pronounced summary and irrevocable judgment on the religious leaders of Israel: *"If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say that you see, your sin remains."*¹ There will be further interchange between Jesus and the Pharisees, but the tone of Jesus' words will follow this judgment: *"You do not believe because you are not of My sheep."*² Indeed, the tenor of the remainder of Jesus' ministry, leading up to His passion and death, is captured by the poignant verse, *"Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end."*³ This section of John's Gospel is no longer about 'the Jews'; it is about Jesus and His disciples, those who were with Him during His earthly ministry, and those who would come to Him throughout the ages since.

It is commonplace in the modern world to dilute Christianity into an anemic religion of love and acceptance, toleration and doctrinal broadness. Ecumenicism is the official brand of this error; its more pedestrian form is captured in refrigerator magnets and 'peaceful' wall art. It would do all believers well to focus on this section of the Fourth Gospel, and to realize once again that Jesus' advent has not unified the human race. Rather even in His own discourse here in John 10 -



Lesslie Newbigin (1909-98)

the discourse of the Good Shepherd – we see a stark division drawn between true shepherds and hirelings, between those who are of His flock and those who are not. The first division has to do with those who have been entrusted with the spiritual care of those

¹ John 9:41

² John 10:26

³ John 13:1

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

who are in the second division. This situation has not changed wherever the gospel is preached and where believers gather. Newbigin writes, “There is still inevitable division – between the shepherd and the thieves and brigands; between the shepherd and the hirelings; between those who receive the word of Jesus and those who reject it.”⁴

The context of this divisive speech is near to hand, in spite of what modern liberal scholarship has said concerning the placement of John 10 relative to what is around it. It is, in fact, a running commentary on what has just taken place as recorded in John 9 – the casting out by the Pharisees of the man born blind, the man who received such a signal miracle from Jesus. In doing this, the Pharisees proved themselves to be false shepherd. “The Pharisees have expelled from God’s flock the man whom Christ Himself enlightened.



Cornelius à Lapide (1567-1637)

They are scattering the sheep whom Christ came to gather.”⁵

Cornelius à Lapide writes that Jesus “put forth this parable to show who He is, and who are His rivals and adversaries. The occasion for it was because the Pharisees had cast out of the synagogue for his confession of Christ the blind man whom He had healed.”⁶ The Pharisees will be greatly offended by what

Jesus now had to say, but in preferring their own arrogation of power to the deliverance from blindness of a child of Israel – blind from birth – they prove themselves to be the false shepherds inveighed against by the prophets of old. Indeed, the shepherd motif is so common in the Old Testament that no one who heard what Jesus had to say here in John 10 could have reasonably missed the inference. To claim to be the ‘Good Shepherd’ was nothing less than claiming to be Israel’s only shepherd, Jehovah. David speaks for every Israelite, and for the nation as a whole, in Psalm 23,

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.

(Psalm 23:1-3)

⁴ Newbigin, Lesslie *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1982); 125.

⁵ Whitacre, Rodney A. *John* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1999); 254.

⁶ Lapide, Cornelius *The Gospel of John* (Veritatis Splendor Publications; 2012); 329.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

The plea of Israel to her God in Psalm 80 is couched in terms of sheep needing the protection and deliverance only offered by the true shepherd.

*Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock;
You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth!
Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up Your strength, and come and save us!
Restore us, O God; Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!* (Psalm 80:1-3)

This relationship of sheep to shepherd was to be an abiding source of comfort and of praise to Israel, as Psalm 100 reminds us,

*Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!
Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing.
Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.* (Psalm 100:1-3)

The LORD was the shepherd of Israel, but He appointed shepherds – undershepherds, we might call them – to guard and feed His flock, His people. Supreme within this group was the Shepherd-King, David, who greater Son Jesus was and is. We know that God called David from tending Jesse’s sheep to be the shepherd of His people, Israel, and this was a type of the greater Shepherd who was to come, who would lead His people into the pastures of salvation.

*Moreover He rejected the tent of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,
But chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved.
And He built His sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which He has established forever.
He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds;
From following the ewes that had young He brought him,
To shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance.
So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart,
And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.* (Psalm 78:67-72)

But the shepherd motif in the Old Testament is far from the peaceful, *pastoral* scene it was intended to be. When Jesus arrives, He finds Israel “*like sheep without a shepherd*,”⁷ and this condition was due to the criminal malfeasance of those who were to be shepherds of God’s flock, but who instead turned out to be abusers of the flock. One of the bitterest prophetic invectives of the Old Testament bears the powerful imagery of a flock horribly

⁷ Mark 6:34

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

abused and neglected by those who were to be its shepherds. The LORD describes through Ezekiel exactly the situation that Jesus discovered.

And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them." (Ezekiel 34:1-6)

The man born blind, whom Jesus healed so wonderfully, was one of these abused and scattered sheep of Israel, a true lamb of God. Jesus' dealings with that man are in fulfillment of the rest of Ezekiel 34, where we learn that Jehovah will not allow His sheep to go un-shepherded, to be continually abused by those whose responsibility it is to tend their needs and defend their lives. *Jehovah* will be their Shepherd.

For thus says the Lord GOD: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord GOD. "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment." (Ezekiel 34:11-16)

This surely was the backdrop to Jesus' discourse in John 10, and the allusion to Ezekiel could not have been missed by any who heard Him speak. The LORD is the Good Shepherd, and here Jesus claims to be the Good Shepherd. The association made between Jesus and God cannot be any clearer without being an explicit, *I am God*, something Jesus was never willing to give His adversaries so simply. *He who has ears to hear, let him hear*. How could they not hear the echoes of Ezekiel in the discourse of Jesus? Indeed, the same Old Testament prophecy tells us that God would do this gathering, this shepherding,

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

through His shepherd David, manifested in these last days through David's greater Son, Jesus Christ.

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: "Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them – My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken." (Ezekiel 34:20-24)

The shepherd motif is strong in Ezekiel, but it is also present significantly in the other prophets, proving that the shepherd/sheep relationship is fundamental to our understanding of God's relationship to His people. Here are a few examples:

Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young. (Isaiah 40:10-11)

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings," says the LORD. "But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking," says the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:1-4)⁸

And the LORD said to me, "Next, take for yourself the implements of a foolish shepherd. For indeed I will raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for those who are cut off, nor seek the young, nor heal those that are broken, nor feed those that still stand. But he will eat the flesh of the fat and tear their hooves in pieces.

*"Woe to the worthless shepherd, who leaves the flock!
A sword shall be against his arm and against his right eye;
His arm shall completely wither, and his right eye shall be totally blinded."* (Zechariah 11:15-17)

These passages echo through Jesus' words in John 10, and no doubt the Lord's first audience heard the echo. We must hear that echo as well if we are to understand the

⁸ This is immediately followed by a prophecy of a 'Branch of Righteousness' being raised to David's line (cp. Jer. 23:5ff).

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

passage before us, and understand Jesus' relationship both to the Father and to the flock. The image of Jesus carrying the lamb on His shoulders may be poignant and comforting, but it misses the arduous nature of being a shepherd – the danger, the enemies of the flock, the false shepherds and hirelings who care nothing for the sheep. These are the true burdens of a good shepherd, the full burden of the Good Shepherd. Being that Shepherd means not only nurturing the sheep of His fold, but also destroying the enemies of those sheep. There is salvation, but with it there is judgment. Jesus brings both, and steps fully into His role as the Shepherd of Israel, both to gather together the scattered sheep (not only of Israel) and to bring judgment and destruction on those 'shepherds' who scattered them.

The Good Shepherd discourse itself can be outlined by the terms Jesus uses in repetition, as markers along the way. There are two "*Amen, amen*" statements and two "*Good Shepherd*" statements, thus bracketing the discourse as follows:

The Door metaphor in doublet form:

Amen, amen [10:1-6]

Amen, amen [10:7-10]

The Good Shepherd metaphor, also in doublet form

I Am the Good Shepherd [10:11-13]

I Am the Good Shepherd [10:14-18]

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. (10:1-5)

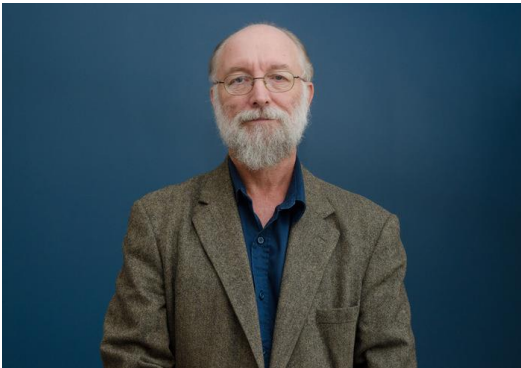
To many modern textual critics this discourse is abrupt and out of place. The opening exhortation, literally "*Amen, amen,*" seems to indicate no change of scene but rather a continuation of what has preceded in Chapter 9. Modern critics, however, are unable to see the connection and have offered various unsupported scenarios of where Chapter 10 really belongs in the overall narrative of the Fourth Gospel. They fail to see the connection between the opening verses of this chapter, and the situation surrounding the man whom Jesus healed of congenital blindness in the previous one. Indeed, Jesus' words here regarding the door and the shepherd correspond directly with Jesus' actions with

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

respect to the blind man, after he had been put out of the synagogue on account of his testimony in favor of Christ.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you." Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him. (John 9:35-38)

Is it not evident that Jesus is referring to His action just prior? Not the healing of



Rodney A. Whitacre (b. 1949)

the blind man, but the finding him and bringing him to Himself after he had been cast out of the synagogue by the religious leaders, the false shepherds. His discourse concerning the Good Shepherd – and about spiritual shepherding (and not shepherding) in general – makes most sense against the backdrop of Jesus’ finding the man He

had just healed, and making sure he was safely within the fold. Seeing the discourse in this light prevents it from becoming nothing more than a proverb and immediately applies it not only to Jesus Himself, but to the false and self-absorbed religious leaders of Israel in that day. *They* are those who fleece the flock rather than nurture it, as Ezekiel had foretold. Whitacre notes, “The ‘Pharisees’ have expelled from God’s flock the man whom Christ Himself enlightened. They are scattering the sheep whom Christ came to gather.”⁹ Carson adds, “If this background is primary, then in the context of Jesus’ ministry the thieves and robbers are the religious leaders who are more interested in fleecing the sheep than in guiding, nurturing and guarding them.”¹⁰

Understanding the context as following on the heels of Jesus’ interaction with the blind man of Chapter 9 also helps us navigate Jesus’ mixed metaphors of Chapter 10. Even though the overall discourse is in reference to Jesus being the Good Shepherd, He begins by talking, not about the shepherd, but about the ‘door.’ The reference here is to the enclosures common in the Middle East even today: structures of stacked stones, sometimes with thorns as a makeshift roof, with but one entry where the sheep can be

⁹ Whitacre; 254.

¹⁰ Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1991); 382.

guarded. It is at this sole entry that the doorkeeper – often hired by multiple shepherds to guard a combined flock – is charged to admit the true shepherd(s) and to turn away all others.

In the overall discourse Jesus presents Himself both as the ‘door’ and as the ‘Good Shepherd.’ But here in the opening verses we have a different character introduced: the ‘doorkeeper.’ One way of looking at the metaphor is simply to recognize that the mention of the doorkeeper is used to validate the integrity of the shepherd, “*To him the doorkeeper opens.*” But in parables and figures of speech it is hard for commentators to resist the temptation of assigning a definite identity to each and every character mentioned. Lapidé’s commentary is notable for its inclusion of the comments of famous ancient church fathers such as Chrysostom and Augustine as well as many others, less famous to today’s readers. Lapidé notes that Theodorus of Heraclea believes the ‘door’ to be the Holy Scriptures, “Scripture is the door, because he is a true pastor to whom the door gives ingress, that is on whom Scripture confers authority, and thus secures his acceptance.”¹¹ Never mind that we are about to read Jesus say that *He* is the door, it is still interesting that an early father would place such emphasis on Scripture considering the evolution of the authority of tradition. Augustine, however, corrects Theodorus with regard to the identity of the door, and goes further, giving us his identification for the doorkeeper. “The Lord Himself is the pastor [*i.e.*, shepherd] and the door. He opens Himself who expounds Himself, and the porter is the Holy Spirit, of whom the Lord says, ‘He will teach you all truth.’ Christ therefore, who is the truth, is the door, and He who teacheth the truth openeth the door.”¹² If we must assign an identity to the doorkeeper, this is a sane approach as any, certainly more so than others of the same era: Chrysostom thought the doorkeeper was Moses, “as bearing testimony to Christ,” where Cyril thought the doorkeeper was the Church’s guardian angel, Michael as was largely supposed.¹³ Perhaps it is better not to read too much into parables and metaphors, lest we lose sight of the overall thrust of the figure of speech.

¹¹ Lapidé; 331.

¹² *Idem.*

¹³ *Ibid.*; 332.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

That thrust, it should be evident, is the comparison between Jesus Himself and all who would seek to put themselves forward as messianic pretenders, false shepherds: *"he who does not enter by the door..."* Newbigin writes, "These self-appointed messiahs, saviors, 'benefactors' have one thing in common. They do not follow the way of Jesus, which is – as we shall learn – the way of total self-giving. They 'climb up some other way.'"¹⁴ Again, there is the temptation to identify specific figures in the nation contemporary to Jesus to whom the designation of 'thief and robber' applies. For instance, many commentators assign this classification to the false messiahs of that era – to Judas the Galilean or Theudas or 'the Egyptian' – of whom we would know nothing if they were not mentioned in the Book of Acts. It is hard to believe that these false messiahs were on Jesus' mind at this time, especially given the immediacy of His controversy with the Pharisees, who had just cast the man whom He healed from the synagogue. It is far more likely that the category 'thieves and robbers' applies generally to those among the religious leaders of Israel – those who were called to shepherd God's flock – who had set themselves against Jesus and therefore were doing great harm to the sheep. Morris comments, "Moreover the blind man, so ready to heed the voice of Christ, clearly belongs among the sheep of this discourse, while the Pharisees are the very embodiment of the false shepherd."¹⁵

Another reason, perhaps, not to be too particular in assigning an identity to the doorkeeper is the fact that Jesus goes on to give a second safeguard for the sheep, and validation of the true shepherd: *"the sheep follow him because they know his voice."* The opposite is true in regard to the false shepherd, thief, or robber: *"a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."* Couched as this is in the homely image of sheep and the shepherd, the depth of meaning might easily be overlooked. What Jesus is saying here is fundamental to the relationship between Himself and all those who are in Him, who are the sheep given to Him by the Father. There is a language that forms a bond between the sheep and the Good Shepherd, and there is a language that, while it purports to be the language of the Shepherd, is foreign and frightening to the sheep. "Just as sheep when they hear the call of the shepherd, so do

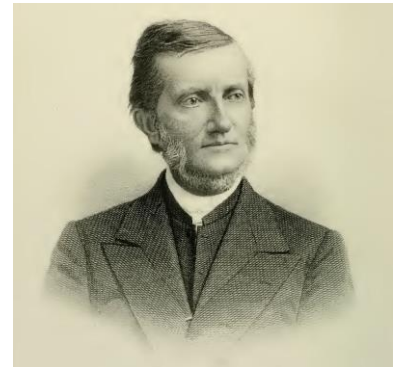
¹⁴ Newbigin; 126.

¹⁵ Morris, Leon *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1971); 501.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Christian people acknowledge the true pastor (and those whom He substitutes as His deputies), listen to His voice, and follow Him in all things.”¹⁶

What this language of recognition is has been a matter of debate throughout the history of the Church, and is very intense today. Some say it is the language of ‘love and acceptance,’ others of ‘social justice,’ others of ‘economic equity.’ But these cannot be the essence of the language, for they have meant something different in different ages, and mean something different among different peoples even today. Each of these phrases can be, and indeed is, comprised within the language of the Shepherd, though none of them constitute the sum total of that language. Elsewhere Jesus Himself gives us the answer: the language that the sheep will recognize is the language of God’s word. *“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love.”*¹⁷ Also, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”*¹⁸ Paul warns Timothy that in the latter days (in which both Paul and Timothy as well as we ourselves are living), people in the church will readily *“accumulate to themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires.”*¹⁹ But the true flock will always hear the Shepherd’s voice, and His alone. Jacobus writes in his *Notes on John*, “Wandering from church to church – running after every new preacher –



Melancthon W. Jacobus (1816-76)

or having only such care as strangers can give, will not satisfy the sheep of Christ’s flock. Least of all will they follow those whose voice they do not know from the word of God, and who broach their new, strange theories to delude and destroy the unwary.”²⁰

If we accept Augustine’s interpretation of the doorkeeper, and recognize Scripture as the voice of the Good Shepherd that all true sheep hear and follow, we arrive at a very biblical, objective, and abiding criteria for recognizing the true flock of God in any age. It is the one to which the whole counsel of Scripture is the only and final authority in doctrine

¹⁶ Lapidé; 332.

¹⁷ John 15:10

¹⁸ John 5:24

¹⁹ II Timothy 4:3

²⁰ Jacobus, Melancthon W. *Notes on the Gospels: John* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers; 1857); 178.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

and practice.²¹ Teachings that are not rooted in Scripture – not in proof texts but in the entirety of the Bible – are the voices of strangers; the true sheep will not follow. This, of course, presupposes within the church a knowledge of the Scriptures – otherwise, how will the sheep recognize the voice of the Shepherd in the voice of his under-shepherds? For this reason, the integrity and centrality of biblical teaching and doctrine has always been a key target of the enemy of the Church, Satan. Just as Satan masquerades as an angel of light, so also false shepherds disguise themselves as true. “Such forewarning our Lord gives, that we may see to it that we be not deceived by the subtilty of those who, while they pretend to be shepherds of the flock, are destroyers of souls.”²²

Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. (10:6)

By this time it should come as no surprise to the reader to find out that Jesus’ audience did not understand what He was saying! The word translated ‘illustration’ in the New King James version is often translated ‘parable’ in other English versions. But it is a different word from the usual for ‘parable’ – *parabolē*. Here the word is *paroimian*, which has more the meaning of a figure of speech, perhaps even an allegory. Köstenberger writes, “The discourse somewhat resembles Synoptic-style parables but is best classified as a ‘symbolic discourse,’ in which a given metaphor (in the present case, shepherding) prompts extended reflection.”²³ It is not that Jesus’ audience failed to understand the symbols He was relating – theirs was a pastoral society; most of them knew the basics about shepherding. What they did not understand is what all of this *meant*. How did it apply to them? What was it the rabbi was trying to get across? We will see later in Chapter 10 that the religious leaders will challenge Jesus directly with regard to His manner of speech and His parabolic, figurative teaching: “*How long will you keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.*”²⁴ But, as faith comes by hearing, hearing also presupposes faith. Jesus’ form of teaching was not intended to clarify matters for those who would not believe anyway; it was rather seed for the Holy Spirit to later cultivate into a harvest of true knowledge. Jesus Himself will move in this latter discourse of John’s Gospel to the

²¹ This is not to say that in any age, or in any church, comprehension of the Scriptures is complete and correct. It is merely to say that no other criteria are set up as authoritative in the church besides that of Scripture.

²² Jacobus; 176.

²³ Köstenberger, Andreas J. *Encountering John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 2013); 109.

²⁴ John 10:24

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

promise of the Holy Spirit, who would bring to remembrance all that He had taught and would guide Jesus' disciples into all truth. That moment had not come, and so Jesus' teaching remained opaque to even His disciples.

Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (10:7-10)

Jesus responds to the crowd's obtuseness with His second *Amen, amen* statement, and this time He does get more specific. Instead of the general observations about good and false shepherds, doorkeepers, and so on, He moves to the first 'I Am' statement of this particular discourse: *"I am the door of the sheep."* This was not an immediate help to the audience, as Jesus shifted the metaphor in an unexpected direction: *"I am the door"* is not where one might logically go with the previous figure of speech, and Jesus will follow that logical path very clearly in a few more verses (*cp.* vs. 11). But for now He is emphasizing a more important characteristic that belongs to Him and to His ministry, in distinction from all others, both true and false, who had gone before Him and who would come after Him. Jesus alone is *the door*, the only legitimate entrance into the fold. By this bold statement Jesus anticipated a perhaps more famous 'I Am' statement from Chapter 14, *"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."*²⁵ Before He speaks of Himself as the 'Good Shepherd' – a title that might simply make Him a better shepherd than all who had gone before Him – Jesus makes it clear that the gate to which the Good Shepherd leads the true sheep *is Himself*. In this order, 'Door' first and then 'Good Shepherd,' "Christ intended to teach two things. First, that no one could enter into the Church, and afterwards into heaven, that is be justified and sanctified, except through Him. This He shows by the parable of the *door*...and secondly, that He is the true *Shepherd*, as laying down His life for the sheep; but that the others were hirelings, whom the sheep ought not to follow. This He sets forth by the parable of the shepherd."²⁶ Jacobus concurs, *"He is the door of the sheep. None can enter into His true church, or belong to His spiritual*

²⁵ John 14:6

²⁶ Lapide; 335.

fold, or be one of *His own* sheep, unless entering in by Him – as the only way of access – as the strait gate.”²⁷

There has been some concern about the hyperbole Jesus seems to use to describe others, “*All who came before me are thieves and robbers...*” How are we to understand the ‘all’ in this condemnation? Is Jesus here condemning Moses and the prophets as ‘thieves and robbers’? Many modern commentators believe that He is, but that is to pit Jesus against Jesus in the Gospel of John, for only shortly before He has claimed that Moses and the rest of Scripture (meaning, the prophets) *testified* of Him. He would not now be calling those witnesses, to whom He had previously appealed, ‘thieves and robbers.’ This is, rather, another example where the biblical usage of the word ‘all’ is to be interpreted as a class and not exhaustively of all men who had gone before Jesus. Hoskyns comments, “Every claim in the past or in the present to give life except through Jesus is destructive of life; all who make the claim have been and are thieves and robbers, whom the true servants of God have never followed. In this all-embracing condemnation the Hebrew Patriarchs, Moses, and the Prophets of Israel are, of course, not included.”²⁸

What Jesus speaks of here is the ‘shepherd’ who claims in any way to be the door, to be the way of salvation in and of himself. This should not be anticipated in such bold and open terms as someone actually claiming to be ‘the Way,’ but must be recognized in the subtilty of both deception and self-deception. Hence the Pope, who claims to hold the keys of salvation for every soul in his hands, as well as the Senior Pastor, who establishes minimum requirements in both doctrine and practice by which members of his congregation are to be ‘accepted.’ Jesus here prioritizes His role as the ‘door’ so that all may know that no true shepherd will attempt to bring a sheep to the Father by any other than Jesus Himself. Jacobus writes, “Every man – pretend what he may – who does not practically acknowledge Christ’s authority in obtaining and exercising ecclesiastical office – who looks no farther than the ordination of a prelate or presbytery, who is satisfied with a mere human authority and call – civil or ecclesiastical – he is not a shepherd of the sheep, be he called a pope, patriarch, or bishop, rabbi, reverend, master, or doctor.”²⁹ Of course,

²⁷ Jacobus; 178.

²⁸ Hoskyns, Sir Edwyn Clement *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber and Faber Limited; 1954); 374.

²⁹ Jacobus; 179.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

the thief and the robber do not *bring* the sheep, they steal the sheep, but the metaphor holds true: there is only one way in and out of the fold – Jesus Christ.

Just as He will in a moment repeat His claim to being the “Good Shepherd,” Jesus here repeats the designation, “*I am the door.*” The first instance is negative – no other than He is the door – the second is positive – “*if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.*” The idea here alludes to a passage in Numbers where Moses pleads with the LORD to give Israel a godly leader after him; that man would be Joshua.

Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying: “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.”
(Numbers 27:15-17)

The image of ‘going in and out and finding pasture’ is one of both freedom and security – the freedom to go out, the security of coming in. “All men long both for security and for freedom, and often it seems that the one can be had only at the cost of the other.”³⁰ In Jesus Christ, the greater Joshua, freedom and security join together in harmony with neither having to give way to the other. “Jesus’ sheep have the freedom to live their lives in his presence. Both their going out and their coming in is through him. In this way he fulfills the type of Joshua as described by Moses.”³¹ But there have been, are, and will forever be many false ‘doors.’

The liberator quickly becomes the dictator who can offer security only at the cost of liberty. And this world is full of self-appointed saviors who offer freedom and security on other terms than those which are embodied in the ministry of Jesus. Those who know his voice will not be seduced by these offers. On the contrary, they learn, as they follow the way which he is in, that he gives them both security and freedom, and that their needs are met abundantly, ‘good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over.’³²

The image of the true shepherd of Israel, leading His flock both out and in, is the poignant message of Psalm 23, perhaps the favorite psalm of all generations. David’s

³⁰ Newbigin; 127. The current political and social climate of the pandemic is another example of this ever-present tension.

³¹ Whitacre; 259.

³² Newbigin; 127.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

poem breathes both security and freedom in a way no human leader or government can ever achieve.

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;
For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.* (Psalm 23:1-6)

Where does all of this lead? To *life...abundant life* (vs. 10). Life is a central theme of the Fourth Gospel, and as we progress through the evangelists narrative we become more and more aware that Life in its only true sense is essentially equivalent with Jesus Christ. It is not that Jesus gives to His followers life; rather it is that His followers have life in, and only in, Him. There is, as Carson notes, “only one source of knowledge of God, only one fount of spiritual nourishment, only one basis for spiritual security – Jesus alone.”³³ This life has often been misunderstood as being ‘the hereafter’ – life after this life, life after death. Nothing in Jesus’ words would justify this putting off of the abundant life to another place (‘heaven’), or another time (‘in the sweet by and by’). Jesus has come as the Good Shepherd, and the gift of abundant life – which is nothing less than the gift of Himself – is present tense with His coming to and into a redeemed sinner. ‘Their life is different in kind; and it is abundant, because it is life according to the will of God; and, being the consequence of His action, it is measureless and unlimited.’³⁴

Returning to the immediate context of the discourse – the events surrounding the man whom Jesus had healed of congenital blindness, and that man’s expulsion from the synagogue – we are reminded that those who usurp the true authority of Jesus are not merely false shepherds, they are spiritual murderers. “*The thief comes only to steal, and kill...*” The danger of false shepherds must never be minimized; the congregation with a false pastor is in serious danger. Jacobus warns, “So the false pastor can have no other

³³ Carson; 385.

³⁴ Hoskyns; 376.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

motive but to do injury – to reason away the soul’s chief hope for time and eternity – and to encourage some false expectation that shall surely perish.”³⁵ This is the manner of all who occupy the place of ‘under-shepherd,’ but neither hear the Good Shepherd’s voice nor guide the sheep to and through the true Door. We are comforted by Jesus’ words that His sheep will not hear nor follow such thieves and robbers; but we are reminded that the temptation to be dull of hearing was to which even His disciples often succumbed. Thus Jesus moves to the second aspect of this metaphorical discourse: the nature of the Good Shepherd and, by extension, the nature of all true under-shepherds.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. (10:11-13)

We have seen in the introduction that any reference to a ‘good’ shepherd could only be interpreted by a Second Temple Jewish audience in light of the divine promise to shepherd Israel (*cp.* Ezek. 34). This is exactly where Jesus his heading, and the sequel proves that His audience traveled the path with Him, for they consequently took up stones to stone Him for blasphemy (*cp.* 10:31ff). It is amazing to read modern commentators who assure us that Jesus was *not* claiming to be God by claiming to be the Good Shepherd who God proclaimed that He would be to Israel! Modern liberal commentators have less understanding of what it was Jesus was saying than did the unbelieving Jews who tried to



Christoph Luthardt (1823-1902)

kill Him for saying it. Jesus will make matters worse by claiming to have “*sheep that are not of this fold,*” which could only mean from among the Gentiles, surely an incendiary statement if ever there was one. All in all, we must be reminded that Jesus’ statements were never meant to adorn ethereal pastel ‘portraits’ to hang on Christian walls. They were bold and unmistakable claims upon deity, identifying Himself as they do with the One who promised to gather His own sheep scattered by the false shepherds, those whom He would judge. Luthardt summarizes the whole import of Jesus’ discourse well. Speaking of the metaphor of the Shepherd, he writes,

³⁵ Jacobus; 180.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

It is well known how thoroughly the figure and the material view, which lies at the base of Jesus' whole discourse, is rooted in and taken from the Old Testament...When the thought desires to choose the most fervent expression for the present relation of grace, or for that which is to be expected in the Messianic period, it chooses this figure. Not a single side, but the entire relation of Jehovah and of his people is summarized in it...[Jesus] desires it therefore to be understood that he is the goal of the entire history of Israel.³⁶

Unlike most shepherds, however, the Good Shepherd *gives His life for the sheep*. This is counterintuitive within the shepherd/flock motif, for the shepherd's death can only mean increased vulnerability and danger, even scattering and destruction, for the flock. The role of the shepherd is to defend the flock against danger, though it is clear that in doing this he may lose his life. Still, the goal is to kill that which endangers the sheep, and to stay alive in order to go on protecting the sheep. One thinks of David's boast to King Saul just before the former's encounter in battle with the giant, Goliath.

But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God." (I Samuel 17:34-36)

Jesus' comment about giving His life for the sheep is, therefore, quite intriguing and should cause the reader to stop and consider what He is saying. He will return to this theme in a few verses, and we will pick up the thread at that point.

Jesus introduces another character into the word picture He has been developing: the *hireling*. This is a significant shift from the contrast between the shepherd and the 'thieves and robbers,' which are by definition illegitimate members of the shepherding community. The 'hireling,' however, more closely represents the religious leaders against whom this parabolic teaching is directed: the hireling is *supposed* to watch over the flock, but cares more for the financial remuneration than for the sheep, and will not risk his own neck to save the sheep. "The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep." Newbigin writes, "Here is the unmistakable criterion by which true leadership is to be distinguished from false. We are familiar with the kind of leadership which is simply a vast overextension of the ego. The ultimate goal – whether openly acknowledged or not

³⁶ Luthardt, Christoph Ernst *St. John's Gospel: Volume II* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark; 1877); 356.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

– is the glory of the leader. The rest are instrumental to this end. He does not love them but he makes use of them for his own ends. He is a hireling – in the business of leadership for what he can get out of it.”³⁷

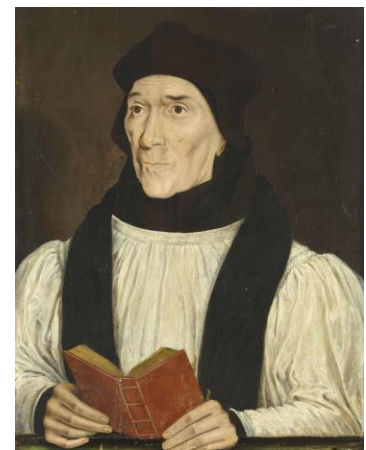
The ‘wolf’ that threatens the flock is not to be limited to physical danger; indeed, “Elsewhere the wolf is an image of false teachers who come both from outside the community and from within.”³⁸ Consider the apostolic injunctions to church elders in light of Jesus’ discourse here in John 10, the unity of thought is evident.

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.
(Acts 20:28-30)

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

(I Peter 5:1-4)

Jesus refers to Himself as the Good Shepherd, but goes on to speak by implication of the under shepherds who would watch over His flock after He had ascended to His Father. In the same vein as Peter and Paul would write to the churches, Jesus implicitly warns His followers first of ‘thieves and robbers,’ but then of the more subtle danger, the hireling. “The Christian community is threatened, not only by hostile attacks from outside, but by the desertion of men who have been responsible for its care.”³⁹ This desertion can take many forms, from accepting



John Fisher (1469-1535)

false teaching in the church rather than refuting it, to abandoning one’s charge for another ‘call,’ one that often involves a higher salary and more notoriety. “The hireling is he who holds the post of a shepherd, but seeks not to gain souls; is eager for earthly advantages,

³⁷ Newbigin; 128.

³⁸ Whitacre; 262.

³⁹ Hoskyns; 376.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

rejoices in the honour of the prelacy, feeds on temporal gains, delights in the reverence paid to him by men.”⁴⁰ Bishop Fisher of Rochester famously said, “If men did but know how exact an account would be required, they would not seek to obtain great and wealthy bishoprics.”⁴¹

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. (10:14-16)

As Jesus mentioned the ‘Door’ twice, so also He refers twice to Himself as the ‘Good Shepherd.’ This repetition is for emphasis as well as for expansion – in each case He takes the metaphor a bit further with the second clause. In this case Jesus digs deeper into the relationship as well as the identity of the flock of which He is the Shepherd. The relationship is intimate, as intimate as is the relationship between Himself and the Father. But it is also prior, because the sheep will know the Shepherd’s voice *when He calls*. This is an strong allusion to the doctrine of Predestination, which we will develop from the Fourth Gospel in the next lesson. That the identity of the entire flock is already known to the Shepherd is also indicated by His statement, “*And other sheep I have which are not of this fold,*” evidently referring to Gentiles, as even Diaspora Jews would be considered of the same fold as those living in Palestine. Carson notes, “If Jesus has *other sheep that are not of this sheep pen*, the reference must be to Gentiles. When he calls them, they, too, will respond to his voice, *and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.*”⁴²

In terms of how His audience would have heard and received Jesus’ words, His reference to “*one flock and one shepherd*” is an unmistakable citation of Ezekiel 34,

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: “Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them – My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken. (Ezekiel 34:20-24)

⁴⁰ Lapidé; 339.

⁴¹ Quoted in Lapidé; 338.

⁴² Carson; 388.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Jesus, therefore, is here claiming to be that one shepherd, that David, who was promised so long ago; He is claiming to be Israel's Messiah. "So when he claims to be the shepherd he is claiming that Messiah has come and in him God himself has come to shepherd his people."⁴³ This point makes it more incredible that the Jews would shortly demand of Jesus that He "*tell them plainly if you are the Christ*" (10:24). To claim to be the one Shepherd through whom God is gathering His sheep from across the world is about as clear a messianic self-identification as can be imagined short of simply saying, "I am the Christ." Of all the 'I am' statements in the Fourth Gospel, however, we do not find this one. *He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*

Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father. (10:18-19)

'Because' statements in the Bible are often difficult to interpret accurately – their causal relationship is often not as direct as it is in English. For example, Jesus is not speaking here of an earned love from His Father – on account of Jesus' laying down His life. The meaning is rather that the Father's love for the Son is manifest through the Son's complete obedience to the Father, and the Father's consequent support of, and listening to, all that the Son requests (*cp.* 11:41-42; 17:4-5). Carson writes, "It is not that the Father withholds his love until Jesus agrees to give up his life on the cross and rise again. Rather, the love of the Father for the Son is eternally linked with the unqualified obedience of the Son to the Father, his utter dependence upon him, culminating in this greatest act of obedience now just before him: willingness to bear the shame and ignominy of Golgotha, the isolation and rejection of death, the sin and curse reserved for the Lamb of God."⁴⁴ Hoskyns adds, "The love of the Father is directed toward the Son, because by Him, by His voluntary death, the obedience upon which the salvation of men depends has been accomplished."⁴⁵

But such is the nature of the God-Man, that Jesus' death is not merely an act of obedience, it is also a willing act of redemption on Jesus' part. Jesus is Life in Himself,

⁴³ Whitacre; 255.

⁴⁴ Carson; 388.

⁴⁵ Hoskyns; 379.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

therefore His life is under no man's control until He lays it down. We have already seen, and will shortly see again, Jesus easily pass through the grasp of the Jews who meant to harm Him. "At no point in this Gospel are his actions determined by human agenda, and his death will be no different. It may look like the triumph of darkness over light, but it is not."⁴⁶ The Apostle Peter will speak of the confluence of divine pre-ordination and human action in connection with Jesus' death, in his first sermon on Pentecost.

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know – Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. (Acts 2:22-24)

We will soon see the Jews make official their death warrant against Jesus (*cp.* 11:47-53), but Jesus makes it clear ahead of time that those men, or any man or men, had no power to take His life: "No man takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord." Newbigin writes, "The action of Jesus in giving his life is an act both of complete freedom and of filial obedience. He is not the passive victim of other men's purposes. They imagine that they are in command and can make their own decision about whether and how and when he is to be eliminated. But the truth is otherwise."⁴⁷ Jesus will make this perfectly (and astonishingly) clear to the Roman governor, Pontus Pilate,

Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." (John 19:10-11)

Yet not only is the case that Jesus' life is independent of any other man, it is also the case that, having laid it down, Jesus has the power and the authority to "take it back up again." Typically we find the resurrection of Jesus attributed either to the Father or to the power of the Holy Spirit, both of which attributions are undeniably true. Here we learn that, as we might expect on account of the intimate unity of the Godhead, Jesus Himself is also operative in His own resurrection: *He takes up the life that He voluntarily laid down.* "For

⁴⁶ Whitacre; 265.

⁴⁷ Newbigin; 129.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

he has therein shown himself to be one who is not subject to the necessary law of death, and as one who is in essential possession of life...He bears life essentially in himself, and only goes into the suffering of death."⁴⁸ And it is this voluntary death that means everything in terms of redemptive history,

The concrete community of Christians in the world has been brought into being by a concrete historical act of obedience, and the whole life of the Church must be controlled by faith in Jesus. In Him the love of God and the faith of men meet, and they meet in the death of Jesus, because there the will of God was finally accomplished: accomplished, because His death was neither the result of the manoeuvres [*sic*] of the Jews nor of some impetuous or capricious decision of Jesus to surrender Himself to His enemies. It was the climax of a Divine necessity, and His whole life and ministry moved steadily towards it – *No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself.*⁴⁹

Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. And many of them said, "He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?" Others said, "These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" (10:19-21)

The division among the Jews continues; Jesus' words serve, as we have seen in increasing measure, only to drive a wedge between Himself and the unbelieving Jews. Hoskyns does not see in this summary any movement toward faith on the part of the Jews, "There is here no question of a division between the Jews who believed and those who did not. The division is between two kinds of misunderstanding, the one more brutal than the other."⁵⁰ Not knowing the hearts of men, we cannot pass this judgment. However, within the city of Jerusalem, animosity against Jesus will only increase until the cries of 'Crucify Him!' resound before Pilate's throne.

⁴⁸ Luthardt; 368.

⁴⁹ Hoskyns; 379.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; 380-81.

Week 2: My Sheep Hear My Voice

Text Reading: John 10:22 - 42

*“Even if His teaching had remained a riddle,
His works might still have furnished the interpretation of it.”
(Brooke Foss Westcott)*

With the second part of the Good Shepherd discourse we have another of the author's time markers; this time it is the Feast of Dedication. This is not one of the three national feasts for which every Israelite male was to journey to the tabernacle or Temple, but rather a nationalistic feast day commemorating the victory of the Jews over the pagan Greeks under the Maccabees. The feast is also called *Chanukkah* which is Hebrew for 'dedication' or 'consecration,' for the feast itself commemorates the time when the Temple was reclaimed from the Greeks and was cleansed and consecrated for reuse as the center of Jewish worship. The recovery of the sacred house was treated by the religious leaders of Judaism as an event parallel with the original dedication of the tabernacle, and of Solomon's dedication of the Temple, as well as the dedication of the post-exilic 'Second' Temple.

*Now the leaders offered the **dedication** offering for the altar when it was anointed; so the leaders offered their offering before the altar. For the LORD said to Moses, “They shall offer their offering, one leader each day, for the dedication of the altar.”* (Numbers 7:10-11)

*And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered to the LORD, twenty-two thousand bulls and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel **dedicated** the house of the LORD.* (I Kings 8:63)

*Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the **dedication** of this house of God with joy. And they offered sacrifices at the **dedication** of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.* (Ezra 6:15-17)

In each of these passages the words translated *dedication* or *dedicated* is the Hebrew **חֲנֻכָּה** – *chanukkah* of Hanukkah.⁵¹ Although the feast was not obligatory on the men of

⁵¹ The verb form is found in I Kings 8:63 – וַיְחַנְּכוּ – “And they dedicated...”

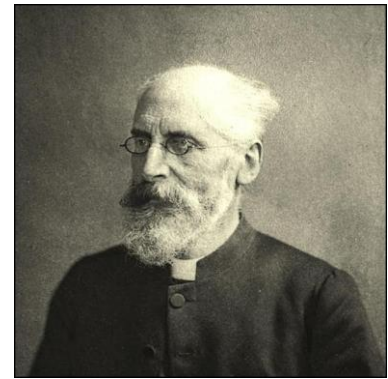
Israel, it was nonetheless one of the most popular of the annual festivals, embodying as it did the independent nationalistic spirit of Second Temple Israel. For though the Jews chafed under the yoke of Roman occupation and overlordship, they still carried the memory of their unlikely (and therefore undoubtedly divinely-orchestrated) victory over the Greeks under the leadership of the Maccabees. We read of the historical event in the book of I Maccabees,

Then Judas and his brothers said, "Now that our enemies have been crushed, let us go up to purify the sanctuary* and rededicate it." So the whole army assembled, and went up to Mount Zion. They found the sanctuary desolate, the altar desecrated, the gates burnt, weeds growing in the courts as in a thicket or on some mountain, and the priests' chambers demolished. Then they tore their garments and made great lamentation; they sprinkled their heads with ashes and prostrated themselves. And when the signal was given with trumpets, they cried out to Heaven. Judas appointed men to attack those in the citadel, while he purified the sanctuary. He chose blameless priests, devoted to the law; these purified the sanctuary and carried away the stones of the defilement to an unclean place. They deliberated what ought to be done with the altar for burnt offerings that had been desecrated. They decided it best to tear it down, lest it be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it; so they tore down the altar. They stored the stones in a suitable place on the temple mount, until the coming of a prophet who could determine what to do with them. Then they took uncut stones, according to the law, and built a new altar like the former one. They also repaired the sanctuary and the interior of the temple and consecrated the courts. They made new sacred vessels and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. Then they burned incense on the altar and lighted the lamps on the lampstand, and these illuminated the temple. They also put loaves on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken. They rose early on the morning of the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, that is, the month of Kislev, in the year one hundred and forty-eight, and offered sacrifice according to the law on the new altar for burnt offerings that they had made. On the anniversary of the day on which the Gentiles had desecrated it, on that very day it was rededicated with songs, harps, lyres, and cymbals. All the people prostrated themselves and adored and praised Heaven, who had given them success. For eight days they celebrated the dedication of the altar and joyfully offered burnt offerings and sacrifices of deliverance and praise. They ornamented the facade of the temple with gold crowns and shields; they repaired the gates and the priests' chambers and furnished them with doors. There was great joy among the people now that the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed. Then Judas and his brothers and the entire assembly of Israel decreed that every year for eight days, from the twenty-fifth day of the month Kislev, the days of the dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness on the anniversary.⁵²

⁵² I Maccabees 4:36-59

This is a very notable passage from Israel's intertestamental history. Here we read of the altar being 'stored the stones in a suitable place' because there was no prophet to tell them how to consecrate the desecrated altar. The prophetic word had departed from Israel, and Israel knew it. Even without the original altar (original, that is, to the Second Temple), the Temple and its precincts remained the beating heart of Judaism, as well as the nationalistic heart of Israel. Chanukkah, therefore, became one of the leading holidays of Second Temple Judaism, no less celebrated than the three feasts commanded by God through Moses.

Josephus reports that the feast was also referred to as the 'Festival of Lights' but fails to give a definitive explanation as to why. There is a legend that only one small vial of consecrated oil was discovered in the Temple, yet it lasted miraculously throughout the eight days of the feast. Edersheim writes, "Tradition had it, that, when the Temple-Services were restored by Judas Maccabaeus, the oil was found to have been desecrated. Only one flagon was discovered of that which was pure, sealed with the very signet of the High-Priest. The supply proved just sufficient to feed for one day the Sacred Candlestick, but by a miracle the flagon was continually replenished during eight days, till a fresh supply could be brought from Thekoah."⁵³ Josephus apparently knows nothing of this legend, and give a rather non-Jewish philosophical explanation for the alternate naming of the feast.



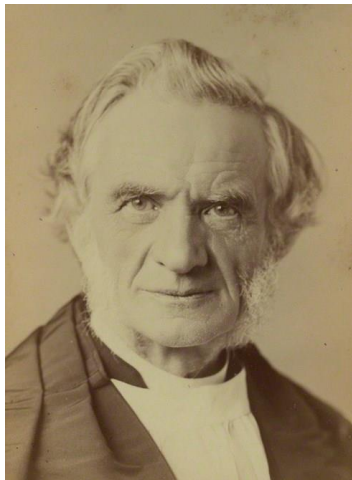
Alfred Edersheim (1825-89)

Now Judas celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple for eight days, and omitted no sort of pleasure thereon; but he feasted them upon very rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honored God, and delighted them by hymns and psalms. Nay, they were so very glad at the revival of their customs, when, after a long time of intermission, they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship, that they made it a law for their posterity, that they should keep a festival, on account of the restoration of their temple worship, for eight days. And from that time to this we celebrate the festival, and call it Lights. I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to the festival. ⁵⁴

⁵³ Edersheim, Alfred *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (MacDonald Publishing Company; nd); 429.

⁵⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*. [The Antiquities of the Jews, by Flavius Josephus \(gutenberg.org\)](http://www.gutenberg.org) Last accessed

From a Christian theological perspective, John's recording of the event here in Chapter 10 does present a challenge to the 'Regulative Principle' as it is widely considered among Reformed theologians. This challenge is due to the apparent observation by Jesus of a feast that was not prescribed by divine revelation as required and proper worship of Jehovah. In short, it appears that Jesus was violating the Regulative Principle! On the one hand we may respond that the text does not say anything about Jesus actually observing the Feast, though, on the other hand, His presence in the Temple at the time of the Feast is at least a *prima facie* approval of the ritual. Certainly, we have abundant data from the Old Testament to show that God does not approve of any form of worship devised by man's



B. F. Westcott (1825-1901)

own will, but it may be that, with the significance that the Temple had in the life of the Jewish nation and religion at that time, the rededication of the Temple fit sufficiently into the plan and purpose of God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ to be wholly permissible. Especially in the Fourth Gospel, where the comparison between Jesus and the Temple is a major theme, we should not be surprised to find our Lord walking and teaching within the Temple precincts at a time of year when many of the Jews would be in attendance. Chanukkah was commemorative of that which Jesus was present to accomplish fully, to dedicate the new *and true* Temple of His body. Westcott notes, "Christ in fact perfectly accomplished what the Maccabees wrought in a figure, and dedicated a new and abiding temple."⁵⁵

Perhaps, however, it is most reasonable simply to see in this reference to the Feast of Dedication another example of John's method of keeping time. Alone among the evangelists, John marks the passing of Jesus' earthly ministry in terms of the religious holidays of Judaism, and Chanukkah was, by that time, an integral part of the Jewish religious calendar. His mention that it was winter may be intended for the Gentile audience, as any Jew would know this fact from the observance of Chanukkah in the month of Kislev, corresponding generally to our month of December. Regardless of

29January2022.

⁵⁵ Westcott, Brooke Foss *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: John Murray; 1882); 157.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

whether we read John's reference to the Feast of Dedication as further evidence of the fulfillment of the Temple's purpose in the ministry and life of Jesus, or simply as a time marker, once again we find Jesus in a hostile environment, and the enmity directed at Him by the religious leaders will intensify even more as the Good Shepherd metaphor continues.

Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." (10:22-24)

As proof that the hostility of 'the Jews' is growing unbearable is the fact here that they accost Jesus as He walks in Solomon's porch, without even waiting for Jesus to say anything. The fact is, Jesus' teaching of late has been accumulating in their minds, especially the way in which this Galilean rabbi is increasingly condemning them and their mode of interpreting Scripture and practicing Judaism. The question they put to Him is in the form of utter exasperation, and the phrase translated '*keep us in doubt*' can also be rendered, '*how long will you take away our life?*'⁵⁶ This does not mean that these Jews recognized how significant Jesus' life and teaching were to their own continued well-being (that would come, though, shortly through the unintended prophecy of the High Priest, Caiaphas). What it means is that Jesus' teachings and His actions had all the markings of someone who might be the Messiah, yet Jesus would not tell them plainly that He was indeed the Promised One. "He had not distinctly said that He was the Christ, but He had professed to be and to do all that was promised of the Messiah, leaving them to infer the fact of His Messiahship."⁵⁷ They were tired of the inference and wanted Him to declare Himself openly and plainly.⁵⁸

Some commentators see in this earnest query a desire on the part of the Jews to believe in Jesus and to acknowledge Him as Israel's Messiah. This, though possible, would run contrary to the general usage of the group title, '*the Jews,*' in the Fourth Gospel; it is almost uniformly negative when in reference to the religious leaders. "This suggests that the Jews are not seeking for clarity in order to worship him without restraint; rather

⁵⁶ Hoskyns; 386, Newbiggin; 131.

⁵⁷ Jacobus; 187.

⁵⁸ We should note that Jesus *did* declare plainly His identity as the Messiah on two occasions: to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well (Chapter 4) and to the blind man whom Jesus healed in the previous chapter.

they want to obtain from him an unambiguous statement that would provide an adequate basis for their attack.”⁵⁹ Jesus’ answer is oblique once more. “The Jews had asked for a plain statement. They receive something which is not framed in the terms of their question, but is so plain as to lead straight to an attempt to stone him for blasphemy.”⁶⁰

Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. (10:25-26)

Jesus consistently challenges His audience, the Jews, to compare what He has said with what He has done: His actions have validated His claims and have clearly pointed to His identity as Israel’s Messiah. It is true that Jesus has not as yet stated to the Jews, ‘I am the Messiah,’ but “all of his ministry, both words and deeds, pointed in the one direction: in that sense he *had* told them.”⁶¹ Westcott adds, “And even if His teaching had remained a riddle, His works might still have furnished the interpretation of it.”⁶² Jesus knew, as we do, that the Jews were wanting an explicit self-proclamation from Jesus in order to latch on to what they would immediately call ‘blasphemy,’ and to drag Him into judgment and condemnation before the Jewish court. Nevertheless, Jesus takes their question at face value, and once again points out that the evidence of the answer they seek has been in front of them the whole time. “The problem lies not in his lack of clarity, but in their lack of faith.”⁶³

Jesus’ response concerning their inability to recognize His self-attestation through His works is both incendiary and deeply theological: “*You do not believe because you are not of My sheep.*” The Arminian would turn this around completely: “*You are not of My sheep because you do not believe,*” and make the faith the operative cause of being within Jesus’ fold. However, that would not fit with Jesus’ other statements concerning His flock – that they are those the Father has given Him, that they hear His voice, that He has other sheep not of this fold that He must bring in. What becomes evident is that the ‘flock’ is already a known entity, a known quantity, to the Godhead, and Jesus’ ministry both during His life

⁵⁹ Carson; 392.

⁶⁰ Newbigin; 133.

⁶¹ Carson; 392.

⁶² Westcott; 157.

⁶³ Whitacre; 269.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

on earth and after His resurrection will be to gather these sheep into His fold. And the Jews are not sheep of this flock, as manifested by their unbelief. Hoskyns comments, “The conclusion is inevitable. Since there is no weakness or obscurity in the ministry of Jesus, there can be but one explanation of the misunderstanding and unbelief of the Jews – *ye are not of my sheep*. As Chrysostom comments: ‘If ye follow me not, it is not because I am not a shepherd, but because ye are not my sheep.’”⁶⁴

Again, consider how definite are Jesus’ comments regarding *His* sheep responding to *His* voice:

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. (10:2-4)

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. (10:14-16)

Jesus’ statement to the Jews is clear: you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. “Were they sheep of his, believing obedience, the relation of fellowship, and following of him would be there.”⁶⁵ This is the doctrine of predestination/election as well as the ‘effectual call’ of the Gospel – the sheep whom God the Father has given the Son since before the foundation of the earth *will hear* the voice of the Good Shepherd in the Gospel when it calls them. This is the metaphorical image behind the theological statement of Paul in Romans 8,

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

(Romans 8:29-30)

The inescapable conclusion is that the determination of hearing His voice is not within the sinner himself, though it is undeniably the sinner who must hear and follow.

⁶⁴ Hoskyns; 387. Hoskyns immediately and quite remarkably states, “This is no formal doctrine of predestination; it describes a general behaviour with which the behaviour of the true disciples of Jesus is contrasted.”

⁶⁵ Luthardt; 376.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

This is the conundrum of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in salvation. Yet priority must go to the sovereignty of God in electing the sheep who will respond to the Shepherd's voice. At any rate, Jesus creates an unmistakable distinction between two groups – those who are His sheep and those who are not. "It is not just that his own sheep *do* hear his voice, that he knows them, and that they follow him, but that those who *are not* his sheep *do not* hear his voice, that he does *not* know them, and that therefore they *do not* follow him."⁶⁶

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one. (10:27-30)

Here is another powerful statement of both election and eternal security, as Jesus identifies His sheep as if they had already been called and had already come into His fold. In a sense, none of His sheep had been called as yet, for He had not laid down His life for them. Yet even at this time, before His passion, He can speak of His sheep as already existing as a flock, because each and every lamb within that flock already belongs to the Father who has given each one to the Son. What is key to this verse is the knowledge that Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, already has of His sheep – and we have already seen earlier in the chapter that the shepherd knows and calls each sheep *by name*. This is, therefore, not a 'corporate' salvation through identification with Israel, but rather the knowledge that the Son of God has had from eternity of each and every lamb within the flock of God. This is the perspective that Paul takes in reference to an individual's salvific relationship to God through Jesus,

*But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, **or rather are known by God**, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?*

(Galatians 4:8-9)

The responsibility of the sinner to hear and follow is not abrogated, but the underlying reality for those who do hear and follow is that they are known by God and given by the Father to the Son, who calls them by His Holy Spirit; they hear, and follow,

⁶⁶ Carson; 393.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

and are eternally safe in His care, *“they shall never perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”* Thus the foundation of Eternal Security is Divine Election; the two doctrines stand or fall together. Newbigin writes,

It follows, and here we revert to Johannine language, that those who do believe do so because the Father has called them, brought them to Jesus, and given them to him...They have no security except in him, but that security is complete because it is the Father himself who called them and gave them to Jesus. They do not depend for security upon their own faith, insight, or goodness, but simply on the one who called them.⁶⁷

Hoskyns adds, *“Those who believe in Jesus are under the protection of God Himself; no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.* Those who are under the protection of, in the hand of, Jesus are under the protection of, in the hand of, the Father, because they have been given to Jesus by the Father. The complete supremacy of God is there secured by the relation of Jesus to the Father.”⁶⁸

In verse 10, Jesus promises His followers, His sheep, *“life, and that abundantly.”* Here in verse 28 He further defines the life that He will give on account of His laying down and taking up His own life: *eternal* life. It is also worth noting that Jesus does not say, *“I will give them”* but *“I give them eternal life.”* Westcott notes that the gift is “present and continuously appropriated.”⁶⁹ But what exactly *is* eternal life? It is indeed ‘life without end,’ but it is so much more. For life without end is really not ‘eternal’ but ‘immortal.’ *Eternal* life is the life that God possesses; life that is not merely temporally immeasurable, but is essential: more a quality than a quantity. But eternal life is not, and cannot be, essential to the creature; it is so only to the eternal God who is the Creator. Therefore, eternal life to the creature must be in relation to the One who is Life in Himself, and this is how Jesus defines ‘eternal life’ in John 17, His ‘High Priestly Prayer,’

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “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. (17:1-3)

⁶⁷ Newbigin; 132.

⁶⁸ Hoskyns; 388.

⁶⁹ Westcott; 158.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Instead of answering the Jews' question regarding Jesus' identity as Israel's Messiah, the Lord returns to the more important matter that underlies His identity as the Messiah: His relationship to the Father. Far more frequently in the Fourth Gospel do we read Jesus speaking of His being the Son than we do of His being the Christ. "The Messiahship of Jesus is throughout the Fourth Gospel interpreted in terms of Sonship. Jesus is the Son of God sent into the world as the Son of man."⁷⁰ Here Jesus makes the relationship beyond debate or confusion, "*I and the Father are one.*" Theologians have tried for centuries to somehow twist this verse into *not* saying that Jesus was essentially one with the Father and, hence, Himself God. But the context of the passage is the power of God to keep those whom Jesus has called, and Jesus unites this power equally in His own hand as well as the hand of the Father: "*neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand...and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.*" Thus Luthardt is undoubtedly correct when he writes, "Nothing is said here of unity of will (thus the Arian and Socinian exposition), but of unity of the power which is proper to the Father and which is proper to the historical person Jesus Christ."⁷¹ Westcott adds,

It seems clear that the unity here spoken of cannot fall short of unity of essence. The thought springs from the equality of power (*my hand, the Father's hand*); but infinite power is an essential attribute of God; and it is impossible to suppose that two beings distinct in essence could be equal in power.⁷²

Jacobus points out that this power is sufficient to protect those the Father has given to the son, not from the predation of *any man*, but rather from the threat of *any thing*, meaning any power or principality or force in the universe. "However they may come *like a thief*, they shall not snatch them out of His hand. Neither the cunning artifice of Satan, nor the power of the pit shall do it. He will never be found off His guard – nor ever wanting in power. They are in His hand, given to Him by the Father, and for their keeping and safe conducting to Heaven, all power is given to Him over all flesh."⁷³ Morris adds more succinctly, "It is one of the precious things about the Christian faith that our

⁷⁰ Hoskyns; 387.

⁷¹ Luthardt; 379.

⁷² Westcott; 159.

⁷³ Jacobus; 188.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

continuance in eternal life depends not on our feeble hold on Christ, but on His firm grip on us.”⁷⁴ But this is nothing more than the Apostle Paul affirms in Romans 8,

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, “Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?” The Jews answered Him, saying, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.” (10:31-33)

It is a mainstay of modern liberal Christology that Jesus never declared Himself to be divine, that the deity of Jesus Christ is nothing more than an evolutionary development within the early Church. Jesus, says the liberal theologian, was *apotheosized*; He was made into a God, but never claimed to be divine Himself. Strange, those who heard Jesus speak, who ostensibly would have a better idea of what this Galilean rabbi was saying in relation to the Jewish conception of who Jehovah was, certainly considered Him to be claiming unity with the Holy One of Israel. Jacobus rightly notes in his day as in ours, “the blind Jews saw more than the Anti-Trinitarians see today.”⁷⁵ To claim unity with the one God was, under Jewish law, *blasphemy* – i.e., sacrilegious speech concerning the deity. Israel’s religion was vehemently monotheistic, so *being a man, yet making Yourself God* would be on almost all grounds justification for the charge of blasphemy. Morris comments, “This shows that they had discerned accurately enough what His teaching meant. What they did not stop to consider was whether it was true.”⁷⁶ To the Jews it was blasphemy, and the penalty, according to the Law, was death by stoning.

Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel; and this Israelite woman’s son and a man of Israel fought each other in the camp. And the Israelite woman’s son blasphemed the name of the LORD and cursed; and so they brought him to Moses. (His mother’s name was Shelomith the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.) Then they put him in custody, that the mind of the LORD might be shown to them. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. (Numbers 24:10-14)

⁷⁴ Morris, Leon *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1977); 521.

⁷⁵ Jacobus; 190.

⁷⁶ Morris; 525.

The Jews, however, saw no reason to take Jesus into custody; they had heard enough (at least in their own minds) to execute both judgment and sentence then and there. This situation, and others like it recorded in the Gospels, are examples of a principle



C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

popularized by C. S. Lewis in his influential *Mere Christianity*. The concept is sometimes referred to as 'Mad, Bad, or God' and it posits that there are only three possible judgments one can make with regard to Jesus and His self-attesting claims concerning deity. He either thought He was God, but was not, in which case He was crazy. Or He knew He was not God, but claimed to be, in which case He was a deceiver. Or, finally, He both knew Himself to be God, and was (is). Lewis

writes,

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.⁷⁷

The liberal theologian seems to realize and accept what Lewis is saying, and therefore denies that Jesus ever said that He was divine. But that will not do, at least not if what Jesus did say is in any way related to the record of what He said in the Gospels (of course, the liberal theologian also denies that). Luthardt dispels any doubt about what it was Jesus said about Himself, "But, as we have seen, Jesus has so combined himself with God, that what is true of the one must be true of the other. He has placed himself at the side of and in God, and therefore on the same basis as God, and has made of himself *gleichgütig* ('equal to God')." ⁷⁸

Unlike other occasions (and again at the end of this chapter), Jesus did not immediately remove Himself from their midst, but rather challenged their judgment and

⁷⁷ Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity* (New York: Collier Books; 1952); 55-56.

⁷⁸ Luthardt; 384.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

condemnation of Him: “*For what good work do you stone Me?*” But it was not merely as a ‘good worker’ that Jesus defends Himself; rather He refers to His works as *from My Father*, showing once again that He was no mere moral reformer, but was the essential representation of Israel’s God. Newbigin notes that “with terrible irony the one who does the works of God is accused of usurping the place of God.”⁷⁹ As the Jews will respond, it is not because Jesus, as a man, did good works. The problem was that He claimed not only to be doing the will of God, but to *always* do the will of God, and this because He and the Father were/are one. “Judging from his works, he cannot be blamed in anything: that is the negative side. On the contrary, since he did them *from the Father*’, they prove the relation to his Father which he has stated: that is the positive side.”⁸⁰ Hoskyns accurately summarizes the impact of this episode, and the Jews’ violent response to Jesus’ self-attestation.

Faith or unbelief spring from man’s judgements concerning His authority. By their attitude to His authority men are finally divided. If His authority be self-appointed he is guilty of blasphemy – if, however, the authority by which He acts and speaks be the authority of God, his divine Sonship adequately expresses the nature of His authority, and it is necessary that men should believe in Him.⁸¹

With this allegation of blasphemy the situation between Jesus and the Jews reaches a crisis point, and in the Fourth Gospel an advance on the earlier division among the Jews as to whether Jesus was insane (*cp.* 10:19-21). Jesus will not leave the matter on any level short of a judgment on His claim to be one with God. In a very similar vein to Lewis’ proposition, Hoskyns writes, “The division among men must not be between those who suppose Jesus to be mad and those who accept His ability to do genuine miracles, but between those who, clearly perceiving the nature of His claim to authority either reject it as the supreme blasphemy and proceed actively against Him, or accept it as the truth and proceed to faith and active discipleship.”⁸² Sadly the Jews, and the majority of Israel at that time, will follow the first of these paths, and Jesus the path of Golgotha.

⁷⁹ Newbigin; 134.

⁸⁰ Luthardt; 383.

⁸¹ Hoskyns; 382.

⁸² *Ibid.*; 389.

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"'? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?" (10:34-36)

Jesus' response to the Jews' interpretation of His comment had caused a lot of debate among modern scholars, with many concluding that He here denies any claim to deity. Jesus, the argument goes, is minimizing the extent of His claim just uttered, "*I and the Father are one*" by merely comparing Himself with the 'leaders' of the nation of whom God Himself says, "*I said 'You are gods.'*" The passage Jesus quotes is from Psalm 82,

*I said, "You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.
But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes."*

(Psalm 82:6-7)

Is Jesus saying that His own self-witness as the Son of God and as one with God is no more than equating Himself with the civil rulers of Israel in the days of the psalmist? This is what modern liberal scholars find in His reference simply because this is what they want to find here, and not because this is what Jesus is actually doing. The argument He sets forth is in a common form: *Argumentum a maiori ad minus* – argument from the lesser to the greater. The form of the argument is framed as such: If such and such was true in lesser circumstances, *how much more* is it true in greater circumstances. If God Himself refers to the civil rulers of Israel as 'gods' and 'sons,' *how much more* is this true of Him "*whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world*"? "The argument is from the lesser to the greater (a common rabbinic device): if there is a sense in which even mere human beings can be called 'gods' in Scripture, how much more is it appropriate to the one whom



Andreas Köstenberger (b. 1957)

God set apart and sent!"⁸³ They were appointed to temporary offices, to be succeeded by others upon their deaths. But Jesus had been set apart from eternity past and sent into the world with a life mission: to do the will of His Father. "For it was not merely a temporal word of God which called to this or that earthly office after the image of God, but with his whole life he carries out a work to which the Father had consecrated him before he entered

⁸³ Köstenberger, Andreas *Encountering John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 2013); 111.

the world.”⁸⁴ Thus Jesus challenges the Jews, who claim to hold fast the Scriptures as their guiding light, to explain how they can stone Him, sent by the Father to do His will, on account of His claim to be the Son of God? “Those to whom the word of the Torah came were, in virtue of that fact, addressed as ‘God.’ How much more the one in whom the word has become flesh!”⁸⁵

Thus Jesus does not let the Jews off the hook, but rather highlights their hypocrisy. They were violating the Law that they claimed to uphold, and that against a man whose actions fully validated His claim that He was from the Father. “His object was only to take them up on their own ground, and show their unreasonable enmity to Him – to expose the root of all their bitterness, in the unbelief and malice of their hearts.”⁸⁶ What they falsely called ‘blasphemy’ was the eternally preordained redemptive work of the Father through the Son. “To affirm this is not to blaspheme the name of the covenant Lord, but to acknowledge that the covenant is fulfilled in the very presence of God’s own beloved son and in the works of blessing which he is doing in the Father’s name.”⁸⁷

If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.” Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand. (10:37-39)

We have seen this line of reasoning before from Jesus: *If you won’t believe My words, then believe My works.* This is not to say that Jesus was granting a lower form of belief or discipleship – that a person can be saved by believing in Jesus’ works but disbelieving His words. What Jesus has been saying all along, and says again here, is that His works *validate His words*, and both are from the Father. Peter, in his first sermon, picks up on the undeniable witness that Jesus’ works gave to Jesus’ words. This witness, however, the Jews would reject.

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know – Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death... (Acts 2:22-23)

⁸⁴ Luthardt; 385.

⁸⁵ Newbigin; 135.

⁸⁶ Jacobus; 191.

⁸⁷ Newbigin; 136.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and there He stayed. Then many came to Him and said, "John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true." And many believed in Him there. (10:40-42)

The Jews would not hear Jesus because, as He said, they were not of His sheep. But their hostility toward Him could not be decisive, as Hoskyns notes, "If the sheep of Jesus cannot be snatched out of His hand, how much less can the enemy have power over the Shepherd of the sheep, until the time should come for Him to deliver Himself into their hand and to lay down His life. But the time is not yet."⁸⁸ There are still a few more sheep from the fold of Israel to gather, and these back where He gathered His first disciples, including the one who is writing this Fourth Gospel.

⁸⁸ Hoskyns; 393-94.

Week 3: TULIP in the Gospel of John

Text Reading: John 10:3-5, 14-16, 27-29; 17:8-9, 20

*"Unsearchable are all these ways, but they are ways,
not of an arbitrary God,
but of a God who guides all things toward the goal that He has set."
(G. C. Berkouwer)*

One of the most significant doctrinal controversies in the history of Protestant Christianity took place after the deaths of the two theologians long since associated with

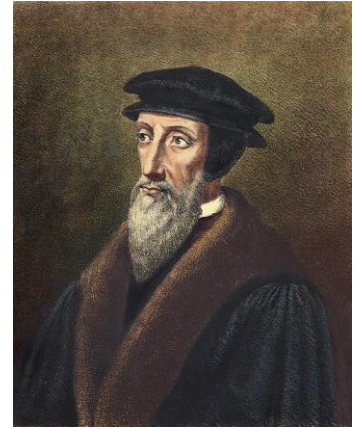


Jacob Arminius (1560-1609)

the debate. The 'Five Points of Calvinism' were promulgated at the Synod of Dordt in 1619, over fifty years after the death of John Calvin. The 'points' were in response to the five 'Remonstrances' issued in 1610 as a summary statement of the 'Arminian' soteriology, a year after the death of Jacob Arminius. In subsequent treatments of the doctrinal debate – 'Calvinism versus Arminianism,' it is often presented as though the two men actually debated one another. Highly unlikely, as Arminius was all of four years old when Calvin died. It was, of course, a controversy carried on by the respective disciples of each teacher concerning their soteriological systems, which were indeed incompatible. So objectionable were the Remonstrances, that the Reformed Church in Holland – the Dutch Reformed – invited Reformed theologians from continental Europe as well as from England. Anglican ministers from England and the Church of Scotland attended, and King James I sent an official observer to the council. The determination of the assembled theologians eventually came to be known under the acronym of T. U. L. I. P., probably because the tulip is the national flower of Holland. However, the order of the theological points as presented by TULIP is misleading and does not address the historical Remonstrances to which the Reformed response was targeted. A more accurate – both historically and theologically – acronym would be U. L. T. I. P., but for obvious reasons that never caught on.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

The soteriology summarized by TULIP is, sadly, often taught in a historical vacuum, without reference to the Arminian Remonstrances or even the Synod that met to address them. This has often resulted in a presentation of the doctrines as aggressive and contrary to the peace of the Church, rather than responsive and necessary to the preservation of biblical soteriology. This point is made simply because the five points, while eminently biblical, are meaty – they can be difficult for immature believers to swallow without choking. This is, to be sure, due to the fact that they are most contrary to fallen human nature, and even the regenerate sometimes stumble on them. The five points are best taught in the course of a broader biblical and systematic theology – such as a study in the theology of the Fourth Gospel – and simple (simplistic, even) acronyms are probably not the best manner of dealing with, as Calvin referred to the point that is the fountain of all five – Election or Predestination – as a *doctrine terribile*. “Calvin taught that God’s will is to be our resting place. He cautions those trying to go beyond the limit of their understanding. When men hear of election, they immediately want to ask, “Why would God choose some, and not others?” To this Calvin replied: “When they inquire into predestination, let then remember that they are penetrating into the recesses of the divine wisdom, where he who rushes forward securely and confidently, instead of satisfying his curiosity will enter in (an) inextricable labyrinth.” God’s thoughts are higher than man’s, and men will be trapped in a mental maze if they try to understand things that are beyond their human comprehension.”⁸⁹



John Calvin (1509-64)

All this to say that the Five Points of Calvinism, also known as the Doctrines of Grace, should be handled with care and not with flowers. Because these doctrines are biblical, it should not come as a surprise to find them in John’s Gospel, and as this study is a focus on the *theology* of the Fourth Gospel, it is the purpose of this particular lesson to investigate the Five Points to see if they gain any support from John. Of course, being a Reformed study of the Gospel of John, there is the presupposition that the points will be discovered in the Gospel, but it is remarkable just how clearly they are found there. But

⁸⁹ [John Calvin and the "Awful" Doctrine of Predestination \(gentlereformation.com\)](http://gentlereformation.com). The quotation is from *Institutes* 3.21.1. Accessed 04February2022.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

before we investigate the text of the Fourth Gospel in reference to the Five Points, let us establish the historical context of the doctrinal controversy.

As mentioned above, the Five Points were in response to five Remonstrances published by the disciples of Jacob Arminius in 1610. The first of these attacked the Calvinistic doctrine of Eternal Predestination or Election, maintaining that God's 'election' is based on His foreknowledge of those who would, in time, believe.

That God, by an eternal and unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ his Son before the foundation of the world, has determined that out of the fallen, sinful race of men, to save in Christ, for Christ's sake, and through Christ, those who through the grace of the Holy Spirit shall believe on this his son Jesus, and shall persevere in this faith and obedience of faith, through this grace, even to the end; and, on the other hand, to leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath and to condemn them as alienated from Christ, according to the word of the Gospel in John 3:36: "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he that does not believe the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him," and according to other passages of Scripture also.⁹⁰

The action of God in eternity past is fundamental to the overall debate, as it is fundamental to the outflowing of redemptive history. The Arminian emphasizes the necessity of faith in salvation, and rightly so. However, what the Arminian misses is the



Norman Geisler (1932-2019)

source of that faith, placing it within the fallen human soul, heart, and mind rather than in the sovereign regenerative grace of God. Rather than God foreordaining that this or that human should believe, the Arminian teaches that God foresees that this or that human *will* believe, and on the basis of that foresight (often referred to as foreknowledge) God 'elects' that sinner unto salvation. Norman Geisler, a leading Arminian evangelical scholar, writes, "God's grace works synergistically on free will. That is, it must be re-

ceived to be effective. There are no conditions for giving grace, but there is one condition for receiving it – faith. Put in other terms, God's justifying grace works cooperatively, not operatively."⁹¹

⁹⁰ [The Five Articles of the Remonstrants \(1610\) \(crivoice.org\)](http://crivoice.org). Accessed 04February2022.

⁹¹ Geisler, Norman *Chosen But Free* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers; 2001); 242.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

The second Remonstrance, corresponding to the “L” of the Five Points, is the denial that Christ’s atoning death was limited to the elect, but was rather universal for all mankind without exclusion or exception.

That, accordingly, Jesus Christ the Savior of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for them all, by his death on the cross, redemption and the forgiveness of sins; yet that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except the believer, according to the word of the Gospel of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And in the First Epistle of John 2:2: “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”⁹²

The logic of this remonstrance flows directly from the first: if God’s electing grace is dependent upon man’s accepting faith, then the death that secured that grace must pour its benefits to all and every sinner. Geisler, in a statement that begs the question as well as stuns the student of Scripture by its boldness, states, “Few teachings are more evident in the New Testament than that God loves all people, that Christ dies for the sins of all human beings, and that God desires all persons to be saved.”⁹³ The issue, of course, is the interpretation of the term ‘world’ in passages such as John 3:16; the Arminian assumes that it means every individual human being who has come or will come into the world – a necessary conclusion from the previous one regarding the nature of God’s electing grace.

The third remonstrance speaks to the condition of fallen man and stands in denial of the *total* depravity represented by the “T” in TULIP. The Arminian statement of this point, however, does not differ appreciably from the Calvinistic view, and presents an affirmation of total depravity and a denial of it in the same breath, for it is maintained throughout the Arminian system that fallen man is capable – *responsible* – to exercise that faith which secures to him the saving grace of God presented in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

That man does not has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, inasmuch as in his state of apostasy and sin he can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do any thing that is truly good (such as saving Faith eminently is); but that it is necessary that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, and will, and all his faculties, in order that he may rightly

⁹² [The Five Articles of the Remonstrants \(1610\) \(crivoice.org\)](http://www.crivoice.org/five-articles-of-the-remonstrants-1610/). Accessed 04February2022.

⁹³ Geisler; 79. Geisler references I Timothy 2:4-6; I John 2:2; and II Peter 2:1 for the second assertion but provides no biblical references for either the first or the third.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good, according to the Word of Christ, John 15:5, “Without me you can do nothing.”⁹⁴

In Geisler’s book, *Chosen But Free*, the author labels those who hold to the Five Points as ‘Extreme Calvinists,’ and uses the phrase quite annoyingly throughout the treatise. With regard to the “T” in TULIP, Geisler writes, “Extreme Calvinists believe that a totally depraved person is spiritually dead. By ‘spiritual death’ they mean the elimination of all human ability to understand or respond to God, not just a separation from God. Further, the effects of sin are intensive (destroying the ability to receive salvation), not just extensive (corrupting the ability to receive salvation).”⁹⁵ But we must note that the corresponding remonstrance asserts that man *does not have the ability within himself* to do anything *that is truly good*, and then proceeds to list saving faith as *eminently* a true good (that man is incapable of doing). The implication of the other four remonstrances is that, as Geisler states, the fallen human is capable of receiving saving grace through self-exercised faith; indeed, he cannot receive that grace otherwise. Geisler goes on to admit that the sinner must be born again and must become a new creation, but concludes “The dispute is over whether this comes by an act of God apart from the recipient’s free choice. On this point the text [ref. John 3:3, 6-7] both here and elsewhere indicates that this new birth comes through an act of faith on the part of the recipient.”⁹⁶ This is the very ‘saving faith’ that the remonstrance denies to fallen man; Geisler is logically inconsistent here, as are all Arminians who adhere to the remonstrances of 1610.

Most modern Arminians are not so rigorous and have adopted a more Pelagian view of human inability. In other words, they have acquiesced to what their system of divine ‘election’ demands: that there lies within the soul, heart, and mind of the sinner an innate ability to believe and, thus, to receive the grace of God offered in Jesus Christ, who died for all. Geisler’s attempts to prove that ‘dead’ does not mean dead and that ‘spiritual’ proves ‘metaphoric,’ are examples of the interpretive gymnastics required in order to come up with a sinner who is yet capable of believing of his own ‘free will.’ “People are ultimately condemned for two reasons: First, they are born with a sinful that puts them on

⁹⁴ [The Five Articles of the Remonstrants \(1610\) \(crivoice.org\)](http://www.crivoice.org/five-articles-of-the-remonstrants-1610/). Accessed 04 February 2022.

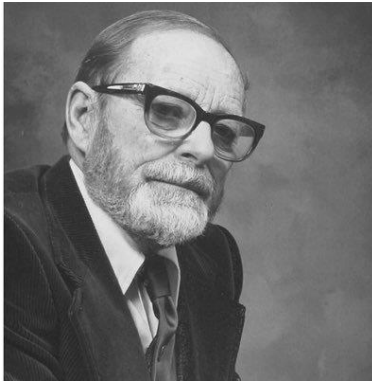
⁹⁵ Geisler; 57.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*; 61.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

the road to hell; second, because they choose not to heed the warning signs along the road telling them to repent. That is, they sin inevitably (though not necessarily) because they are born with a sinful nature, *and* they find themselves in a sinful condition where they are bound by sin because they have chosen to be in this condition.”⁹⁷

The anthropology behind one’s soteriology is crucial. Either man is totally unable,



Arthur Custance (1910-85)

because literally dead to God, to do anything with respect to his own salvation, or he is yet able, though otherwise exceedingly sick and corrupt, to exercise that repentance and faith that appropriates the saving grace of God. In the first case, salvation is from God from first to last; in the second, salvation is a cooperative effort between God and the sinner, with the sinner’s contribution being the *sine qua non* of his salvation. The first is *monergistic*, the second *synergistic*. Arthur Custance establishes the doctrinal impact of the debate on the first page of his treatise on the Five Points of Calvinism, titled *The Sovereignty of Grace*. Custance asserts,

Every departure from the doctrine of Election in any degree has been a departure from the Gospel, for such departure always involves the introduction of some obligation on man’s part to make a contribution towards his own salvation, a contribution he simply cannot make. This is unrealistic with respect to man and dishonouring with respect to God. There are no shades of truth here. This is an all-or-nothing doctrine...If man contributes anything whatever to his salvation, even his own responsiveness of heart or the exercise of his own faith, then salvation is no longer by grace. For it becomes a co-operative effort between man and God in which the decision of man and not of God determines the issue.⁹⁸

Given, in the Arminian scheme, that fallen man possesses (somehow) the ability to exercise saving faith and to appropriate to himself divine grace through Jesus Christ, it follows logically that this grace may be (and usually is) resisted fully and finally. Hence the fourth remonstrance rails against the concept of the “I” in TULIP: Grace *is* resistible because man is free. The Remonstrants of 1610 struggled with this point: on the one hand according to divine grace the sole motive power of all good, while on the other hand

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*; 62-63.

⁹⁸ Custance, Arthur *The Sovereignty of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1981); 3.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

asserting that this divine, omnipotent grace can be fully resisted by the sinner to the cost of his own salvation.

That this grace of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of all good, even to this extent, that the regenerate man himself, without prevenient or assisting, awakening, following and cooperative grace, can neither think, will, nor do good, nor withstand any temptations to evil; so that all good deeds or movements, that can be conceived, must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ. but respects the mode of the operation of this grace, it is not irresistible; inasmuch as it is written concerning many, that they have resisted the Holy Ghost. Acts 7, and elsewhere in many places.⁹⁹

The Arminian position holds that all operations of the Holy Spirit are salvific and, hence, any resistance to the Holy Spirit is a freewill resistance to the grace of salvation. Furthermore, in order to maintain the foundation of Arminian soteriology – Human Free Will – it is maintained that the grace of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, offered freely by the Holy Spirit, can be fully and finally resisted. Geisler shows how logically *resistible* grace fits into the Arminian system. “Those who insist that God’s will cannot be resisted confuse what God wills *unconditionally* with what He wills *conditionally*. God wills the salvation of all persons conditionally – conditioned on their repentance. Hence, God’s will in this sense can be resisted by an unrepentant heart. Of course, God’s will to save those who believe (i.e., the elect) is unconditional.”¹⁰⁰ In the end, therefore, the salvation of any man is dependent solely upon himself – whether he will receive or resist the Holy Spirit. Logically, then, though much glory undoubtedly goes to God for His making this way of salvation possible, at least some (if not most) of the glory goes to the man who ‘chooses’ to be saved. James R. White, whose *The Potter’s Freedom* is an excellent refutation of Geisler’s *Chosen But Free*, writes,



James R. White (b. 1962)

The first thing that strikes the reader is that this criticism begins with a fundamental denial of the assertion that God’s ‘foreknowledge’ and ‘predetermination’ are ‘one.’ There is a

⁹⁹ [Five articles of Remonstrance | Theopedia](#). Accessed 05February2022.

¹⁰⁰ Geisler; 96-97.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

plain priority in CBF's presentation to the 'free choices' of men which then influences (indeed, determines) the making of the 'list of the elect.' Obviously, this indicates a priority of the free choices of men: the 'list of the elect' seemingly is made up of those who vote for themselves.¹⁰¹

Finally, the logical flow of the Arminian soteriology reaches the culmination for each individual man: is salvation permanent or can it be lost? Here, the fifth remonstrance, the disciples of Arminius hedge their bets, as their teacher had before them, not wanting to issue an unadulterated positive as to eternal security, but also unwilling to trouble the souls of 'believers' with an out-and-out denial.

That those who are incorporated into Christ by true faith, and have thereby become partakers of his life-giving Spirit, have thereby full power to strive against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and to win the victory; it being well understood that it is ever through the assisting grace of the Holy Ghost; and that Jesus Christ assists them through his Spirit in all temptations, extends to them his hand, and if only they are ready for the conflict, and desire his help, and are not inactive, keeps them from falling, so that they, by no craft or power of Satan, can be misled nor plucked out of Christ's hands, according to the Word of Christ, John 10:28: "Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginning of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of becoming devoid of grace, that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with the full persuasion of our mind.¹⁰²

In reality, this statement is nothing more than a bald-faced denial of the inexorable logic of the previous statements. A system of salvation that is ultimately dependent on the free will choice of the sinner, cannot then be secured by the sovereign action of God. Logically, if human free will is so sacred that the divine will must yield to it at the inception of salvation, it must remain sacred to all eternity. Not only may the 'redeemed' man later choose to be 'unredeemed,' theoretically – so long as he remains human – he must possess this right of contrary choice forever, even beyond this life. This point has been a conundrum for Arminians to this day, with some denominations such as the Assemblies of God teaching that one can lose one's salvation, and others, like most Arminian Baptist denominations, holding the 'once saved, always saved' position. Only

¹⁰¹ White, James R. *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing; 2000); 69.

¹⁰² [Five articles of Remonstrance | Theopedia](#). Accessed 05February2022.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

the former position is logical within the system, with the further caveat that the potential loss of one's salvation cannot reasonably be limited to this life. Those who wish to hold an eternal security must admit that, upon believing, a man's free will is superseded by the preserving power of God, so that the man no longer has free will with regard to his own continuing in a state of salvation, but must do so even if he later chooses to apostatize. Geisler's solution to the problem is convoluted, "God knows in advance that all who begin to believe will continue by His grace to persevere to the end. In short, God is able to keep us by His power."¹⁰³ Later in the same chapter Geisler again tries to condition this divine power by human free will: "God's omnipotent power is able to keep us from falling – in accordance with our free choice."¹⁰⁴ But what if our 'free choice' chooses to fall? Can God's omnipotent power keep us then? If not, is God's power omnipotent?

The long and short of the matter really does come down to 'power.' Who has the power to save, and to keep saved? God, or man? In the Arminian system, as held by most evangelicals today, God does not have the power to save – only to make salvation possible – but He does have the power to keep saved. This is logically tantamount to having one's eternal cake and eating it, too. The Good Shepherd discourse in John 10 is perhaps the most concentrated biblical commentary on who it is who is responsible for both populating and keeping the 'flock' of God. There is no denial of the responsibility of the sinner (sheep) in this passage, but there is an unmistakable emphasis on the priority of the will and power of the Father, mirrored perfectly in the will and power of the Son, Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. There are many New Testament passages that seem to support Arminianism, and many other that seem to support Calvinism. This discourse should, however, reveal the heart of the Good Shepherd as well as of His Father in heaven, and set matters at rest concerning both will and power in salvation. It is then reasonable, from this firm foundation, to interpret the other passages accordingly. Therefore, let us revisit the 'Five Points' – in the same order as the Remonstrances – and see what both the Good Shepherd discourse and the Fourth Gospel in its broader scope have to say about each one.

¹⁰³ Geisler; 126.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*; 127.

Unconditional Election

In responding to the Arminian Remonstrances, the theologians assembled in Dordrecht, Holland, in 1618-19, addressed the biblical and systematic theology behind the 'Five Points' through five "Main Points of Doctrine." The first of these dealt with 'Election and Reprobation,' and Article 7 of this first point is the direct response to the associated remonstrance regarding the Doctrine of Election or Predestination.

Election is God's unchangeable purpose by which he did the following:

Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of his will, God chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from its original innocence into sin and ruin. Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery. God did this in Christ, whom he also appointed from eternity to be the mediator, the head of all those chosen, and the foundation of their salvation.

And so God decreed to give to Christ those chosen for salvation, and to call and draw them effectively into Christ's fellowship through the Word and Spirit. In other words, God decreed to grant them true faith in Christ, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of the Son, to glorify them.

God did all this in order to demonstrate his mercy, to the praise of the riches of God's glorious grace. As Scripture says, "God chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, so that we should be holy and blameless before him with love; he predestined us whom he adopted as his children through Jesus Christ, in himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, by which he freely made us pleasing to himself in his beloved" (Eph. 1:4-6). And elsewhere, "Those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30).¹⁰⁵

The previous six articles establish the divine justice in condemning all mankind and the corresponding grace and mercy exhibited in the fact that God should choose to save any. But the underlying premise of the entire doctrinal point is that those who will be saved in Christ Jesus – the Elect – are God's possession *before they are saved*. This principle fits well with Jesus' teaching in the Good Shepherd discourse and other passages in the Fourth Gospel. In the discourse, Jesus clearly establishes a division among the Jews – those who are His sheep and those who are not. Jesus speaks of His sheep as already

¹⁰⁵ [The Canons of Dort | Christian Reformed Church \(crcna.org\)](https://www.crcna.org/). Accessed 05February2022.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

belonging to Him, and of other sheep that are His from another fold, almost universally interpreted as from among the Gentiles. “These ‘scattered children of God’ (cp. John 11:52) were truly ‘children of God,’ thought they had not as yet received the full knowledge of their Father.”¹⁰⁶ Jesus does not include all of Israel in His flock, specifically excluding the Jews who do not believe in Him. However, contrary to the Arminian position, it is not the case that these Jews are not Jesus’ sheep because they do not believe, but rather they do not believe because they are not of His flock.

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. (10:14-16)

*Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. But **you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep**, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.* (10:25-27)

Compare,

*He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, **because you are not of God.*** (8:47)

Elsewhere Jesus speaks of the unbelieving Jews as not being the children of God, but rather of their father the devil. The Arminian would explain this as due to the foreknowledge of God that these Jews would not believe, and hence were not among the elect, but the more natural interpretation of Jesus’ words is that their parentage is determinative of their unbelief, rather than their unbelief being proof of their parentage.

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. (8:42-45)

¹⁰⁶ Westcott; 175.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Perhaps the most convincing statements concerning the prior ownership by Jesus of His sheep are those that speak of the flock as belonging to the Father before being given to the Son.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one. (10:27-30)

Again, the Arminian will argue that this only reflects God's foreknowledge and consequent election of those who would believe in Jesus Christ, though this is a very unnatural sense of the words used. Still, we must choose between the two alternatives, as Custance notes, "Either God is sovereign and Election is an expression of God's will, or man is sovereign and Election is an expression of God's foreknowledge."¹⁰⁷ Jesus is even clearer in His High Priestly prayer of John 17,

I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. (17:6)

There is an implication to the Good Shepherd discourse that is not stated in the text itself – that is, there is an *owner* of the sheep. Normally the shepherd is not the owner of the sheep, but is a dedicated servant who treats the sheep as his own out of respect and honor to the owner. The most familiar example of this is David, who faithfully kept his father's flock and, in doing so, filled another aspect of his typology to Christ. The point being that, as Jesus does explicitly state in several places, His sheep belonged first to His Father and have been entrusted into His care. "These elect individuals though yet unsaved were nevertheless already in the Father's possession, purchased in anticipation. Those who were not in the Father's possession would not hear the Lord's voice because they were not his sheep, and therefore they did not come to him for salvation. Conversion does not appear to turn goats into sheep."¹⁰⁸ It must be noted that at no place in these passages do we read that these men and women and children belong to the Father on account of

¹⁰⁷ Custance; 137.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*; 151.

their 'foreseen faith.'¹⁰⁹ Jesus simply states that the elect belonged to the Father first and have been given to the Son to be called forth, to be redeemed.

Limited Atonement

The "L" of TULIP has without doubt been the most offensive to Arminians and most difficult to Calvinists. The thought that Jesus did not die for every human being in history seems inimical to the 'spirit' of Christianity, to the notion of a God who is Love. Modern evangelicalism especially desires a soteriology without limits, without distinctions; a Christ who died for all so that all might have the opportunity to be saved. Yet when faced with the corresponding remonstrance denying any specificity in Christ's death, the assembled theologians in Dordrecht responded with nine articles on this 'Second Main Point of Doctrine.' In these articles the Synod concluded that the worth of Jesus' death is undeniably infinite; Christ's blood being *sufficient* for the salvation of every human being ever born or to be born. The issue, however, centers on the *efficiency* of that blood – and in this respect both Arminian and Calvinistic Soteriology are limited. Article 7 of the Synod states,

For it was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of his Son's costly death should work itself out in all the elect, in order that God might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation. In other words, it was God's will that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; that Christ should grant them faith (which, like the Holy Spirit's other saving gifts, he acquired for them by his death). It was also God's will that Christ should cleanse them by his blood from all their sins, both original and actual, whether committed before or after their coming to faith; that he should faithfully preserve them to the very end; and that he should finally present them to himself, a glorious people, without spot or wrinkle.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ A logical refutation of the Arminian position stems from the nature of God as infallibly omniscient. If, as the Arminian teaches, God elects a sinner to salvation on the basis of foreseen faith, and because what God foresees, He foresees infallibly, then the sinner is 'bound' just as determinatively to believe as if his election were based solely on the inscrutable will of a sovereign God. God could not have mistakenly foreseen faith only to discover in time that the particular sinner in question chose not to believe. Rather is it the case, as John Calvin put it, 'God cannot foresee that which cannot be,' (unfortunately, the phrase doesn't rhyme in French).

¹¹⁰ [The Canons of Dort | Christian Reformed Church \(crcna.org\)](https://www.crcna.org/). Accessed 06February2022.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

The essence of this argument is that Christ's blood is 100% effective ('efficient') for those for whom it was shed; it failed in no single case to provide the redemption for which it was intended. The alternative, the Arminian position, is that Christ's blood having been intended for every man, woman, child in the world (at all times) *did not* achieve its goal. In other words, Christ's blood is limited for the Calvinist in respect of its *application*, whereas in the Arminian view it is limited in terms of its *effectiveness*. The only other position is that Christ's blood, being both intended for all and efficient for all, will bring about universal salvation. Though some have held this logical but erroneous conclusion, it is almost universally rejected by both Arminians and Calvinists alike. The point as to the effectiveness of Jesus' sacrifice touches the will and purpose of God, as well as the love of God: Is it conceivable that God should purpose the death of His Son yet fail to see the full accomplishment of His intent? Custance writes, "First of all, the view that Christ's sacrifice was intended for all would make much of that sacrifice pointless since so many do not in fact avail themselves of it; the triumph of the cross is fatally diminished if only a fragment of its original intention is actually to be realized."¹¹¹

The Arminian responds by saying that, since the death of Christ was intended only to make salvation available to be apprehended by the free will choice of man, it was fully effective, completely successful. This view is essentially that Jesus' death did not save anyone; it merely made salvation possible for everyone. Custance disagrees, "Christ did not die to make the salvation of all men possible; He died to make the salvation of the elect certain."¹¹² With this statement the Evangelist John would agree:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.
(10:11-15)

Jesus plainly limits His death as intercessory for *the sheep*. He immediately mentions '*other sheep*' that He has that are not of this fold, and later flatly declares that the

¹¹¹ Custance; 155.

¹¹² *Idem*.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

unbelieving Jews '*are not of My sheep.*' The inescapable conclusion, unless one is inclined to escape it for other reasons, is that Jesus knows those for whom He is going to lay down His life, and that the entire human race is not comprehended within that knowledge. Elsewhere, in Jesus' High Priestly prayer, the Lord expands on the theme of a 'targeted' group, the elect, as distinct from the whole human race.

I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. (17:9-10)

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word (17:20)

The second verse quoted could, of course, be interpreted as the sinner appropriating the benefits of Jesus intercession on account of his or her prior faith. Be that as it may (and the thrust of the Fourth Gospel has been that those who will believe are those who, owned by God from eternity past, have been given to the Son), it remains the case that neither Jesus' death nor the consequent intercession of both His blood and His prayers was ever intended for all mankind. "The scope of the atonement, then, is the scope of intercession."¹¹³ The implication of the doctrine of Limited or Definite Atonement is that God's love is not poured out on every human being in the world, in spite of the Arminian interpretation of John 3:16. While this is a difficult concept to comprehend, and even more difficult to explain to a generation convinced that 'love' is God's essential attribute, it still must follow that if "*love never fails*" then certainly divine love cannot fail. To argue that God's love does not fail in the case of a sinner who chooses not to benefit from it also does not hold water, as God's love must be as omnipotent as God Himself. If the *intention* of the divine love is the salvation of all mankind, and the *result* is less than the salvation of all mankind, the conclusion can only be that the divine love failed of its intention. "God's love would appear to be limited by the intention of the Atonement since the Atonement was in the final analysis the real demonstration of the scope of God's love."¹¹⁴ Although from his first epistle and not from the Fourth Gospel, John takes the same view, linking the divine love with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ,

¹¹³ White; 241.

¹¹⁴ Custance; 160.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (I John 3:16)

Total Depravity:

We have already seen that the third remonstrance, dealing with the fallen condition of all men, does not differ much from the position of Calvinism, at least not in writing. In practical application, however, it differs tremendously. This is due to the fact that, regardless of what the Arminian says concerning fallen man's inability to do anything 'good,' he still holds that the sinner is capable of repentance and faith, the ultimate 'good works.' *"What is the work of God? That you believe on Him whom He has sent."*¹¹⁵ In light of this error, the Synod of Dort responded with the Third Point of Doctrine, Article 3:

Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin. Without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform.¹¹⁶

In spite of the distinction made between those who are Jesus' sheep and those who are not, we must not conclude that those who will believe do so on account of anything within themselves that makes them to differ from those who will not believe. The natural, fallen human response to divine grace in any form, is unbelief. John establishes this foundational fact in the beginning of his gospel, as he outlines the natural response of the darkness to the Light.

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it... He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (1:5, 10-13)

And again in Chapter 3,

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light,

¹¹⁵ John 6:29

¹¹⁶ [The Canons of Dort | Christian Reformed Church \(crcna.org\)](http://crcna.org). Accessed 06February2022

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God. (3:18-21)

In the first passage, believers are spoken of as those who are born “*not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*” This is, of course, the new birth which forms the context of Chapter 3 and, hence, the second passage. There is perhaps no stronger verse in the New Testament concerning the total depravity of fallen man than John 3:3, “*Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” The condition of fallen man, therefore, is such that nothing short of a new birth will suffice to redeem him, something that startles Nicodemus as being impossible: “*How can a man who is old, enter again into his mother’s womb?*” But the Arminian would still conclude from this that faith, exercised by a fallen human being who must be born again, is the cause of that very regeneration. This, however, contradicts the earlier passage, in John 1, that states that those who believe are “*born...of God.*”

Irresistible Grace:

It is consistent with the Arminian system in defending the free will of man, that the grace of God cannot be the operative force in the sinner’s salvation; it must be ‘resistible.’ To this the theologians at Dordrecht responded that while rejection of the grace of God in the Gospel must and does remain the responsibility of the sinner, the motive force of conversion unto salvation belongs only to God through His Holy Spirit. Several articles in this Fourth Point of Doctrine address the Synod’s response to the coordinating remonstrance.

The fact that many who are called through the ministry of the gospel do not come and are not brought to conversion must not be blamed on the gospel, nor on Christ, who is offered through the gospel, nor on God, who calls them through the gospel and even bestows various gifts on them, but on the people themselves who are called. Some in self-assurance do not even entertain the Word of life; others do entertain it but do not take it to heart, and for that reason, after the fleeting joy of a temporary faith, they relapse; others choke the seed of the Word with the thorns of life’s cares and with the pleasures of the world and bring forth no fruits. This our Savior teaches in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13).

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

The fact that others who are called through the ministry of the gospel do come and are brought to conversion must not be credited to human effort, as though one distinguishes oneself by free choice from others who are furnished with equal or sufficient grace for faith and conversion (as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains). No, it must be credited to God: just as from eternity God chose his own in Christ, so within time God effectively calls them, grants them faith and repentance, and, having rescued them from the dominion of darkness, brings them into the kingdom of his Son, in order that they may declare the wonderful deeds of the One who called them out of darkness into this marvelous light, and may boast not in themselves, but in the Lord, as apostolic words frequently testify in Scripture.¹¹⁷

Irresistible Grace is also often referred to as the ‘Effectual Call’ of the Gospel to the elect. One of the key verses in support of the omnipotent grace of God to salvation is Psalm 110, where we read that God “*will make His people willing in the day of His power.*” Thus Custance writes, “the grace of God does not search for men who are willing to accept it...the grace of God *makes* men willing.”¹¹⁸ That the effectual call of the Gospel is irresistible is evident from both the teaching and the actions of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Fourth Gospel. For instance, in Chapter 5, Jesus speaks of the dead hearing the voice of the Son of God *and coming forth*, without apparent exception. This call is represented as twofold in that passage – one is the effectual call of the Gospel unto salvation, the second is the final call of the general resurrection, where the division of mankind will be made between eternal life and eternal damnation. What is evident in both is the omnipotent word of Jesus, to whose voice the dead will irresistibly come forth.

Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (5:25-29)

It is often argued that Calvinism teaches that God unfairly drags sinners ‘kicking and screaming’ into heaven. Of course, the notion of a redeemed sinner being unwilling is ludicrous, but not the biblical anthropology that all men in Adam *are unwilling* and are incapable of being otherwise. But sinners are not ‘kicking and screaming’; they are dead.

¹¹⁷ [The Canons of Dort | Christian Reformed Church \(crcna.org\)](http://www.crcna.org). Accessed 06February2022.

¹¹⁸ Custance; 133.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

“One reason why we view this as unfair is that we fail to realize that man unsaved is truly spiritually dead, and the dead are both unseeing and unhearing. It is a mistake to suppose that men actually do hear the voice of the Lord and honestly desire to respond affirmatively but are somehow unable to do so, as though they were actually willing but not allowed...Men hear *sounds* but do not recognize the significance of them. The message of the Gospel is a noise, not a communication, until God tunes the set of man’s heart.”¹¹⁹ Thus the Good Shepherd need not cajole His sheep to come follow Him, they do so because they recognize His voice.

To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. (10:3-5)

This is about to get a powerful confirmation in action in John 11, where Jesus calls forth Lazarus from the tomb, and the dead man obeys the call.

Perseverance of the Saints:

Of the five points of Calvinism this is the one that everyone wants to agree with, though the more logically consistent Arminian will withstand the temptation of the comfort that this point brings, and hold that true believers can lose their salvation. But the ‘five points,’ though by no means a comprehensive statement of Christian doctrine, nevertheless stand or fall together; they are a doctrinal *system* with each point intertwined within the others. This final “P” flows with inexorable logic from the other four points. While it is indeed a very comforting doctrine, that comfort would be deception unless the doctrine were biblical. But when we turn to the Scriptures, what we find is that we ought to be talking about the *preservation* of the saints rather than their *perseverance*. Cushman writes, “should we not then speak rather of the *Preservation* of the Saints than of the *Perseverance*, for must it not be that God preserves rather than the believer perseveres?”¹²⁰ In reality, the believer perseveres because God preserves (*cp.* Phil. 2:12-13). This is exactly what the assembled theologians at Dordrecht concluded:

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*; 292.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*; 191.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Because of these remnants of sin dwelling in them and also because of the temptations of the world and Satan, those who have been converted could not remain standing in this grace if left to their own resources. But God is faithful, mercifully strengthening them in the grace once conferred on them and powerfully preserving them in it to the end.¹²¹

Thus we see that, while the Canons of Dort did not in any way teach sinless perfection as attainable in this life, nor did they minimize the need for the believer's obedience in the way of sanctification, yet they saw that the entire structure of biblical salvation was dependent upon divine grace from first to last. And yet again we find the doctrine amply supported within John's Gospel, not least here in the Good Shepherd discourse.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.
(10:27-29)

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.
(6:44)

Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward."
(13:36)

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.
(14:1-3)

Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.
(17:11-15)

¹²¹ [The Canons of Dort | Christian Reformed Church \(crcna.org\)](http://crcna.org). Accessed 07February2022.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

This last passage is most poignant in that it represents the heart of the One who *“having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”*¹²² About to ‘lay down His life for the sheep,’ Jesus entrusts the care of His flock to His Father – perhaps only for the time that He descends into the grave, but probably also even after He ‘takes His life up again.’ In John 11 Jesus says that the Father always hears Him; who could think that the Father would refuse to hear this prayer in John 17? Those who cavil at ‘perseverance’ do so because they consider salvation to be a cooperative, synergistic affair between God and man. Those who understand the biblical doctrine of salvation know it to be both the work and the glory of God, and certainly not of man. God will not share His glory with another; nor will the Good Shepherd.

¹²² John 13:1

Week 4: The Raising of Lazarus

Text Reading: John 11:1-54

*“He arms himself for war upon the enemy,
who came to meet him in Lazarus’ death.”*
(Christoph Luthardt)

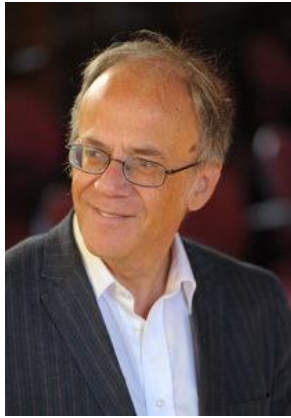
John 11 brings us that last of the seven miracles or signs that John records of Jesus’ earthly ministry. That there were many other such events that John might have included is made explicit in the closing statement of the main body of the Gospel,

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)

There might be something stylistic in the selection of seven of Jesus’ signs; seven is a biblical number of completeness and John evidently felt that these particular signs were sufficient to record in order to prove that Jesus is the Christ and to bring about belief in Him, if the source of saving faith were solely within the miracles. Put in terms of the Good Shepherd discourse, we may say that these signs were evidence of the Good Shepherd’s voice, sufficiently clear to all of His sheep, that they may hear His voice, believe, and follow Him. There is a common denominator among these seven signs recorded in the Fourth Gospel, and unique variations to each one. Common among them is the manifestation of the divine power over all things associated with this Creation and with human life. If the two attributes of Jesus that John wanted to show in unmistakable terms are *the fact that Jesus is the Christ* and *the fact that He is the Son of God*, these seven signs were more than adequate to the task. As the miracle of raising Lazarus from the tomb presents us with the end of John’s record of Jesus’ miraculous works, it may be of some use to briefly review the previous six here.

The first miracle recorded in the Fourth Gospel is, of course, the turning of water into wine at the wedding in Cana. The evident meaning of this miracle was to show the coming of the One who would bring ‘new wine’ to Israel, a feast to the children of God of

*“well-refined wines on the lees.”*¹²³ The synoptic gospels record Jesus’ parabolic teaching concerning putting new wine in old wineskins; Cana was the living parable of the new wine of the Messianic age. The miracle also showed the divinity of Jesus, as it was in His



Richard Bauckham (b. 1946)

power to change the elemental structure of the water into wine. Jesus is *the Christ* and He is *the Son of God*. Anglican biblical scholar Richard Bauckham notes that the changing of the water into wine at Cana was an example of the abundance of blessing that Jesus brings, foreshadowing the *“abundance of life”* promised in the Good Shepherd discourse. Bauckham writes, “It is significant that the first of Jesus’ signs (2:1-11) does more than

meet a need. Running out of wine at a wedding feast would certainly be a serious source of social humiliation for the family, but Jesus does much more than solve a problem for them. The quantity and the quality of the wine that he provides are far in excess of need...The miracle points to the greater enhancement of life to which Jesus refers when he says that he came ‘that they may have life, and have it abundantly.’”¹²⁴

The second ‘attesting miracle’ recorded is the healing of the son of the official from Capernaum, recorded in Chapter 4. Not much detail is given to this event, except for Jesus’ comment that *“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.”*¹²⁵ This statement sets the stage for the ongoing conflict between Jesus and ‘the Jews’ who will oppose and even try to stone Him, in spite of the many signs He does in their sight. As for the nobleman, his son is healed just from Jesus’ word, and the nobleman and his whole household believe. All in all, however, the miracle seems to be almost a throw-away – Jesus simply says the word and the child is healed. Not so the third miracle which, in John’s narration, has the feel of a divine appointment. The healing of the man who had been *“thirty-eight years in his sickness”* at the Pool of Bethesda, occurs on a Sabbath day, and therefore is a shot across the Pharisees’ bow. The healing of the man on the Sabbath intensifies the Jews’ hatred of Jesus, *“For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more*

¹²³ Isaiah 25:6

¹²⁴ Bauckham, Richard *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 2015); 72.

¹²⁵ John 4:48

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

to kill Him.”¹²⁶ But it also gave the context for one of the longer discourses that John records from Jesus’ teaching, one that includes the powerful reference to the two resurrections (*cp.* 5:25-29). In this discourse we find for the first time Jesus essentially equating Himself with the Father who sent Him. In keeping with the general purpose for which John includes the signs and miracles of Jesus, this discourse contains the various ‘witnesses’ to Jesus’ identity and purpose, the most important (and, really, the only important one) being the Father Himself (*cp.* 5:31-47).

The fourth and fifth signs are similar to the first one in the sense that they show Jesus’ power over the forces of nature. The fourth sign is the feeding of the five thousand and the fifth is Jesus walking on the water, both recorded in John 6. Each sign is a challenge to Jesus’ disciples to *believe* in Him, and in the narrative of each the disciples exhibit their dullness of understanding. Philip, when questioned by Jesus as to how they would find enough food to feed the gathered multitude, answered for all of the disciples, *“Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.”*¹²⁷ And when Jesus was seen by the disciples, walking on the lake near the boat in which they were traveling, *“they were frightened.”*¹²⁸ After these two miraculous events, the crowd of people who had been fed by Jesus serve to illustrate the insufficiency of miracles to bring a sinner to faith and salvation,

Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” (6:26-27)

The sixth miracle is the healing of the man born blind, recorded in John 9 as the bookend to the healing of the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda. In John’s narrative, Jesus is actually not the main character of the story, though He is ever present as one reads of the healed man’s interrogation by the religious leaders and his eventual expulsion from the synagogue. In a sense, this episode illustrates the maturity of faith even though the healed man had not previously been a disciple of Jesus. Again, in keeping with John’s

¹²⁶ John 5:15

¹²⁷ John 6:7

¹²⁸ John 6:19

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

overall purpose for including these signs only and not all of the attesting miracles that Jesus had done, we hear the healed man arguing with the Pharisees, *"Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He has opened my eyes..."*¹²⁹ What Jesus did for this man was sufficient for him not only to see physically, but to 'see' the Son of Man, and to believe and worship (cp. 9:35-38).

The miracle of healing the man born blind, and the subsequent adding of that man to Jesus' flock after he had been excommunicated by the Pharisees, leads directly to the Good Shepherd discourse of John 10. And the Good Shepherd discourse leads directly to the seventh recorded miracle, the raising of Lazarus. This seventh sign is the emphatic exhibition of Jesus' words, *"I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly,"* and *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish..."* The Good Shepherd discourse is the doctrine behind Jesus' words in John 11, *"I am the resurrection and the life,"* and the raising of Lazarus – after the point at which corruption had set in – becomes the epitome of those attesting signs that prove the Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Hoskyns notes that the raising of Lazarus is *"recorded as the supreme climax of the manifestation of the power of Jesus to the Jews."*¹³⁰

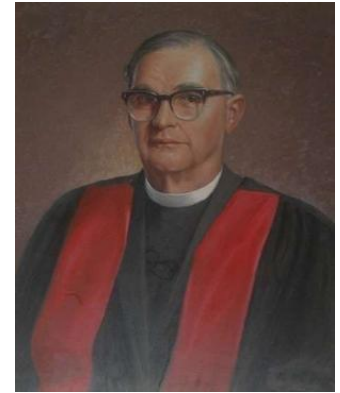
Of course, being as important an event as it is in the ministry of Jesus, the raising of Lazarus cannot be without detractors among the modern critics. For instance, it is not recorded in any of the synoptic gospels, a fact which, to a Higher Critic, almost automatically means that the story is a fabrication. As with most of the higher criticism, however, this charge is without merit. As remarkable as the raising of Lazarus is, it does not differ materially from the raising of Jairus' daughter – recorded by all three synoptics but not John – or that of the son of the widow of Nain – recorded only by Luke. Indeed, the raising of the dead was to be a sign of the coming Messiah, as Jesus Himself noted when disciples of the Baptist had come to Him to ask if He was the Expected One,

And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." (Matthew 11:2-6)

¹²⁹ John 9:30

¹³⁰ Hoskyns; 396.

Perhaps the reason for the inclusion of the raising of Lazarus in the Fourth Gospel, and its exclusion from the Synoptics, is the geographical emphasis of each. The Synoptics focus mainly on Jesus Galilean ministry, whereas the Fourth Gospel emphasizes particularly Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem. Hence, as Morris writes, "We must also remember that the miracles in Jerusalem form no part of the Synoptic tradition. Not only this one, but those concerning the lame man at Bethesda and the blind man at Siloam are not mentioned in the Synoptics. For whatever reason they treat only of the last week at Jerusalem and omit all that goes before."¹³¹



Leon Morris (1914-2006)

Another, much older, interpretation of the narrative of John 11 is to incorporate the view that Jesus certainly could not have known more than one Lazarus in His life and therefore the Lazarus raised here in John 11 must be the same poor beggar who sat outside the rich man's gate. The same subterfuge is attempted with Mary, conflating her with Mary Magdalene. The folly of this sort of exegesis should be obvious: 'Lazarus' is simply a shortened form of Eleazar, a very common Jewish name since the days of Aaron, whose third son was named Eleazar. That Mary was a very common name in Second Temple Judea should go without saying. Thus Westcott, a very notable Hebrew scholar of his day, notes, "All the attempts to identify Lazarus with the person in the parable or with the rich young man are quite baseless. It may also be added that the identification of Mary with Mary Magdalene is a mere conjecture supported by no direct evidence, and opposed to the general tenour [sic] of the Gospels."¹³²

One final association has been made in the history of interpretation of this passage, that of Simon the Leper at whose house in Bethany Jesus' head was anointed by an unnamed woman. This narrative, recorded in Matthew and Mark, is very similar to that which is recorded by John in Chapter 12,

¹³¹ Morris; 535-36.

¹³² Westcott; 164.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. (12:2-3)

Early exegesis linked these events together as one, placing them at the home of a Pharisee, Simon the leper. One theory, expounded at least by Gregory the Great, was that Martha had married Simon and brought both her sister Mary and her poverty-stricken brother, Lazarus, to live with them in Bethany.¹³³ The problem with this view is that Simon is not mentioned in the Johannine narratives involving Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Furthermore, it equates the Lazarus of the parable with the Lazarus of Bethany, a convenient but baseless interpretation. The only real connection is the *spikenard*, which was a common oil used by the wealthy in the process of anointing a body for burial because of its strong aroma.

He Whom Jesus Loved (11:1-15)

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him." (11:1-15)

Jesus has departed from the area around Jerusalem due to the hostility of the Jewish leaders. While He is in the area of the Jordan where John had first baptized, He receives word that "*he whom You love is sick.*" This reference to Lazarus is both in keeping with the theme of this final section of the Fourth Gospel (*cp.* 13:1) and a subtle entreaty on the part of Lazarus' sisters to bid the Master hurry to their brother's sickbed. That Jesus loved Lazarus is evident in the narrative, as even the crowd gathered at the tomb note, "*See how*

¹³³ Luthardt; 397.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

He loved him" (vs. 36). Bringing this fact to the forefront, John emphasizes the actual behavior of Jesus, which is to stay put for an additional two days. Similar to the other miracles (and requests for miracles) involving family and close friends, Jesus once again answers only to His Father's will. "John means us to see Jesus as moved by no external forces, but solely by His determination to do the will of God."¹³⁴ This does not diminish Jesus' love for Lazarus and the two sisters (or for His mother, in the case of the wedding at Cana), but it does highlight that no earthly attachment could lay claim upon Jesus' actions – nothing could sway Him from listening only to His Father's voice, and acting only in accordance with His Father's will. The previous miracle narratives both in John and in the Synoptics have taught us that Jesus did not need to be present in order to heal (Jairus' daughter), nor did death offer the least hindrance to His power (the widow's son). He could have sent the messenger back to Bethany with the words, "Your master, Lazarus, lives." But He did not. In fact, He not only stays where He is for another two days, He makes a seemingly incorrect statement to His disciples regarding Lazarus' condition, *"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."*

If Jesus was staying in the region of the Jordan nearest Jericho, as seems evident from 10:40, the travel time to Bethany, southeast of Jerusalem, would have been approximately one day's walk. Given that when Jesus finally arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has been buried four days, it is evident that he died shortly after the messenger was sent to Jesus and was already dead when Jesus first heard the sisters' plea. But, as we shall see in the narrative, the delay of two days was necessary for Jesus in order to fully show the glory of the Father through Himself, that the Father *"always hears"* the Son's prayers. Jesus' last miracle before His own death will leave no doubt to any believer of His divine power over death itself. "He arms himself for war upon the enemy, who came to meet him in Lazarus' death."¹³⁵

Jesus' disciples, even at this late hour, still do not understand the One with whom they have been associated these past three years. Jesus' words are just as much a riddle to them as they have always been. When He says that Lazarus' illness is not unto death, they

¹³⁴ Morris; 540.

¹³⁵ Luthardt; 428.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

assume that Lazarus will live. When He tells them that Lazarus has fallen asleep, they take the words literally and conclude that sleep will help their friend recover. But, of course, Jesus is using the word 'sleep' in the more prosaic, and biblical, meaning of death. The word, *koimetarion* (κοιμητέριον), is the root word for the English 'cemetery,' – a place of sleep - due to its frequent usage in the ancient world in reference to the dead. Assuming, however, that Lazarus is literally asleep and not dead, as Jesus meant, the disciples are both surprised and concerned that Jesus wishes to return to the area around Jerusalem, as the Jews were still on the warpath against Him. *"The disciples said to Him, 'Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?'"* Again Jesus returns to His *modus operandi*, the will of the Father, and the key statement to the entire chapter in terms of Jesus' actions.

Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." (11:9-10)

There are several ways of interpreting this phrase; each somewhat coordinate to the other. In the first place, Jesus is speaking generally about acting according to the light one knows, as He says elsewhere concerning the light within a man,

The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matthew 6:22-23)

The figure of speech that Jesus uses is one that meant more in His day than in our modern world of almost uninterrupted light – the day was truly guided by the light of the Sun, and the night (especially in a New Moon) was very dark indeed. Analogously, if a man walks according to the will of God, he will not stumble. This applies supremely to Jesus, who always and only did the will of His Father. So, secondly, this aphorism also means that Jesus is making no mistake in heading back into harm's way – for no harm can befall Him before His work (His 'day') is finished. "If this will gives us light, we shall make no false steps. Thus the disciples are to be assured that Jesus acts rightly in going to Bethany; for he follows the will of the Father who appoints him his calling; the time of his

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

vocation is not yet at an end.”¹³⁶ Lapidé adds, paraphrastically, “with equal certainty the time of My life is fixed by God the Father, in which I have to live and do the works which I have been sent to perform. This therefore I call the day; and in this I have no danger to fear from the Jews for Myself or for you, nor can I be slain before the time foreordained for Me by My Father; that is, before the setting and night of My life shall come.”¹³⁷

This phrase, however, was not intended by Jesus to apply solely to Himself. He speaks in general terms because the truth contained in the saying – and perfectly manifested in His own actions – applies no less to His disciples; really, to all men. “If a man walk apart from Him, he stumbles as in the night, because he has no light abiding in him.”¹³⁸ Morris summarizes both points,

The disciples need not fear to go up with Him, because He cannot die before the appointed time, and there is still a little time left. There will also be the thought that to be with Him is to be in the light, and the next verse brings out the reverse – if they are away from Him they will certainly stumble in the darkness.¹³⁹

Jesus then tells the disciples plainly of Lazarus’ death, with the enigmatic statement, “*I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe.*” The raising of Lazarus is the last miracle that John records, and certainly one of the last miracles that Jesus performs prior to His death. If we may use the word reverently, this particular sign has been so orchestrated by the Father as to dispel any lingering doubt there may be in any of the disciples as to the identity of their Rabbi (though even it will be insufficient to alter the course of Judas Iscariot). To this purpose, then, it was imperative that Jesus *not* go to Lazarus at once, or even to speak the word of healing to the messenger. Had Jesus been in Bethany before Lazarus passed, Lazarus would not have died. Bengel writes, “It is beau-



J. A. Bengel (1687-1752)

¹³⁶ Luthardt; 406.

¹³⁷ Lapidé; 360.

¹³⁸ Hoskyns; 400.

¹³⁹ Morris; 541.

tifully consonant with Divine propriety, that no one is ever read of as having died whilst the Prince of life was present.”¹⁴⁰ Luthardt adds, “This does indeed imply that if Jesus had been in Bethany, Lazarus would not have died. But this would have been less because he could not have resisted the prayers of the sisters, than because death could not have touched his friend in the presence of Him the personal life.”¹⁴¹

Ye of Little Faith (11:16-27)

Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.” So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” (11:16-27)

One can almost hear the disciples, and Martha, and Mary, crying out as the father of the demon-possessed child once had, “Lord, I believe; help me in my unbelief!” The centerpiece of this section is the centerpiece of the entire passage: “I am the resurrection and the life.” But surrounding this glorious statement is little but unbelief – weak faith struggling to believe, holding desperately to the right doctrine – but mostly unbelief. The section is bracketed by Thomas’ morose words, “Let us go that we may die with him” and the

¹⁴⁰ Bengel, John Albert *Gnomon of the New Testament: Volume II* (Philadelphia: Smith, English, and Co.; 1840); 302. It may be noted that even at the crucifixion, Jesus dies before the two thieves.

¹⁴¹ Luthardt; 410.

carping of some of the Jews, *“Could not this man...have kept this man from dying?”* As to the first comment, many commentators think that Thomas is speaking bravely of dying with Jesus, since His life is indeed in danger back in Jerusalem. Whitacre writes, *“This is the response of a true disciple. Just as Peter sticks with Jesus even though he does not understand what Jesus is talking about regarding eating his flesh and drinking his blood, so Thomas is willing to go with Jesus to death...Here is an incredible picture of faith.”*¹⁴² But the more natural reading, Jesus having just told the disciples that Lazarus had died, is that Thomas was expressing both his grief at Lazarus’ death as well as his lack of faith in what Jesus was going to do. The latter comment about Jesus being able to keep Lazarus from dying, is simply the ongoing unbelief of the Jews which will culminate in their taunts of Jesus on the cross: *“He saved others, let Him save Himself.”*

John repeats one very significant piece of data in the narrative: that Lazarus has been dead four days (vss. 17 & 39). It was widely believed that the corruption of the corpse did not occur until after the third day, when the soul was said to have finally departed from the body. In the practical matter of identifying a corpse, the Mishnah specifies that it must be done within three days: *“Evidence of the identity of a corpse may be given only during the first three days after death.”*¹⁴³ Morris quotes the *Rabbah* for Leviticus 18:1, *“For three days the soul hovers over the body, intending to re-enter it, but as soon as it sees its appearance change, it departs.”*¹⁴⁴ This corresponds to the promise regarding the Messiah, *“Thou wilt not let Thy Holy One see decay,”* indicating, as Jesus then teaches, that His own body would not be in the tomb more than three days. The connection between the raising of Lazarus and Jesus’ own resurrection is quite strong. *“That which happens to Lazarus is a prophecy in reference to Christ himself.”*¹⁴⁵

In between the unbelief of Thomas and the unbelief of the Jews, we find the unsteady faith of Martha. Her faith has undoubtedly been shaken by her brother’s death, considering their closeness to Jesus and His reputation for healing, *“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”* Yet her faith in Jesus glimmers dimly, *“Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”* We see in the sequel that Martha

¹⁴² Whitacre; 283.

¹⁴³ Yebamoth 16:3

¹⁴⁴ Morris; 546.

¹⁴⁵ Luthardt; 399.

herself did not quite know what it was she was saying, what is was she was expecting from Jesus. Her dialogue with Jesus indicates that she sees Him yet as a powerful intermediary between man and God, but not yet as God Himself. When it came time for Jesus to perform what He intended with regard to Lazarus, it was Martha who vigorously remonstrated with Him, *“Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.”* To her, the removal of the stone was an indignity; she had not yet the faith that she would have. Jacobus writes, *“It is certainly a great stretch of her faith, that ventures to think of Christ’s prayer or power as going beyond death and the grave. And yet she thinks of Him only as prevailing with the Father, and not as having the power in Himself. High thoughts and poor thoughts of Christ these might seem to be.”*¹⁴⁶ Hoskyns adds, *“She seems to regard Him as a virtuous man powerful in prayer.”*¹⁴⁷

But Jesus meets Martha where she is, as He does with Thomas and the other disciples, to nurture her faith through the miracle He knows He is about to perform. In what Carson calls *“A masterpiece of planned ambiguity,”*¹⁴⁸ Jesus challenges her in regard to her dead brother, *“Your brother shall rise again,”* to which she answers appropriately for a Pharisaic Jew, *“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”* Her doctrine is solid, but it affords her little comfort at this time. Indeed, she is in danger of her doctrine getting in the way of her faith in Jesus. *“Martha acknowledges the doctrine of a resurrection, as an object of remote belief; as something of general but not of personal interest, and therefore powerless in the present bereavement.”*¹⁴⁹ Jesus’ response to her brings her mind from the abstract hope of a future resurrection, to the concrete faith in the One who *is* the resurrection Himself. Carson notes, *“Jesus’ concern is to divert Martha’s focus from an abstract belief in what takes place on the last day, to a personalized belief in him who alone can provide it.”*¹⁵⁰ Luthardt adds, *“To her Lazarus still remained withdrawn beyond Jesus, for she knew of the latter as in life, of the former as in death.*

¹⁴⁶ Jacobus; 201.

¹⁴⁷ Hoskyns; 402.

¹⁴⁸ Carson; 412.

¹⁴⁹ Westcott; 168.

¹⁵⁰ *Idem.*

Hence Jesus must show to her that Lazarus is not lost to Him, that communion with Him is not destroyed by death, and that even in this sense also He is the life in death.”¹⁵¹

I Am the Resurrection and the Life

Another of the trademark ‘I Am’ statements recorded in the Fourth Gospel, this one is perhaps the pinnacle of Jesus’ self-awareness and self-attestation. He does not say, “*I give the Resurrection and I give Life,*” but rather that these two inseparably related concepts are who He is. “Christ in the fulness of His Person does not simply work the Resurrection and give life: He is both.”¹⁵² He speaks this as the Incarnate God, and before His own resurrection, because in taking on human flesh He has united the essential and eternal Life of the Creator to the form of the Creation. His Life is not derived but eternal, and therefore the life He imparts to His own flesh is immortal. It is the all-conquering Life which triumphs over death, and thus is also essentially the Resurrection. “The present εἰμί (*eimi* – ‘I am’) expresses that which is true of him essentially, and therefore at all times, now as well as in the future: the resurrection and the life.”¹⁵³

That Life is the essential characteristic of the God-Man explains how Jesus was able to say, in the previous discourse, that He both lays down His own life (for no one can take life from the One who is Life in Himself) and takes life up again. The death of Christ, therefore, was not a matter in doubt until the third day; there could be no conceivable universe or dimension in which the prince of death could hold the Prince of Life in his grip. Martha thinks of the resurrection as future; Jesus exhorts her (and all believers) to see it as present in Him, even before His own. The implication for Martha and for all who believe in Jesus Christ is evident: they are joined to Him who is Life, and therefore He gives to them Life eternal and Life abundant – the ‘first’ resurrection of John 5,

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself...
(John 5:24-26)

¹⁵¹ Luthardt; 417.

¹⁵² Westcott; 168.

¹⁵³ Luthardt; 418.

"He who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live." This statement refers to Lazarus in the immediate context, but to all believers both in Jesus' day and throughout the centuries since. This perspective of the resurrection is critical to a biblical understanding of the Christian life, for far too often believers also put off the resurrection to some future date (when, indeed, the physical resurrection will occur) and thus fail to comprehend the spiritual resurrection that has already taken place. "This transcends the Pharisaic view of a remote resurrection at the end of time. It means that the moment a man puts his trust in Jesus he begins to experience that life of the age to come which cannot be touched by death."¹⁵⁴ Thus those who believe in Jesus, as Lazarus evidently did, do not 'die' in the sense that their life is removed from God; they continue to live on until the day they will be reunited with their incorruptible bodies at the final resurrection. The dead in Christ "shall live still, live on even through that change, and not resume life at some later time."¹⁵⁵

Two thoughts here cross each other. First the general Christian truth, according to which physical death is trivial and irrelevant. Jesus is the Resurrection, because He is the Life. Through faith in Jesus Christians possess eternal life. Secondly, in the context of the narrative Lazarus will be brought back to life, though he is dead.¹⁵⁶

This is fundamental to the Christian (and biblical) view of both life and death. Death is not the cessation of life; it is the removal of the soul from the merciful grace of God – God's holy judgment against sin without the mitigating grace of redemption through Jesus Christ. Death is what fallen man is born into; it is not the end of life. Life, therefore, does not 'end' with physical death for the one who is in Christ, for His eternal Life is transferred to every sheep He calls forth, *"My sheep hear My voice...and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish."* (10:27-28).

"Do you believe this?" Jesus asks – almost *demand*s – of Martha. We hear from her the echo of the demoniac's father, *"Lord, I believe; help me in my unbelief."* Martha's answer is, however, solid: she confesses Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God who has come into the

¹⁵⁴ Morris; 550.

¹⁵⁵ Westcott; 169.

¹⁵⁶ Hoskyns; 402.

world. Her answer reflects not intellectual understanding of all that Jesus has told her; it is doubtful that she possessed that. It reflects her deeply held trust that this Man is the Messiah; He is the Son of God. If He says thus-and-so about Resurrection and Life, it is sufficient that He is the Messiah, the Son of God. What Jesus said to Martha has challenged the minds of great theologians and philosophers for millennia, and sadly many of them could not answer Jesus as she did. There is little doubt that Peter did not understand what Jesus meant when He discoursed about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, but Peter knew enough to respond, *"To whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."* (6:68-69).

Jesus Wept (11:28-27)

And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there." Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" (11:28-37)

Martha returns to the family home to bring her sister Mary to see Jesus, and Mary's first words to Him are the same as were Martha's. But Jesus does not reiterate the discussion with Mary that He had just had with Martha; now is the time for action. This passage is famous, of course, for containing the shortest verse in the Bible: *Jesus wept*. But that short verse is as enigmatic as any passage in the whole Gospel; *why* did Jesus weep? Even the Jews gathered at the tomb were perplexed: some seeing Jesus' tears as a sign of the depth of His love for the deceased, others wondering why the man who had healed so many others did not intervene to heal this man that he allegedly loved so much. And why would Jesus weep over the death of Lazarus, knowing as He did that He was about to bring His friend back to life? It is possible, of course, that Jesus is weeping not over the specific death of Lazarus but over death in general, and the heartache and grief that it causes human beings. "Since in Christian thought death and sin are inseparable, many

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

commentators have seen in the grief of Jesus at the death of Lazarus an all-embracing sorrow over human sin which is the cause of suffering and death.”¹⁵⁷ Whitacre points out that the verb translated ‘weep’ in verse 35 is not the same as is used to describe the ‘wailing’ of the mourners, “He does not wail (*klaiō*) like them. Rather, he weeps (*dakryō*), that is, sheds tears. He is not in anguish over the death of Lazarus, but rather sadden by the pain and sadness they feel. He is weeping with those who weep because he loves them.”¹⁵⁸

But not all commentators take this approach, that Jesus was weeping in sadness over sin and death in general, or because of the evident sadness of Mary and Martha. Interpreting Jesus’ response within the context of the narrative requires seeing this short verse as bracketed by two other phrases – one in verse 33 and the other in verse 38.

When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews...also weeping,

He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled... (11:33)

...Jesus wept... (11:35)

Jesus therefore again being deeply moved within... (11:38)

The phrase in verse 33, that Jesus *was deeply moved* is also correctly rendered ‘groaned’ in spirit. Morris points out that “The verb rendered ‘groaned’ is an unusual one. It signifies a loud inarticulate noise, and its proper use appears to be for the snorting of horses. When used of men it usually denotes anger.”¹⁵⁹ The same word is repeated in verse 38, thus signifying that the entire situation has roused Jesus to a deep, emotional response. However, we must not assume that the Lord’s reaction to the event at hand is of the same nature, or due to the same cause, as the grief displayed by Lazarus’ sisters and the mourners. It is not that they wept “*as those who have no hope,*” for they did have the hope of the resurrection. But, being who He is and knowing what He was about to do, Jesus could not grieve as they did. Jesus’ weeping was called forth by the same event – Lazarus’ death – that motivated the wailing of the sisters and their friends, but Jesus’

¹⁵⁷ Hoskyns; 404.

¹⁵⁸ Whitacre; 289.

¹⁵⁹ Morris; 556.

weeping did not have the same inner spring as theirs did. “The feeling is called out by something seen in another which moved to anger rather than to sorrow.”¹⁶⁰

This is not to say that Jesus was not touched by the feelings of those He came to save; He most certainly was. The most poignant messianic prophecy of the Old Testament leaves no doubt as to the fellow-feeling that Christ shares with His own, in a passage that sheds tremendous light on Jesus’ behavior at Lazarus’ tomb:

*He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.* (Isaiah 53:3-4)

It is possible that, in light of this governing prophecy as to the life and emotions of the Messiah, His response at this time is the culmination of His mission which is about to be fulfilled on the cross. The entire event, as we have noted, has been foreordained and divinely orchestrated to validate supremely Jesus’ previous claims to “*have life in Himself*.” It is also intended to point toward that other enigmatic saying He just uttered in the Good Shepherd discourse, “*I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it up again; this command I have received from My Father*.” It is entirely off the mark to interpret the raising of Lazarus as just another wonderful miracle that Jesus performed, or to see in it only the intense love of Jesus to His. It is both of these things, and much more. Fundamentally it is the harbinger of His own death, and His resurrection. Indeed, by raising Lazarus from the dead Jesus is, as it were, sealing His own fate inasmuch as the Jews were concerned.

But it was not the Jews that concerned Jesus, it was the prince of death, the devil. This will come to the fore in Jesus’ more intimate discussions with His disciples on the even of His own death, “*I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me*.”¹⁶¹ It was to this conflict that the death of Lazarus, and Jesus’ raising of him, pointed. Indeed, this particular miracle was, as it were, the first blow of the final conflict that would culminate at Golgotha and the empty tomb. “To this is to be added the fact that the fate of Lazarus had for Jesus a more general meaning and was a

¹⁶⁰ Westcott; 170.

¹⁶¹ John 14:30

reminder of the entire activity of the prince of death.”¹⁶² Earlier in this commentary, Luthardt seems to capture the essence of Jesus’ groaning and weeping, “he arms himself to war upon the enemy, who came to meet him in Lazarus’ death.”¹⁶³

Lazarus, Come Forth! (11:38-44)

Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.” Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.” (11:38-44)

The emotion of the Son of Man is graphically manifest in these passages – Jesus “again groaning in Himself,” approaches the tomb of Lazarus. This is too much for simply the death of His friend, for not only did He know that He was about to raise Lazarus from the grave, He had already brought people back from the dead. It is not merely Lazarus’ tomb that Jesus approaches, it is death itself and death as He is soon to undergo it. The closer Jesus gets to Golgotha, the more troubled His soul becomes. Notice the emotional progression – essentially John’s narrative of Jesus’ deep emotion building to Gethsemane.

*Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He **groaned** in the spirit and was **troubled** in Himself.* (11:33)

*Then Jesus, again **groaning** in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.* (11:38)

*Now My soul is **troubled**, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour.* (12:27)

*When Jesus had said these things, He was **troubled** in spirit, and testified and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.”* (13:21)

These two words – *groaning* and *troubled* – are strong words in the Greek. The first,

¹⁶² Luthardt; 429.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*; 428.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

according to A. T. Robertson, is an old verb combination that means 'to short like a horse.'¹⁶⁴ The second word indicates strong agitation, and is in the middle voice: *He agitated Himself*, or *was agitated within Himself*. Jesus is deeply affected by His approach to death, and not for the reason that many commentators have deduced. Robertson, for example, has Jesus 'struggling for self-control' and quotes with approbation



A T Robertson (1863-1934)

Marcus Dods, "His sympathy with the weeping sister and the wailing crowd caused this deep emotion."¹⁶⁵ The idea of Jesus sharing in the sorrow of the bereaved is touching, and there is no doubt that, as noted above, He "*has born our grief and carried our sorrows*," but He has done so in a way that no man ever has: as a perfect, sinless man – and as God Himself – taking upon Himself, even *becoming*, sin. The agony of this approaching transformation – *He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf* – is the root cause of these powerful expressions of grief and sorrow, not merely the sadness of the death of Lazarus, or of death generally considered. Even Robertson sees that Jesus' emotional outbursts are the fulfillment of the prophetic word in Psalm 6 and Psalm 22,

*O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure.
Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am weak; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled.
My soul also is **greatly troubled**; but You, O LORD – how long?* (Psalm 6:1-3)

*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me,
And from the words of My **groaning**?
O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent.* (Psalm 22:1-2)

Death is the event to which Jesus is inexorably headed, and this means the ultimate conflict with the enemy of God, the 'ruler of this world.' Jesus knows that by raising Lazarus from the grave He is, humanly speaking, sealing His own fate. John will narrate in this very passage the determined plan of the Sanhedrin to kill Jesus, a plan brought to solidity through this particular miracle. "Thus, by giving life to Lazarus, Jesus has sealed his own death. In what follows we see the even greater irony that through his death come

¹⁶⁴ Robertson, Archibald Thomas *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press; 1932); 202.

¹⁶⁵ *Idem*.

life for the world.”¹⁶⁶ But it is a tremendous error to conceive of Jesus approaching death calmly and dispassionately. Luthardt considers Jesus’ strong emotions caused not only by the death of Lazarus, or even death in general, but “that...he who has the power of death, should possess and exercise such power, and be able to cause such suffering. “It is the most human sympathy, but in the shape of anger against this power of opposition to life, this power which in all its convulsing strength here meets him at the threshold of his own death.”¹⁶⁷ This seems to be the interpretation best suited to the whole counsel of Scripture,

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

(Hebrews 2:14-15)

The raising of Lazarus itself is almost anticlimactic: Jesus wakens Lazarus from the dead as if His friend were merely asleep, though he had been in the tomb four days. The miracle was no stretch of effort for the Prince of Life, but it was a torment of soul and mind. But even in the midst of His inner turmoil, Jesus does not act apart from the will of the Father, and the key point in the miracle is really not Jesus’ famous words, “*Lazarus, come forth!*” but the prayer that He prays before the act. Prayers to His Father in the presence of His disciples will become a central part of His remaining days spent with them, those few days for them to finally and firmly see that He is who He says He is. John may have written all of these things down so that *we* may believe, but Jesus prayed these prayers so that *John* – and his fellow disciples – might believe. “*And I know that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me.*”¹⁶⁸

Jesus’ prayers, like the one recorded here in John 11, are, of course, *model* prayers. But not in the sense normally taken: they are not ‘models’ in the sense that believers are to imitate the form or the words. Rather Jesus models the essence of prayer as the ascertaining of and conforming to the will of the Father. Westcott writes in a helpful general comment on Christian prayer,

¹⁶⁶ Whitacre; 298.

¹⁶⁷ Luthardt; 427-28.

¹⁶⁸ John 11:42

This passage may help to an understanding of the true nature of prayer in the case of the Lord, as being the conscious realization of the divine will, and not a petition for that which his contingent. In the case of men prayer approximates to this more and more. It is not the setting up of the will of self, but the apprehension and taking to self of the divine will, which corresponds with the highest good of the individual.¹⁶⁹

One Must Die for the Nation (11:45-54)

Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death. Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with His disciples.

(11:45-54)

The technical aspects of this passage are somewhat confusing and require a little sorting out. The Pharisees are mentioned as biting their fingernails to the nubs over their impotence in the face of the wondrous signs that Jesus continues to perform, the raising of Lazarus after four days in the grave being just the most powerful and wonderful of them all. The mention of the High Priest is what might cause some confusion, as he was not typically (if ever) from the Pharisaic class but was rather a member of the Sadducees. The key to unlock the seeming misstatement is the "*calling of a council*," meaning, no doubt, the calling of the Sanhedrin or at least a quorum of this ruling religious assembly. Thus far in the Fourth Gospel we have not encountered the high priestly caste but have been confronted mostly with the Pharisees and the scribes. "The Pharisees are designedly named, that is, not the possessors of power, but the representatives of orthodoxy."¹⁷⁰ John is well aware, as are the Pharisees, that they lack the political and magisterial power necessary to actually prosecute Jesus even if they could prove Him to be heretical or blasphemous. This, of course, did not stop some of their number from attempting to take the law into their own hands and to stone Jesus; but even in this they consistently failed.

¹⁶⁹ Westcott; 173.

¹⁷⁰ Luthardt; 440.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

The Pharisees, or at least a few of them, may also have retained some measure of scruple in condemning a man untried; but this was not a problem for the Sadducees. Thus the Pharisees call in the cavalry. “The Pharisees called to their support the official power of the Sanhedrin and of the Sadducees, who were among the highest dignitaries, solely in order to rid themselves of this man.”¹⁷¹ Several unholy alliances will be formed with the common goal of ridding the land of the troublemaker Jesus: Pharisees and Sadducees, Jewish leaders and the Roman Governor, Pilate and Herod. It was a veritable lovefest of hatred toward Jesus, fulfilling through human agency that which was foreordained by God.

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know – Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death... (Acts 2:22-23)

John mentions Caiaphas as “*the high priest that year,*” and critics have pointed to this as ‘proof’ of historical error in the Gospel, written as they believe some time in the second century. Two things may be said in this regard. First, folks in the second century were as aware of the lifetime tenure of the High Priest as those in the first century – an late author attempting to pass off his work as of an earlier era would certainly have checked the Old Testament (as well as the recent histories) in regard to the term of office of the High Priest. Secondly, John’s comment is actually even more historical than it might have been had it been written later, because at the time of these event the high priestly office was held at the sole behest of the Romans – and the latter did frequently change the occupant of the former, sometimes on a yearly basis as suited their whims. “The information is the more relevant in that, though the office was not an annual one, the Romans did change the high priest quite often.”¹⁷² What the evangelists is saying is simply that in the year of Christ’s death the High Priest was Caiaphas, the scion of a powerful family from which several men had held the high seat. John just happens to express the fact in a manner that gives more evidence of his being a contemporary of the events than of having written the narrative over a hundred years later. Of the revolving door that the Romans had made of the High Priesthood, Josephus writes,

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*; 441.

¹⁷² Morris; 566.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

And [Tiberius Caesar] sent Valerius Gratus to be procurator of Judea, and to succeed Annias Rufus. This man deprived Ananus of the high priesthood, and appointed Ismael, the son of Phabi, to be high priest. He also deprived him in a little time, and ordained Eleazar, the son of Ananus, who had been high priest before, to be high priest: which office, which he had held for a year, Gratus deprived him of it, and gave the high priesthood to Simon the son of Camithus; and when he had possessed that dignity no longer than a year, Joseph Caiaphas was made his successor.¹⁷³

It would have been quite difficult for a second century author to keep all of this straight!

It is Caiaphas who unwittingly prophesies regarding the meaning of the death of what he undoubtedly considered a nuisance, a gnat that simply needed to be swatted. “*You know nothing at all*” he condescendingly chides the Pharisees for their inability to see the obvious solution: kill the man. Again, it is not that the Pharisees had not thought of this solution but that they still held to the antiquated notion that a man ought to be first convicted under the Law. Except for the intemperate actions of those who attempted to stone Jesus for blasphemy, the Pharisees within the Sanhedrin tended toward a more moderate, legal process. Caiaphas, as High Priest, gives them an exit, and they speedily take it. “Whatever Jesus may be is now irrelevant. The time for discussing the ground of His authority has passed.”¹⁷⁴

John notes that Caiaphas, as High Priest, was speaking prophetically of Jesus’ death, though the High Priest had no idea or intention of doing so, and completely failed to understand which ‘nation’ Jesus was dying for. John explains, “*he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God scattered abroad.*”¹⁷⁵ “Every word the High Priest spoke, was, as the author points out, verbally inspired. Caiaphas was an ignorant man moved by prophetic inspiration.”¹⁷⁶ But Whitacre adds, “The irony is that they do destroy the temple of Jesus’ body, but this does not prevent the Romans from destroying their temple and their nation, nor does it prevent increasing numbers of people from believing in Jesus.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews: Book 18, Chapter 2, Paragraph 2* (Grand Rapids: Hendrickson Publishers; 1994); 478.

¹⁷⁴ Hoskyns; 410.

¹⁷⁵ John 11:51-52

¹⁷⁶ Hoskyns; 410.

¹⁷⁷ Whitacre; 296.

Week 5: Swan Song

Text Reading: John 11: 55 - 12: 50

*“How can the truth be grasped by a world
whose fundamental patterns of thought
are shaped by the lie?”
(Lesslie Newbigin)*

John 12 brings us to the end of Jesus’ public ministry as recorded in the Fourth Gospel. From chapter 13 onward we enter the intimate last days and hours that the Lord spends with His disciples as He approaches the climax of His redemptive work at the cross. His preliminary victory over death in the raising of Lazarus serves actually to bring the immanence and intensity of His own impending death even closer to His mind and soul, deepening the anguish that troubles Him at the end. But with chapter 12 we encounter the sad denouement of Jesus ministry which, in human terms, is utter failure. The conflict and contract between faith and unbelief reaches its peak, and even the accolades He receives during the ‘Triumphal Entry’ are misguided and misplaced, and will soon lead the same people to cry out, ‘Crucify Him!’ Jesus does not despair of His life’s work, however, in spite of the famous conclusion of Albert Schweitzer, and continues His inexorable path to the cross in the full knowledge that it remains the will of His Father that He do so. So chapter 12 presents both a summary of what has gone before and a harbinger of what is to come. Luthardt writes, “The twelfth chapter assumes a peculiar position, in so far as it both prepares the way for new matter, and concludes what has been presented. It prepares the way in that it begins the passion-week, ver. 1. And it forms a conclusion, in that it everything in this chapter looks back to the previous course of the gospel history.”¹⁷⁸

John’s literary pattern of contrasts continues in chapter 12, setting the horror of Jesus’ impending death against the glory that will be revealed in His resurrection. The “*Father, save Me from this hour*” quickly becomes, “*Father, glorify Thy Name.*” And the “*Now is My soul troubled*” moves quickly to “*Now is the ruler of this world cast out.*” It is noteworthy that, even as He felt the repulsion of the cross and the grave, Jesus never

¹⁷⁸ Luthardt; *Luthardt on the Gospel of St. John; Volume III* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark; 1878); 3.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

waivered in the assurance of victory, because He knew that He was doing the will of the Father. It would be wrong to conclude that this assurance of victory in any way diminished the anguish of His soul as He approached death, and it would be wrong to conclude that this anguish at any time diminished Jesus' assurance that the will of the Father would be accomplished through His death. Allowing both realities to stand will enable us to come to a greater appreciation of *death* itself, as we witness its impact on the Prince of Life.

John 12 contains all the usual hermeneutical issues regarding comparison and harmony with the Synoptic Gospels. The anointing of which we read in the opening verses is very similar to accounts in the synoptic records, though with significant differences in detail and timing. The triumphal entry has both similarities and differences, and harmonizing the accounts of the Passion Week between the Fourth Gospel and the other three, never an easy task, becomes somewhat more difficult in this chapter. Newbigin recognizes the difficulties of harmonizing the several accounts, and writes, "It seems safest to conclude that John had his own access to the common stock of tradition and that, as always, he has retold this story in such a way as to further the overall purpose of his work. We must take the story as it stands."¹⁷⁹ We would add, as Newbigin himself affirms in the Introduction to his commentary, that the 'common stock' for John included most importantly the fact that he was an eye-witness to the events he records.

Encouragingly, there has been pushback recently against the treatment of the Gospel records over the past 150 years, with many leading scholars of modern evangelicalism repudiating the 'conclusions' of liberal scholars concerning the late dating of the books, especially that of the Fourth Gospel. Richard Bauckham, for instance, sees the four Gospels as 'testimony,' essentially the same word as 'witness' that we have seen frequently in our study of John. Bauckham notes that the veracity of testimony is not dependent on its being verifiable – it is often the case that the only verification of an event is *from* the testimony of an eyewitness; by definition this cannot be verified further. "It is true that a powerful trend in the modern development of critical historical philosophy and method finds trusting testimony a stumbling-block in the way of the historian's

¹⁷⁹ Newbigin; 150.

autonomous access to truth that he or she can verify independently. But it is also a rather neglected fact that all history, like all knowledge, relies on testimony.”¹⁸⁰

There are often multiple witnesses to an event, and it is commonplace that their testimonies will not be verbatim: they have witnessed the event not only from a unique vantage point, but also from a unique epistemological perspective – each one ‘sees’ the same event slightly differently. Furthermore, their reporting of the event will have a unique purpose – in the case of the Gospels a *theological* purpose – especially if that reporting is done independently of the other eyewitnesses. “Understanding the Gospels as testimony, we can recognize this theological meaning of the history not as an arbitrary imposition on the objective facts, but as the way the witnesses perceived the history, in an inextricable coinherence of observable event and perceptible meaning. Testimony is the category that enables us to read the Gospels in a properly historical way and a properly theological way. It is where history and theology meet.”¹⁸¹

These observations are particularly important with regard to the Fourth Gospel, admittedly the most difficult to harmonize with the other three. Harmonies of the Gospels were a popular endeavor in the church from the late-19th Century through the middle of the 20th Century, but have fallen out of vogue of late. Earlier, John Calvin developed his commentaries on the gospels by treating them in parallel, a method that can be somewhat difficult to follow when one is looking for what the Genevan Reformer has to say on this or that passage in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. What is significant to note concerning Calvin’s treatment of the material is that he left the Fourth Gospel out of the parallel and treated it as a separate commentary. All four evangelists, however, arrange their material in a manner that suits the purpose of their writing, and this is not exclusively chronological. For John, who explicitly states the purpose for his arrangement of the material, we may concluded that the order of events throughout the Fourth Gospel has been intended “*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Bauckham, Richard *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 2017); 5.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*; 5-6.

¹⁸² John 20:31

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. Then they sought Jesus, and spoke among themselves as they stood in the temple, "What do you think—that He will not come to the feast?" Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command, that if anyone knew where He was, he should report it, that they might seize Him. (11:55-57)

As is his custom, John locates us on the Jewish religious calendar by noting that *the Passover of the Jews was at hand*. This is the last Passover of Jesus' ministry and life, and the events that carry us through the end of the Fourth Gospel are all contained within the Passion Week and the immediate post-Resurrection timeframe. John devotes more attention than the synoptic writers to these relatively few days of Jesus' life and in doing so provides us with an invaluable insight into the incredibly intimate relationship between Jesus and His disciples. "*Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.*"¹⁸³ One event or theme that is noticeably missing from John's record is the institution of the Lord's Supper, presupposing knowledge of this sacrament from the Synoptic Gospels. This omission by John of the important ordinance is, however, strong hermeneutical evidence that the Fourth Gospel *was not* written by someone in the church of the second century, as even by that early date the Lord's Supper had become a very important ritual in congregational life. A 2nd-Century author would hardly have left it out of his narrative of Jesus' final week.

Rather it is the case that the omission of the Lord's Supper in the Fourth Gospel illustrates once again the purpose of the book itself, and particularly the intended audience. Presupposing knowledge in the church of the divine origination of the Supper – it is widely believed that all three of the Synoptic Gospels had already been written by the time John penned his account – the author focuses on a more detailed account of the final words of Jesus to His disciples and to His Father. These chapters, comprising almost half of the whole book, set out the event of Jesus' last Passover as only an eyewitness could have done (unless the author was simply a masterful creator of fiction), and give us the words that couched the ordinance of the Lord's Supper in a way the Synoptics do not. It is as if the mechanics of the Church fade into the background, and the meaning of those mechanics stands in the foreground. Jesus, ultimately rejected by those to whom He came – "*His own*" – now retreats into the upper room with His few disciples, and imparts to

¹⁸³ John 13:1

them some of the most precious revelation in the whole Bible, not least being the promise of the advent of the Holy Spirit.

The closing verses of John 11 set the stage for the final conflict between Jesus and ‘the Jews.’ The latter’s hatred toward Jesus has reached a fever pitch and spies and informants have been posted throughout the city to give advance notice of any ‘Jesus sightings.’ The excitement of the gathered multitude is also at a high pitch as knowledge both of Jesus’ latest and greatest miracle, the raising of Lazarus, combines with the knowledge that this is the man whom the religious leaders of Jerusalem want dead. There is a palpable sense that this Passover will be like none other in recorded memory, with the expectation of a showdown between Jesus and the Jews only forestalled by the rabbi’s continued absence. ‘Will He even come to Jerusalem?’ Yes, He will and He must.

The Anointing of Jesus at Bethany (12:1-8)

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, who would betray Him, said, “Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.” (12:1-8)

This passage generates a tremendous amount of discussion among commentators due to its similarity with accounts in the Synoptic Gospels – similarities, with distinct differences. The central theme, of course, is the anointing of Jesus:

Mark 14:3¹⁸⁴

And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head.

John 12:3

Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

Luke 7:37-38

And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

¹⁸⁴ Cp. Matthew 26:6-13

On the surface these narratives appear to refer to the same event, but there are significant differences that cause hermeneutical problems when a harmony is attempted. For instance, the accounts in Mark and John place the anointing at the time of the last Passover, when *“the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth, and kill Him.”*¹⁸⁵ But Luke’s account seems to have no reference to the Passover nor to the threat of the Jews against Jesus’ life, and is located chronologically much earlier in Jesus’ ministry. We might conclude that the Lucan anointing is a different event entirely, but for the fact that both Mark and Luke place the occurrence in the home of Simon – though in Mark he is referred to as a leper, and in Luke he is a Pharisee. We should note that these two designations are not mutually exclusive; Simon may have been a Pharisee whose leprosy had been cured by Jesus. Furthermore, in Mark’s account the woman – noted as a sinner as she is in Luke’s account – anoints Jesus’ head, whereas in both Luke and John she anointed His feet and wipes them her hair (in Luke’s account the woman also washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, drying them with her hair).

Interpretive history on this passage offers little guidance. It was commonly held in the early to medieval church that Simon was Martha’s husband, though his attitude toward the woman – whom John identifies as Mary, and thus Simon’s sister-in-law under this interpretation – is not terribly admirable: *“If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.”*¹⁸⁶ It is perhaps best to view Simon as a wealthy Pharisee who lived in Bethany and who was, like Nicodemus, intrigued by the Galilean rabbi, Jesus. In honor of the upcoming national feast, Simon holds a banquet at which both Jesus and Lazarus – two ‘famous’ men at the time – were guests of honor. That John records Martha as assisting with the service is nothing surprising; Bethany was a small town and everyone knew everyone. Furthermore, it was common for the women to help out at meals, and an already-established character trait of Martha that she would be foremost among them in serving the tables. It also comes as no surprise to us that Mary was *not* assisting the wait staff but was rather devoting her attention on Jesus.

¹⁸⁵ Mark 14:1

¹⁸⁶ Luke 7:39

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

All in all there does not seem to be a way to harmonize the placement of this narrative between the Gospels. There is nothing in any one of them that contradicts any of the other accounts – the man who hosts the banquet in John 12 is most likely the same Simon – both a Pharisee and a (healed?) leper – of Mark and Luke. The woman in the earlier accounts – the ‘sinner’ – is Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, whose love toward Jesus is shown to be commensurate with the magnitude of her forgiven sin. The point in John’s placement of this narrative at this location, it would seem, is to continue the thread that he began back in chapter 10: that the Good Shepherd was about to lay down His life for the sheep, Jesus was going to die.

There is some difference, it should be noted, between the anointing of someone’s *head* and the anointing of someone’s *feet*. The anointing of the head is for office; in Jesus’ case, the kingly office. The anointing of the feet, however, does not signify any particular office but is part of the preparation of the body for burial. John’s usage of the anointing narrative in chapter 12, alongside the Triumphal Entry, joins Jesus’ role as the promised King with the fact that His immediate destiny is not the throne but the grave. “John wishes to show that Jesus enters Jerusalem as the king who has been anointed for burial, as one destined for exaltation via the suffering of death.”¹⁸⁷ Newbigin adds,



Beasley-Murray (1916-2000)

Now – in the midst of the banquet – she comes forward to perform a deed which is both the expression of the utmost possible humility, love, and devotion, and a sign – perhaps an unwitting sign – of that which lies before Jesus. The unnamed woman of Mark’s account anoints the head of Jesus – a sign of consecration to the office of king. Mary anoints his feet, an act which can have no such meaning but which could be a symbol of the anointing of the whole body for burial...And the shaking loose of the hair would be incomprehensible were it not the familiar sign of the deepest grief.¹⁸⁸

The disciples’ objection to the extravagance of Mary’s devotion is another common feature between the Gospels. In John’s account, however, Judas Iscariot is singled out as the leader of the grumblers, not because Judas was a naturally benevolent man who desired to see the value of the *pure spikenard* go to meet the needs of the poor, but rather

¹⁸⁷ Beasley-Murray, George R. *Word Biblical Commentary: John* (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher; 1987); 208.

¹⁸⁸ Newbigin; 150.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

because he was a thief and used to pilfer from the money-box. John's memory of Judas never lost its sharp edge, as Whitacre notes, "Every time John mentions Judas he refers to his betrayal."¹⁸⁹ Jesus, however, bypasses what He knows about Judas (for He knew the heart of every man) and answers with a theological principle: devotion to Jesus is more important than alms for the poor.

Jesus is by no means denigrating benevolence or teaching that believers ought not care for the poor. His statement is essentially a quote from Deuteronomy 15, "*For the poor shall never cease from the land,*"¹⁹⁰ but Jesus does something different and remarkable with it. The remainder of the verse from Deuteronomy 15 would seem to play into Judas' argument concerning the wasteful use of the perfume: "*therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'*"¹⁹¹ But Jesus knows Himself to be greater than the commandment, as He is the One who gives the commandment. Therefore Mary's act was not an abdication of her duty to the poor, but was rather the exercise of her greater duty: to anoint her Lord for burial. Jesus' statement to this effect in 12:7 is difficult Greek – the verb tenses seem all tangled. The best rendering seems to be "*She has kept this expensive perfume, instead of selling it and giving the proceeds to the poor, in order that she might fulfill what is required of the Law concerning the anointing of My body for burial.*" What she has done, of course, is prophetic, for Jesus is not yet dead. "Mary consciously recognized the necessity of the death of Jesus, and also, recognizing that the Hour had come, anticipated his burial by an act of intelligent devotion."¹⁹²

Outside the banquet, news of Jesus' arrival was beginning to sell the crowds, not in Jerusalem but in little Bethany. The misconception of Messiah was growing; anticipation that Jesus would bring in the Kingdom was rampant, and the Jewish leaders were frantic in their impotence to stop the 'Jesus Movement.' In that desperation, the chief priests determined that even Lazarus had to die in order to nip this insurrection in the bud. Newbigin writes, "The raising of Lazarus has been the climax of all Jesus' mighty works. It leads multitudes of Jews to turn to him in faith and therefore – by contrast – leads the

¹⁸⁹ Whitacre; 301. Cp. *John* 6:71; 13:2, 26-29; 18:2-3, 5.

¹⁹⁰ Deuteronomy 15:11a

¹⁹¹ Deuteronomy 15:11b

¹⁹² Hoskyns; 416.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

authorities still further along the path of violence. They will seek to destroy not only the giver of life but also the one who is a living witness to him.”¹⁹³ Jesus had made Himself, in their opinion, Public Enemy #1. And the situation for the Jews was about to get even worse.

The Triumphal Entry (12:9-19)

The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out:

“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!

The King of Israel!”

Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written:

“Fear not, daughter of Zion;

Behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt.”

His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him. Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, “You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!” (12:12-19)

This passage is often referred to as the ‘Triumphal Entry’ and is included in all four Gospels. This title, however, presents an opportunity for misunderstanding, though no worse than the Jews of that day misunderstood both the type of king Jesus was and the manner of the kingdom He was bringing. They hail Jesus as a conquering king, which is what the palm branches signify, but one wonders how many in the crowd noticed Jesus’ choice of transportation – a donkey, not a horse. The donkey is not a war animal; indeed, in the ancient world the donkey was the choice of the king when he came *in peace*; the Jews were looking for a king to lead them in battle against the Roman legions, and certainly not on a donkey. Even the passage cited by John in explanation of Jesus’ action would indicate that the type of Messiah Jesus is, is not the type of Messiah Israel is looking for. The passage from Zechariah 9 speaks of universal peace, not of war.

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation,
Lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.
I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem;
The battle bow shall be cut off.*

¹⁹³ Newbigin; 153.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

*He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.* (Zechariah 9:9-10)

Hoskyns writes, "The action is a challenge to the crowd, for while it focuses their attention upon a regal advent of the Messiah, this regal advent is not for war, but in peace and humility."¹⁹⁴ Even the shout of acclamation from the multitudes flows from misguided ambitions on behalf of this evident Messiah. "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD" is a quote from Psalm 118, the fuller context of which is quite revealing as it applies to what will immediately become of Jesus at this Passover feast.

*The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.
This was the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.
Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!
We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.* (Psalm 118:22-26)

Jesus knows that these same Jews who are receiving Him as their King will soon be shouting with equal vigor for His crucifixion. Presented with the kingdom on a platter, as it were, Jesus rejects the offer – as He done before when the crown has been offered to Him, whether by the Jews or by the devil. The Dispensational view that the Jews rejected the kingdom is not in accordance with the historical record. The truth of the matter is that Jesus rejected the type of kingdom the Jews were seeking; they would most certainly made Him their king but He would not be King according to their purposes. Therefore, His taking of a donkey – instead of a horse or just walking into the city, as was His custom – forms "a prophetic word against the kind of political messianism represented in the popular reception which Jesus is receiving. His action in continuing his journey mounted on an ass is an acted piece of exegesis, a silent testimony from holy scripture against a false messianism."¹⁹⁵ It is sad how often the Church has forgotten this message, and has attempted to make of Jesus the same type of worldly king that the Jews did at Jerusalem that final Passover.

¹⁹⁴ Hoskyns; 420.

¹⁹⁵ Newbigin; 153-54.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Even the disciples did not understand what Jesus was saying by His actions, a situation we have come to expect of the disciples. John admits that the message was lost on the twelve until after Jesus was resurrected, and the Scriptures became clear to their understanding through the advent and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. No doubt the disciples were caught up in the moment and perhaps also believed that this was the time at which Jesus would take up His throne and conquer Israel's oppressors – both those within the nation and those without. We know that at least one of the disciples was a Zealot, and this was the desire and expectation of the Zealots, as it was the hope of most of Second Temple Israel. The rejoicing of the people at this time was indeed the fulfillment of prophecy, though not in the manner that the people themselves expected.

Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel!

Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!

The LORD has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy.

The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall see disaster no more.

(Zephaniah 3:14-15)

Greeks Seeking Jesus (12:20-26)

Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus. But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. (12:20-26)

At first blush this passage makes very little sense either to its congruence with the rest of the passage or with Jesus' response to the information brought to him by Andrew and Philip. In the first analysis, these curious Greeks seem to show up out of nowhere, and then disappear from the narrative without gaining what they were seeking, to see Jesus. Indeed, the Lord seems to be oblivious to both their presence and their request. But, in fact, both the enquiry by these Greeks and Jesus' response are intimately tied to the overall theme that began in chapter 10 with the Good Shepherd discourse. There we heard Jesus informing the Jews that "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must them also, and they

shall become one flock with one shepherd."¹⁹⁶ We saw in that context that these 'other sheep, not of this fold' could only mean Gentiles, as all Jews, whether in Judea or from the Diaspora, were already considered one flock of God, one fold. This aspect of Jesus' redemptive ministry to the Gentiles is reiterated in chapter 11, as John expands on Caiaphas' unwitting prophecy concerning Jesus' death for the nation.

Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. (11:51-52)

Even the frustrated Pharisees join in the prophecy, as it were, exclaiming, "*You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him.*"¹⁹⁷ This is exactly what is signified by the appearance of the Greeks. Designated such, these men are certainly not to be considered Hellenistic Jews, as some commentators have done; such would never have been called 'Greeks.' These were, literally, 'Hellenes,' but by no means Hellenized Jews, who would have been called Jews no less than their brethren more associated with the Hebrew heritage. These men who approached Philip were likely of a group referred to as 'God fearers,' Gentiles who had attached themselves to the Jewish religion and paid attendance to the synagogue services and even the annual feasts, but who had as yet not become proselytes through circumcision (because even a proselyte was considered by Law as one native-born). In short, these men represented the harvest from among the nations, the 'sheep not of this fold.' But Jesus' time for them, though very close, had not yet come. Thus Jesus does not directly respond to their inquiry. "The discourse is not, however, addressed to the Greeks: indeed He made no movement toward them, since their coming to Him must be deferred until after His Crucifixion and Resurrection."¹⁹⁸ Yet, and this is John's point for including this particular episode, the arrival of these Greeks is further proof that Jesus' time is now at hand: "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*"

The thrust of all that Jesus has been saying during these past several chapters of John's Gospel, is that only through His death and resurrection would the sheep be gathered, both from Israel and from the world, into one fold with the risen Jesus as the

¹⁹⁶ John 10:16

¹⁹⁷ John 12:19

¹⁹⁸ Hoskyns; 423.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

One Shepherd. Jesus' reply in regard to the Greeks (we cannot assume that He deigned to reply to them directly), "indicates that the coming of the Gentiles heralds the climax of his ministry; his 'hour' has at last arrived, and it will witness his glorification. It is tacitly assumed that then will be the time for the Gentiles to come under the saving sovereignty of God."¹⁹⁹ In the ensuing short discourse, Jesus implicitly addresses the Greeks' desire, noting "*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.*" Whitacre notes, "As with all his cryptic sayings, this response addresses the issue, but it does so in ways incomprehensible at the time. He does not speak directly to the Greeks, but he speaks of their place in his community in the future."²⁰⁰ Newbigin comments as well on Jesus' 'hour,'

The coming of the Gentile inquirers is a token of its presence [i.e., Jesus' *hour*], but their desire to see Jesus will not be fulfilled in the way they expect, just as the Jewish crowds who cry out their greetings to the 'king of Israel' will find that his kingdom is utterly different from their expectation. In fact the revealing of the glory of God will be in his dying, and both Jews and Gentiles will cooperate in putting him to death.²⁰¹

Jesus' response to the disciples would undoubtedly seemed, at the very least, enigmatic. But once again the connection to the immediate context is both very real and very powerful. "*Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*" Having just said that His hour had finally come to be glorified, and having alluded in the previous several discourses that this glorification would come only through His death, there can be no doubt as to the identity of the 'grain' in verse 24; it is Jesus Himself. As a parable, this discussion of the grain of wheat may be applied to everyman's life; but Jesus is not simply moralizing here about the importance of a 'giving' life as a 'full' life. No, there is only one life that must die that other may live; one grain of wheat that must fall to the earth in order to bear much fruit: this is all about Jesus, and no one else. Hoskyns is certainly correct in writing,

But the parable of the grain of wheat is not applied primarily to the lives of the disciples of Jesus, as though their fruitful obedience to the will of God was to burst forth independently on its own. They are the fruit of the isolated obedience and death of Jesus; and their

¹⁹⁹ Beasley-Murray; 211.

²⁰⁰ Whitacre; 310.

²⁰¹ Newbigin; 156.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

fruitfulness springs from His death, and is joined organically to it...The universality of the significance of the death of Jesus is the answer to the request of the Greeks to see or come to know Him, and explains why He can as yet enter into no direct relation with them. They will believe in Him through the preaching of His disciples.²⁰²

Now Judgment is Upon this World (12:27-45)

Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die. (12:27-33)

The beauty of this passage lies in the poetic parallelism of Jesus' statements which intensifies the truth that the passage contains regarding the ultimate impact of Jesus' victory over death: the casting out of the devil from his dominion over this world. The parallelism hinges on Jesus' use of the word *Now* three times and of *Father*, twice. The pattern is in the traditional Hebraic *chiastic* structure:

<i>Now My soul has become troubled</i>	<i>Father, glorify Thy Name!</i>
<i>Father, save Me from this hour!</i>	<i>Now judgment is upon this world</i> <i>Now the ruler of this world shall be cast out</i>

The author of Hebrews informs us that it was "for the joy set before Him" that Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame."²⁰³ Here in John 12 we find the content of that joy: that the ruler of this world should be cast out from his dominion; that the power of death might be broken, the strongman bound and his house of men plundered. But the agony of what Jesus must endure to bring about this glorious end is not diminished: *Now is My soul troubled...Father, save Me from this hour!* Comparisons are made to Jesus' experience in Gethsemane roughly a week later, and the comparisons are just. Death to Jesus was far more abhorrent than death is to any man: the One who *has life in Himself* cannot be ambivalent about dying. Thus Jesus' "Father, save Me from this hour!" is parallel to His "Father, let this cup pass from Me" and results in the very same resolve, "Yet not My will but

²⁰² Hoskyns; 424.

²⁰³ Hebrews 12:2

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Thine be done” with *“Father, glorify Thy Name!”* This is not ‘Gethsemane’ in John’s Gospel, as some commentators think; it is rather a different manifestation of the same intense emotion within the soul of Jesus as He inexorably approaches death. Whitacre has an interesting analysis of the difference between fallen man in his approach to death, and Jesus facing the same fate.

The actual form this death to self takes for us is the exact opposite from what Jesus faced here. In our case, we must die to our false self, which is in rebellion against God. We must detach from ‘all the vain things that charm me most.’...In Jesus’ case, this dying to self is the reverse: he is living in union with God and must give that up to fulfill his role of Lamb of God, ‘who takes away the sin of the world.’²⁰⁴

We often read II Corinthians 5:21 *theologically*: “He made Him who knew no sin to become sin on our behalf...” Here in John 12 we read the same redemptive fact *emotionally*, even *psychologically* – the emotion and psychology of the One who was being made sin, the One who had not forfeited His life through sin, but offered it freely. The freedom of the offer, however, should not blind us to the agony of it. “But it is the dread of death that comes over him, because death is the anti-divine thing, the opposite of the society of God, the utterance of the power of and the realm of Satan. Hence, because this man is God’s son, therefore is his soul shaken.”²⁰⁵

Jesus does not shrink from His duty, further manifesting that the single goal of His life is to obey and glorify His Father. His *Father, save Me* quickly becomes *Father, glorify Thy Name* because the former was never the guiding principle of His life, ‘*What shall I say?*’ whereas the latter has always been. He will have another battle with deep distress in His soul, at Gethsemane, and will triumph there as well. Here, however, we see a bit more clearly what it was that Jesus saw as He traveled through *the valley of the shadow of death*. He saw Satan’ fall. Commentators have struggled with Jesus’ statement, “*Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world is cast out*” because it seems like a statement of the final defeat of Satan. The meaning of the sentence, however, is best found in the ‘now and not yet’ nature of so much of redemption: *secured now* in the Person and Work of Jesus

²⁰⁴ Whitacre; 313

²⁰⁵ Luthardt; 35.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Christ, yet *not yet* in terms of ultimate and final fulfillment. Therefore Jesus' words are parallel to other statements we read in the New Testament.

Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." (Luke 18:17-20)

If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. (Matthew 12:26-29)

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (Revelation 12:7-9)

And what exactly Jesus is accomplishing by His sacrificial death is summarized beautifully by the author of the letter to the Hebrews,

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

John explains to us at least part of the meaning of Jesus' '*lifted up*' statement, telling us that this signified the manner in which Jesus was to die: by crucifixion. The immediate sequel shows that the crowd understood Jesus to be speaking of His own death, and that being '*lifted up*' meant dying. In that day this manner of death could only signify crucifixion, a circumstance that could only have troubled the crowd even more. "Jesus will not die at the hands of the Jews by stoning on the religious charge of blasphemy; he will die at the hands of the Romans by crucifixion on the political charge that he claimed to be a king."²⁰⁶ The very thing this multitude proclaimed as Jesus rode into Jerusalem will be

²⁰⁶ Newbigin; 160.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

the ground of His conviction and execution by the Romans; this was not the Messiah they were looking for.

The people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?" Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them. (12:34-36)

There is some uncertainty about where in the 'Law' the Jews would find that the Messiah would remain forever. There is no such statement explicitly made in the Old Testament, though the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 9 certainly implies perpetual dominion of the promised 'Emmanuel,'

*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.* (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Jesus, however, is no longer engaging with the crowd as He once did and His response not only holds the line of His current thought – that His death is imminent – but loops up back to the very beginning of the Gospel itself: *the Light that has come into the world* is soon to depart from it. The time has come for the Jews to stop with their nitpicking questions, and to walk in the Light while they still have it. "For only a little longer will he, the Light, be among them; the darkness is shortly to fall, and they are in danger of being engulfed by it."²⁰⁷ Sadly, however, the crowd is moving away from Jesus. His words confuse them; His talk of death troubles them; and even His riding on a donkey disillusions them. All too soon the darkness will indeed engulf them, and they will be crying for His death.

Newbigin reminds us that this principle is perennial and not merely for the Jews of Jesus' generation. He writes,

²⁰⁷ Beasley-Murray; 215.

Once again one must remember that while nature is cyclical and there is always another spring, another dawn, another chance, God's dealings with us are not so; there is a time to decide. The light shines, and if you do not recognize and welcome it, there is no further way by which you can be assured that it is the light. Then, inevitably, darkness overtakes you, and 'he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes.' Meaninglessness is once more in control. In the dark, nothingness reigns.²⁰⁸

But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke:

Lord, who has believed our report?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"

Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,

Lest they should see with their eyes,

Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,

So that I should heal them.

These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

(12:37-41)

As noted at the beginning of this lesson, John 12 represents the end of Jesus' public ministry. Accordingly, therefore, the author provides us with an Epilogue that closes the loop with the opening chapter, where we read, "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him."²⁰⁹ John explains the unbelief of the Jews as essentially part of the divine plan, though by this he does not mitigate the guilt of their own lack of faith. The Jews are blind, but it is God who has blinded them. This is the conundrum of Romans 9 – who hardened Pharaoh's heart? Did Pharaoh harden his heart? Yes. Did God harden Pharaoh's heart? Yes. The key to unlock this mystery is that of the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep, and of the sheep who hear and follow His voice. But those who are not His sheep do not hear, nor do they desire to hear, for they are blind (*cp.* 9:41). The purpose of this citation of Isaiah is to remind us that even the unbelief of the Jews did not surprise God, nor did it thwart His redemptive plan. Rather their unbelief coincided with that plan, was part and parcel of it, and resulted in its ultimate fruition, the salvation of the Gentiles. This is how the Apostle Paul understood it,

I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! (Romans 11:11-12)

²⁰⁸ Newbigin; 161.

²⁰⁹ John 1:11

Again we are presented with the Both/And of Predestination and Human Responsibility, not the Either/Or of so much theological debate. “The guilt of the people in their repudiation of the ministry of Jesus matched the predestination of God, their rejection of his message matched the concealment of the secret of the kingdom, the judgment on their blindness entailed the divine rejection of the rejectors. But as in Isaiah’s day the hardening of the nation was qualified by the creation of an obedient remnant.”²¹⁰ That remnant is noted here in John 12, though not in glowing terms of confident faith.

Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. (12:42-43)

Passages like this one stimulate the perennial debate on the nature of ‘saving’ faith. Were these among the rulers true believers? If they were unwilling to confess the Son of Man before men, would the Son of Man confess them before His Father? Westcott considers such fearful and hesitant faith to be no faith at all, “Such ineffective intellectual faith (so to speak) is really the climax of unbelief.”²¹¹ But perhaps we should not be too harsh in judgment; these rulers may be, by God’s grace, the ‘many priests’ who “*were becoming obedient to the faith*” through the preaching of the disciples after Pentecost.²¹²

Then Jesus cried out and said, “He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.” (12:44-50)

This passage presents perhaps insurmountable hermeneutical difficulties. There is no indication of where Jesus is when He ‘cried out,’ and we have already read that He “*departed and hid Himself from them*” (v. 36). The words quoted here are a compendium of what Jesus is recorded as saying, often in so many words, earlier in the Fourth Gospel, so

²¹⁰ Beasley-Murray; 216.

²¹¹ Westcott; 185.

²¹² Acts 6:7

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

that this passage looks very much like a summary statement of Jesus' self-witness. It is as if John pulls together many of the salient points of Jesus self-attestation – that He speaks only what the Father has Him speak, that believing in Him is believing in the Father, etc. – as an exclamatory – *Jesus cried out* – punctuation to the first part of the Fourth Gospel. From here to the end of the book Jesus is with His disciples (except, of course, when He is arrested, tried, and crucified). The focus turns to those whom Jesus is leaving behind, those whom He loved to the end (13:1). This summary statement pulls it all together: “Jesus is, quite simply, God’s revelation of himself. It is God whom we meet when we meet Jesus.”²¹³

With these closing verses the die is cast. The hostility of the Jews toward Jesus is now implacable; His death, from a human standpoint, certain. From a divine perspective it always has been certain. Now the two streams flow together in a torrent of hostility that will unite Sadducee with Pharisee, Herod with Pilate, Jew with Gentile to effect the death of the Prince of Life. Considering what Jesus has done in their midst, the unbelief of the Jews is breath-taking. But it is no worse than any society would have done, dead as all mankind is in sin and trespass. “How can the truth be grasped by a world whose fundamental patterns of thought are shaped by the lie? How can the glory of God be recognized by those for whom the only glory which is valued is the glory that men receive from one another?”²¹⁴ Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies...

²¹³ Newbigin; 165.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*; 162.

Week 6: He Loved Them to the End

Text Reading: John 13:1 - 30

*“He prepared Himself for this day
by heroic acts of the supremist humility”
(Cornelius à Lapide)*

Maundy Thursday is a lesser known (among most Protestants, at least) holy day during Holy Week – the week between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. Maundy Thursday is named for the event of which we read in John 13 – the ‘foot washing.’ The derivation of the term is somewhat obscure, with differing opinions abounding. Perhaps the most sustainable is that it derives from the Latin *mandatum* through the Old French *mandé*, meaning ‘commandment.’ If such, it would derive from Jesus’ words in John 13:34, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.* This verse ties together with the opening verse of the chapter, *“having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end,”* and fairly bathes the whole context in the love of Christ toward His disciples. Indeed, as Whitacre notes, the theme of the love of Jesus Christ flows through the portion of John’s Gospel known as the Farewell Discourse – or the Upper Room Discourse – running from Chapter 13 through Chapter 17. *“Love is one of the key terms in chapters 13 – 17, occurring thirty-one times in these five chapters as compared to only six times in chapters 1 – 12.”*²¹⁵ This is an important consideration as we investigate Chapter 13, for the historical event of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet – the *pedilavium* – has led over the centuries to a great deal of ecclesiastical and liturgical debate. Did Jesus intend His actions to become a sacrament or ordinance in the Church for all ages? Voices across the millennia, from Roman Catholic to Eastern Orthodox, Protestant to Anabaptist, have insisted that He did, and Maundy Thursday is just a perennial manifestation of that belief. Jesus did say to His disciples, *“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.”* Did He thus intend for the Church to *literally* – and even more, *sacramentally* – wash one another’s feet?

²¹⁵ Whitacre; 327.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Even within Christian denominations that officially affirm a sacramental or quasi-sacramental ritual called ‘foot-washing,’ there is historical evidence of great inconsistencies among the congregations – not all, and sometimes not even most, of the congregations observing the rite. For instance, the anabaptist Mennonite Church has, from its origination in the 16th Century, advocated foot-washing. Article 13 of the Statement of Faith of the Mennonite Church USA is specifically entitled ‘Foot Washing’ and states dogmatically,

We believe that Jesus Christ calls us to serve one another in love as he did. Rather than seeking to lord it over others, we are called to follow the example of our Lord, who chose the role of a servant by washing his disciples’ feet. Just before his death, Jesus stooped to wash the disciples’ feet and told them, “So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.” In this act, Jesus showed humility and servanthood, even laying down his life for those he loved. In washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus acted out a parable of his life unto death for them, and of the way his disciples are called to live in the world. Believers who wash each other’s feet show that they share in the body of Christ. They thus acknowledge their frequent need of cleansing, renew their willingness to let go of pride and worldly power, and offer their lives in humble service and sacrificial love.²¹⁶

Yet the same document remarks in the commentary: “Among our congregations, some practice foot washing, while others have discontinued the practice or have never observed it. Congregations are encouraged to practice foot washing when it is a meaningful symbol of service and love for each other. ‘Washing the feet of the saints’ (1 Tim. 5:10) is one way of representing Christ to each other in acts of hospitality, service, and



Thomas O’Loughlin (b. 1958)

love.”²¹⁷ There seems to be no denomination of professing Christianity that mandates foot-washing as a sacrament, though many still advocate its observance and some do so in a sacramental manner. One such of the latter is the Roman Catholic Church, in which foot-washing has become a quasi-sacramental ritual to be enacted by the hierarchy – from the priest all the way up to the Pope – on Maundy Thursday of

²¹⁶ [Article 13. Foot Washing | Mennonite Church USA \(mennoniteusa.org\)](#). Accessed 14 March 2022.

²¹⁷ *Idem*.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Holy Week each year. Thomas O’Loughlin, a Dominican friar and Historical Theology professor at the University of Nottingham, has published a short treatise on the subject in regard to the liturgical application of foot washing in the church today. In *Washing Feet: Imitating the Example of Jesus in the Liturgy Today*, O’Loughlin traces the historical development of liturgical foot-washing, and shows that even when the rite was officially sanctioned, it was often not practiced or even studiously avoided as being disruptive to the prevailing social hierarchy. The act was condoned and encouraged as early as Augustine, as O’Loughlin notes,

Sometime in 401 Augustine of Hippo was asked about the way Easter should be celebrated and one of the questions was about whether there should be a washing of feet and, if so, when. Augustine’s reply is interesting. There should be a footwashing because the Lord commanded it, and so great a practice of teaching by example should take place at the time of deepest religious appeal – so clearly Augustine was aware of its power to impinge on us. But then Augustine added that many people are unwilling to accept it as a practice in their communities, while others move it to a less conspicuous time such as the Tuesday of Holy Week or the Sunday after Easter. Footwashing seems always to have been a powerful but also threatening, impressive but also a practice we continuously sideline and deprive of its power.²¹⁸

O’Loughlin points out that foot washing is mentioned and enjoined twice in the Rule of St. Benedict, though most Benedictine monastic orders have since abandoned the practice. “The ritual eventually died out in Benedictine monasteries, but the weekly footwashing survived in Cistercian/Trappist monasteries until well into the twentieth century.”²¹⁹ Within the Roman Catholic Church in general, the practice of foot washing was returned to a central place within Holy Week through the liturgical reforms of 1956, where its sacramental character is highlighted by association with the observance of the Mass. Still, not all congregations observe the ‘mandatum,’ and it has not been practiced consistently by the various popes since the 1950s. Pope Francis famously and ostentatiously performed a foot washing almost immediately upon his elevation, going to a young offenders’ prison in Rome and washing the feet of several inmates, both men and women. That Francis performed this ritual on women offended many purist within the

²¹⁸ O’Loughlin, Thomas *Washing Feet: Imitating the Example of Jesus in the Liturgy Today* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press; 2015); 12.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*; 20.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Catholic community; the next year the Pope only washed the feet of men, and the following year did not observe the ritual at all. It remains a touchy (no pun intended) subject.

But the fundamental question is whether or not Jesus *intended* His actions to be normative in a literal sense for the Church in the coming ages. A secondary question arises only if an affirmative answer is determined for the first: is this ritual *sacramental*, meaning, does it transfer grace to the recipient? Most discussions on the topic take the second question first and arrive at the conclusion as to whether or not the rite is to be continually observed through the presuppositional framework of either sacramentalism or anti-sacramentalism. The Mennonites and other anabaptist congregations are an exception to this general rule, as they are anti-sacramentalist but have maintained the practice of foot washing as an example of congregational brotherly love. Within denominations that are sacramental at the core, such as the Roman Catholic and Anglican communities, the observation of foot washing, where is it observed, is *ipso facto* sacramental. For most Reformed Churches, anti-sacramental by rule, the practice is generally not observed at all. But is this the correct manner of addressing the issue? Jesus appears to have commanded His disciples to wash one another's feet, and by extension this command would pass to those who have believed through the disciples' testimony – in other words, to all believers throughout the ages.

The first principle to be established through the historical-critical method of exegesis, is the reason why foot washing was the mode through which Jesus showed His love to His disciples. The historical context of the act comes out in the dialogue between Jesus and Peter when Peter initially refuses to allow his Master to wash his feet. Foot washing was a cultural practice in parts of the ancient world and was due to (1) the fact that the roads were dirt and therefore dusty, and (2) people wore open toed shoes/sandal without socks. In other words, their feet got dirty when they walked through the land or the city. Thus foot washing is a phenomenon discovered in ancient Greece and Rome as well as ancient Palestine; in and of itself is bore no greater significance than the fact that one's feet got dirty as one traveled about. But this fact does mitigate our understanding of *how* Jesus' act is to be applied in an age of sidewalks and socks & shoes.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

A second, and more important, fact about foot washing is that it was considered demeaning and menial – a slave’s task. Indeed, so menial was the act that it was forbidden by the rabbis to be done by a Hebrew slave on the basis of Leviticus 25:19, “*And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave.*”²²⁰ Whereas the washing of hands was a requirement in any and every home, foot washing was optional and was generally perceived as a sign of favor to a guest – a favor that the Pharisee Simon failed to provide to Jesus when He was a guest; the anecdote is highly instructive to our consideration of Jesus’ actions in John 13,

*Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, “This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.” And Jesus answered and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” So he said, “Teacher, say it.” “There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?” Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “You have rightly judged.” Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? **I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head.** You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.” (Luke 7:36-47)*

Foot washing was a sign of respect and affection when a host bid his slave to wash his guest’s feet; it was an unashamed act of love when it was voluntarily done by oneself. Thus the act of Jesus in the Upper Room must first and foremost be recognized as the manifestation of what John tells us at the opening of this chapter, “*having loved His own that were in the world, He loved them to the end.*” Beasley-Murray notes, “It is not to be overlooked that the footwashing is more than a simple parable of the greater act of cleansing by Jesus through his death; it is itself an act of love to the limit.”²²¹ It is this love

²²⁰ However, it was not forbidden to wives & children if there were no Gentile slaves in the household.

²²¹ Beasley-Murray; 239.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

that Jesus then enjoins upon His disciples as a ‘new commandment,’ a love that is now to be founded upon His love toward His disciples. *“We love because He first loved us,”* John writes in his first epistle. Jesus is inculcating the *love* that is manifested by the act of foot washing – condescending, humbling, love *to the end* – and not the act itself. “Jesus does not wish here to institute an outward ceremony, much less a sacramental one – as it has been taken in the church since the fourth century...He simply clothed his exhortation in the form of an external symbolical act, such as was suggested by the chance circumstances.”²²² In other words, Jesus chose the most menial task, yet one appropriate to the needs of His disciples, to show the condescending nature of His love, in the face of which these same disciples could have no further reason to withhold love – and loving service – to one another.

Should foot washing be observed in modern congregations? Carson notes, “nowhere else in the New Testament, or in the earliest extra-biblical documents of the church, is footwashing treated as an ecclesiastical rite, an ordinance, a sacrament.”²²³ This fact provides a strong indication that Jesus did not intend for His act to become common practice in the Church, probably for the simple reason that the Church would convert it into a ritual, and invest the act with sacramental and even salvific powers. We note that Judas Iscariot was among the disciples when Jesus went around washing their feet – he had not yet left the room. “Doubtless when Jesus washed the disciples’ feet he included the feet of Judas Iscariot. If this proves anything beyond the unfathomable love and forbearance of the Master, it is that no rite, even if performed by Jesus himself, ensure spiritual cleansing. Washed Judas may have been; cleansed he was not.”²²⁴

The continued practice of foot washing presents another problem: it establishes a hierarchy within the congregation that is itself unbiblical. The priest or bishop or pope who washes the feet of the lowly prisoner or layman merely highlights a false hierarchy – placing the clergy in the place of Jesus, who alone bears the dignity sufficient to such an act of humility. The practice of footwashing as a liturgical sacrament draws attention to the usual chasm between the clergy and the laity in much the same way as the ancient

²²² Luthardt; 82.

²²³ Carson; 468.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*; 466.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Roman holiday of Saturnalia, on which the masters would serve their slaves at mealtime, merely accentuated the normal, hierarchical structure of Roman society. Thus the liturgical application of the *pedilavium* in the church over the past two millennia has only served to highlight the very distinction among the disciples of Jesus Christ, that Jesus' actions in the upper room were meant to dispel. It is best to see Jesus' act of washing His disciples feet as the epitome of humility, the Master choosing to perform the most menial service on behalf of His students as both a display of His love toward them and an example of how they ought to behave toward one another.

Do congregations that practice footwashing in a non-liturgical, latitudinarian manner – like the Mennonites – sin in so doing? There is certainly no more command from Jesus that His disciples *not* wash one another's feet than there is that they *not* pray the 'Lord Prayer' verbatim. But the danger of reducing one of the greatest examples of divine love and humility to a meaningless act – we no longer arrive at our destination with dirty feet – is as great as that of the recital of the Lord's Prayer reducing it to empty ritual. It *need not* be empty, to be sure, but the sin that remains within us renders any such repetitious acts susceptible to meaninglessness, which is tantamount to false worship. A healthy understanding of the tendency toward pride in every man should cause us to be wary of performing 'acts of humility' in the sight of others. It is probably best to pursue practical – and generally private – acts of service toward one another, and to understand from Jesus' own example that none of us are greater than any other.

The *pedilavium* took place during the Last Supper, but the narrative account in the Fourth Gospel has raised largely insoluble hermeneutical issues for the past two thousand years. Was this the Passover meal? From John's own account it would appear that this meal could not have been the Passover, as Jesus was on trial prior to the Passover meal itself.

Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.
(18:28)

When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" (19:13-14)

It seems clear from the text of John 13-17 that the events recorded here are those of the last night Jesus spent with His disciples, hence we conclude that it was the Last Supper. However, the Synoptic Gospels make it clear that this meal was the Passover meal, whereas John neither calls the meal the Passover nor mentions the institution of the Lord's Supper on this evening. Newbigin concludes without elaboration, "This is not, in St. John's chronology, the Passover, but the ordinary meal at the end of the day – the day before the Passover."²²⁵ But John's chronology does not allow for another meal the next day, the Passover meal, since in this narrative Jesus goes directly from the upper room to betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Luthardt summarizes what must have been the universal view of John's first readers, "If, now, the supper of which John speaks is the last supper, on the evening before the death of Jesus, and if the readers, moreover, know from the synoptics nothing else than that Jesus on the last evening before his death held the Passover supper with his disciples, they then could understand no other supper by the one mentioned here."²²⁶

The harmonizing of the Synoptics with the Fourth Gospel has been nigh impossible without the introduction of implausible intervals in the chronology. Furthermore, it has been almost uniformly maintained that Jesus celebrated the official Passover with His disciples, on the same evening as did the rest of the nation. This is undeniably the most natural reading of the Synoptic accounts, for instance:

Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples." So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover. (Matthew 26: 17-19)

Making preparation for the Passover meal would entail getting the sacrificial lamb and having it ritually slaughtered at the Temple, something alluded to in Mark's account,

Now on the day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?" (Mark 14:12)

²²⁵ Newbigin; 166.

²²⁶ Luthardt; 73.

Luke's account is in agreement with, and perhaps based on, Mark's,

Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be ¹⁴killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat." (Luke 22:7-8)

There does not appear to be a way to harmonize the Synoptic accounts with that of the Fourth Gospel from a strictly chronological analysis. The three Synoptics appear to place the meal unmistakably on the 'official' Passover, the 15th of Nisan, which scholars believe was the evening of Thursday to the evening of Friday of that particular year. It is to be noted that this chronology has created the additional problem of figuring Jesus' three days in the tomb, with Him rising on the first day of the week, Sunday. Without being able to harmonize John's account with the Synoptics, there is the distinct advantage of the Johannine chronology – which places Jesus' Passover meal with His disciples on the *night before* the Jewish Passover – hence beginning on Wednesday evening – that it furnishes the necessary time for the 'third day' of the resurrection. In addition, John's chronology offers the more consistent *theological* analysis of the event, as it places Jesus on the cross at the time when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple.

The exegetical problem of the evangelists' chronologies of Jesus' final evening with His disciples remains insoluble. Each narrative is fairly clear, but John's differs undeniably from the other three. The only way to make the theological analysis work is the plausible assumption that Jesus, the Law giver, can make the paschal meal His own independently of the Temple regulations. But we are still left with the differing chronology of the Synoptics. Carson summarizes the dilemma,

This reckoning [i.e., placing the Last Supper on the evening before Passover] assigns Jesus' crucifixion to Thursday afternoon, at the time of the slaughtering of the Passover lambs at the temple in preparation for the Passover that lay just ahead. Theologically, this means that the last supper cannot easily be construed as a paschal meal, even if the link between Jesus' death and the slaughter of the lambs might be considered a significant gain; historically, this reckoning introduces such jarring contradiction with the Synoptics that most commentators have felt it necessary either to approve one scheme while condemning the other, or to propose some kind of resolution.²²⁷

²²⁷ Carson; 455.

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. (13:1)

John's use of the word 'hour' has had a consistently eschatological tenor, pointing throughout the Gospel to an event on the near horizon. Now it has arrived, the hour of Jesus' departure, the hour of His glorification through death (*cp.* 13:31). "The 'hour' of Jesus was that for which he came into the world (12:27); the hour wherein God would glorify Jesus and Jesus would glorify God through a death for the world's salvation (12:24-26); the hour of judgment for the world and defeat of the devil and of the exaltation of Jesus to exercise the divine sovereignty (12:31-32); hence the hour of his 'crossing over' from this world to the Father's side (17:5)." ²²⁸ John has also been explicit concerning Jesus' self-awareness and control of this 'hour'; it is not a time or event that could take Him unawares. Knowing that His hour had arrived, therefore, Jesus withdraws from the public ministry of the previous three years and devotes His final hours to pouring out Himself in love to those whom the Father had given Him in the world, the disciples. "The public ministry of Jesus is over. John tells us nothing more of any words spoken by Jesus to the multitude. There are a few words addressed to those who arrested Him. There are a few to those who examined Him. But apart from these the whole of the rest of the Gospel concerns Jesus' final ministry to His own disciples, and the events surrounding the Passion. The section on the farewell discourse is noteworthy. There is nothing like it in the Synoptic Gospels." ²²⁹

This chapter does indeed begin what has come to be called Jesus' 'Farewell' or 'Upper Room' Discourse; His final conversation with His disciples prior to His betrayal and arrest. Carson notes how Jesus in this discourse reverses the order of the previous half of John's Gospel in terms of Jesus' acts and His teachings. "Several of the signs in the first half of the Fourth Gospel are immediately followed by extended discourses that 'unpack' the significance of the sign. Here the order is reversed: one of the purposes of the chapters immediately before us, embracing the last supper, the farewell discourse and the final

²²⁸ Beasley-Murray; 232.

²²⁹ Morris; 610.

prayer of Jesus, is to ‘unpack’, before the event, the significance of Jesus’ departure – his death, burial, resurrection, exaltation and the consequent coming of the Holy Spirit.”²³⁰

The phenomenon of a ‘Farewell Address’ was not only common in the ancient world, it was common in the biblical world as well. The blessings of the patriarch Jacob over his sons is in the form of a ‘farewell address,’ as is Joshua’s address to Israel in chapters 22-24 of that book. Indeed, the entire book of Deuteronomy is of the nature of Moses’ ‘farewell address’ as he reiterates the whole of God’s dealings with Israel just prior to his own departure and their entering the land. Beasley-Murray sees a distinct similarity between the last book of Moses and the last half of John’s Gospel, “Moreover the situation of Israel addressed in Deuteronomy is curiously similar to that of the disciples addressed in John 13-17: Israel is on the point of entering the promised land as the chosen people of God, and the disciples are about to be launched as the new Israel in order to be the instruments of the divine sovereignty in the world.”²³¹ We might add to Beasley-Murray’s analysis that just as Israel was to proceed without the presence and guidance of Moses, so also the disciples would be deprived of the physical presence of Jesus, though the important difference – and one made explicit by Jesus in this discourse – is that Jesus would still be very present with them through the Holy Spirit.

The opening verse of this discourse sets the tone and context for the entire discourse: the love of Jesus for His own. As noted above, the word ‘love’ occurs a great many more times in these five chapters than in the previous twelve of John’s Gospel. Jesus thus begins the whole evening by enacting the most supreme manifestation of humility and love that could be imagined in that culture, the washing of the disciples’ feet.

And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. (13:2-5)

The timing of this self-deprecatory act is curious, as it was common for the slave to wash the guests’ feet upon arrival. This must have indicated to the disciples that there was more to Jesus’ actions than their dirty feet. As usual, there was a lesson involved here and,

²³⁰ Carson; 455.

²³¹ Beasley-Murray; 223.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

as usual, they did not get it. That this act was indeed a lesson is further indicated by John's comment regarding Judas Iscariot, that the 'son of perdition' had already determined upon a course of betrayal, having succumbed to the temptations of the devil to turn against Jesus. The implication of John's comment is that, in spite of this and in full knowledge of this, Jesus also washed Judas' feet. John's mention of the devil also shows us, as it has progressively over the last few chapters and will increasingly over the next, that Jesus' struggle is not with flesh and blood – it is not with Judas – but with His great adversary, the devil. "In Jesus' strife with unbelief, the struggle of the Son of God with the devil had become evident to the evangelist."²³² Thus the statement that the devil had put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus does not mean that Judas himself had not concluded upon a path of betrayal – we know from the Synoptics that he had already conspired with the chief priests before the evening meal. It merely highlights the *real* conflict that was behind Judas' unbelief and consequent betrayal. Carson adds, "The idea, then, is not that Judas was not responsible, for a heart incited by Satan actually wills what the devil wills; rather, the plot against Jesus, however mediated by wicked human beings, was nothing less than satanic."²³³ Nonetheless, Jesus continues to humble Himself in love, taking the very visible manner of a lowly slave to do for His disciples the unthinkable. Once again, as we have seen so many times before, it was Peter who announces the unthinkable and, once again, does so in a very unthinking manner.

Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" (13:6-9)

It is often assumed, though with no justification in the text, that Jesus started with Peter. It is equally possible, and perhaps even more plausible, that Jesus started with Judas. The sense of John's "*Then He came to Peter*" implies that others had already been washed. One can imagine the stunned disciples, knowing that Jesus was once again doing something really important, though remaining clueless as to the meaning of this incredible act. Leave it to Peter to break the stunned silence. But Peter is not to be condemned in

²³² Luthardt; 74.

²³³ Carson; 462.

this; his reaction was eminently natural considering his intense love and admiration of Jesus. Hoskyns is right when he comments, “The contrast is not between the humiliation of Jesus and the pride of Peter, for there is no pride in Peter’s words. The contrast is between the knowledge of Jesus which is the ground of His action, and the ignorance of Peter, who does not as yet perceive that the humiliation of the Messiah is the effective cause of Christian salvation.”²³⁴ Luthardt concurs, “Peter’s conduct proceeded from reverence towards the Lord, only that he was lacking in the understanding of that which Jesus desired to do.”²³⁵ This is confirmed by Jesus’ own words in response to Peter’s objection, “*What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will understand hereafter.*”

Peter’s continued objection, though, serves as an opportunity for Jesus to further explain – in a manner of speaking – that what He is doing is more than just washing the disciples’ feet, that His actions are also symbolic of His entire salvific mission. It is at this point that commentators across the ages have attempted to ‘explain’ the *pedilavium*, to discern the hidden spiritual meaning behind Jesus’ humbling actions. It is also here that the commentators own worldview, his own agenda, shows through his explanation of the event. For instance, Lesslie Newbigin, who was very involved throughout his ministry with the care and benefit of the poor and oppressed, sees in Jesus’ actions the ultimate subversion of worldly power structures. He writes,

The solemn reply of Jesus shows how profound are the issues to which his action points. This is not just an acted lesson in humility; Peter could have understood that. But Jesus declares that it is impossible for Peter to understand at this moment what is being done, but that he will understand afterward. The foot-washing is a sign of that ultimate subversion of all human power and authority which took place when Jesus was crucified by the decision of the ‘powers’ that rule this present age...Without this radical subversion of the world’s order you cannot be a participant in the new order of which Jesus is the head.²³⁶

There is truth in this statement, truth that is taken up by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossians. But it is questionable whether this truth flows from the dialogue between Jesus and Peter, or is rather poured into it. It would not have been impossible for Peter to conceive of the world order being overturned – that was essentially the content of

²³⁴ Hoskyns; 438.

²³⁵ Luthardt; 78.

²³⁶ Newbigin; 168-169.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

the Jewish Messianic hope. What was impossible for Peter, or any of the disciples to understand, was the fact that Jesus was going to do this *through the humiliation of death*. The 'hereafter' when Peter would finally understand must refer to after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as we will find Jesus explaining to the disciples later in this same discourse. The mystery of salvation through the sacrificial death of the Messiah was still opaque to the disciples, and the *pedilavium* did not serve to clarify it any.

Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean." (13:10-11)

As expected, there is a deeper meaning to what Jesus does than the *prima facie* display of condescending love that the foot washing most clearly represents. The statement Jesus makes in response to Peter's appears to be a simply statement of fact for that place and culture – a person who bathed at home would only require that part of his body to be washed that came in contact with the dirt roads on his travels: his feet. We might well leave it at that if not for Jesus' comment, "*you are not all clean.*" In this the Lord reveals both the deeper meaning of his ministrations and the fact that one of them is a traitor, a false friend. "The action of Jesus is parabolic of the greater cleansing that he is about to achieve through his redemptive death, by which his disciples (and all who are to believe through them, 17:20) will be granted not only remission of guilt, but a part with him in the eternal kingdom."²³⁷

Jesus speaks of the disciples as already '*completely clean,*' though He had not yet gone to the cross. This proleptic proclamation of their cleansing is a statement both of the eternal predestination that placed Jesus' sheep into His hand, and the assurance that Jesus had of the completed work that He was about to accomplish. This 'already and not yet' characteristic of the redemptive work of God is imitated in Paul's writings; for instance, notice the past tense of the believers sanctification in the following from Paul's letter to the Corinthians,

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor

²³⁷ Beasley-Murray; 234.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (I Corinthians 6:9-11)

Early and medieval (as well as modern Catholic) scholars have earnestly sought to find the sacrament of the Eucharist in this statement by Jesus – that the Mass represents the necessary continued washing that occurs subsequent to and consequent on baptism. Lapse references several of the early fathers on this score. “Augustine takes this mystically. Unless I wash away thy venial sins by penance I will not give thee the Eucharist, which I am about to institute.”²³⁸ Also Ambrose, “holds that this bodily washing of the feet is necessary for all the faithful before baptism, that by it they may be prepared for the Holy Eucharist just as Christ prepared the apostles. Hence he maintains that the washing of the feet is a kind of *sacrament* or sacred rite here sanctioned by Christ, by which we are strengthened against the devil’s endeavors to trip us up.”²³⁹ On the face of the passage, however, there is no evidence of either the Lord’s Supper or Baptism and neither should be imported into the exegesis.

A more straightforward interpretation of Jesus’ words requires no reference to either baptism or the Lord’s Supper, and no resort to sacramentalism. It is to realize that Christ will be securing the once-for-all cleansing that cannot be repeated, through the sacrifice of His own body and blood. “Individuals who have been cleansed by Christ’s atoning work will doubtless need to have subsequent sins washed away, but the fundamental cleansing can never be repeated.”²⁴⁰ Luthardt adds, “As he who comes forth from the bath needs only to wash his feet, because these become unclean; so he who has once been purified by Jesus, needs constantly only to purify himself in so far as he ever again soils himself in the way of his daily life.”²⁴¹ This on-going work of sanctification and the forgiveness of daily sins is what John speaks of in his first epistle,

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(I John 1:8-9)

²³⁸ Lapse; 431.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*; 430-431.

²⁴⁰ Carson; 465.

²⁴¹ Luthardt; 79.

So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” (13:12-17)

John himself provides the most powerful commentary on Jesus’ explanation of His own actions to His disciples, when he writes, “We love, because He first loved us.”²⁴²

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

(I John 4:7-11)

Although John does not record it, we know from the Synoptics that, thinking themselves out of their Master’s hearing, the disciples were arguing among themselves as to which of them was the greatest (*cp.* Mark 9:33-37), and even the author himself must have remembered his own ambition to sit at Jesus’ right hand (or left, if his brother James got the right seat), when Jesus had come into His kingdom (*cp.* Matthew 20:20-28). By His actions in the upper room, Jesus seeks to dispel all such thoughts from His disciples’ minds. Witnessing His condescension, His self-emptying love, must have had the most humbling impact on at least eleven of the disciples, and most likely had a belated impact on the twelfth. The footwashing was a vivid and unforgettable display of that great hymn of humiliation found in Paul’s letter to the Philippians,

*Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, **taking the form of a bondservant**, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.* (Philippians 2:1-8)

²⁴² I John 4:19

But Jesus' actions are not to be interpreted, as many anabaptist sects have done, as removing all distinction of office and dignity within the Church. The main point of what Jesus says here is that, yes, He is indeed their Teacher and Lord – He outranks them in dignity. So also there will be members of the body of Christ who are of greater dignity, as Paul speaks in his body metaphor in I Corinthians 12. It is the *manner* in which this dignity or office is practiced that is at stake here: there can be no *lording it over* as the Gentiles do. There must only be mutual service without reference to office or dignity. "There will be recognized positions of leadership within the new community, but the exercise of leadership is to follow this model of servanthood."²⁴³ Newbigin speaks at length on the proper hierarchical relationship within Jesus' Church.

This is a kind of equality, but it must not be confused with the egalitarianism which is based upon the doctrine of the 'rights of man.' That, in the end, makes every man a monad fighting for his rights, because it is of the essence of our human situation that each of us tends to estimate his own rights more highly than those of his neighbor. This is a different kind of egalitarianism which is based upon the fact that the one who alone is master has proved himself a slave to us all equally. He has laid aside his life for us all. And the debt which we owe to him is to be discharged by our subjection to our neighbor in loving service...There can be no true leadership in the Church except one which has as its model the Master who does the work of a slave.²⁴⁴

I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.' Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.
(13:18-20)

The drama of Christ's Passion, for the disciples that is, combines the sorrow and confusion of hearing of the death of their Master with the announcement that His death will be due to the betrayal of one of their own number. It is commonly held, especially in the medium of art, that Judas was a shadowy character always at the fringes of the group, a brooding, introverted loner always plotting his despicable treachery. The facts are quite different, as we will see in John's eyewitness narrative. Jesus' own citation of Psalm 41 is a reference to the role Ahithophel played in the betrayal of David during the rebellion of

²⁴³ Whitacre; 332.

²⁴⁴ Newbigin; 171.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Absalom. The psalmist speaks of a ‘familiar friend,’ which makes the betrayal all the more bitter.

*Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread,
Has lifted up his heel against me.*

(Psalm 41:9)

The reference to ‘eating of bread’ is itself a mark of intimacy; this is not merely the sharing of a meal, it is the sharing of one another – *koinonia*, fellowship. The ancient Eastern culture, indeed the whole Mediterranean culture to this day, places great emphasis on the importance of the meal as the central feature of friendship. “‘The eating of bread’ is not an expression for the doing some kindness, but the companionship at the table is an expression for intimacy.”²⁴⁵ We see immediately that the betrayer was not only at the table with Jesus and the others, he was seated at Jesus’ side, another sign of friendship.

When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.” Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.” And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.” But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, “Buy those things we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor. (13:21-29)

The reference to the ‘beloved disciple’ has almost universally been seen as autobiographical, a reference to the apostle John himself. This is the first such self-reference, emphasizing again the theme of the entire upper room discourse: *Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.* The beloved disciple is seated very close to Jesus, probably on His right side so that, as they reclined at the table, leaning on their left elbows as was the custom, this disciple’s head would have been at the level of Jesus’ chest. The picture is certainly one of a young disciple who deeply cares and loves his Master, and the emotion is fully reciprocated. The action of dipping a piece of bread or meat into the gravy – a sop – and giving it to a guest is an act of favor, of kind recognition. Only here it also becomes an act of self-surrender. The sense of the verse is that the person

²⁴⁵ Luthardt; 83.

receiving the sop is also right next to Jesus, so that no interruption of the layout of the room is required or intended, only a natural show of kindness and solicitation. “In John’s account it seems that Jesus has placed Judas in the seat of honor at his left side and the ‘beloved disciple’ on his right.”²⁴⁶ If this arrangement was the case, and it is the most natural image generated by the text, then Jesus began to show His disciples what was coming from the moment they reclined at the table for the meal. This was a vivid, real-time fulfillment of the prophecy from Psalm 41, a passage that was not considered messianic until this moment.

There is debate as to whether Jesus offered Judas a sop of meat or bread. The meaning of the gesture is not contingent upon the conclusion, but it would be more theologically appropriate that the sop be bread. We do not know whether this event occurred before or after Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper (and there has been vigorous debate on that score, impinging as it does on whether Judas himself partook of the sacramental meal). If this transfer of the sop did take place *after* the Lord’s Supper, then we see that Jesus was figuratively placing His life (“*this is My body...*”) into the hands of His betrayer and, consequently, into the hands of His enemy, Satan. The charitable act of hospitality with which Jesus surrenders Himself to betrayal and death is further display of both His obedience to the will of His Father and of His unending love toward His disciples, even Judas. It may even have been intended as a final lifeline to the disciple in whose heart Satan has already begun to work against Jesus. “That Jesus, the host, handed to Judas bread that he had dipped in the dish is more plausibly a sign of favor than of hostility. In such a setting the action and the word would have been deeply significant. Jesus gives to Judas a sign of friendship, despite knowing the intention of his heart.”²⁴⁷ The handing of the sop to Judas is the final act of Jesus’ self-humiliation and self-surrender. “At this point Jesus, who has already honored Judas by placing him at his side, silently makes a further gesture of love and friendship – dipping a morsel in the dish and giving it to him. And that final act of love becomes, with a terrible immediacy, the decisive moment of judgment.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Newbigin; 173.

²⁴⁷ Beasley-Murray; 238.

²⁴⁸ *Idem*.

There seems to be some discontinuity within the chapter concerning Satan's role in Judas' actions. The opening of the chapter tells us that the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus, whereas this passage informs us that, when Judas took the sop from Jesus, *Satan entered him*. At what point, then, did Judas become the tool of the devil? To say that there is a contradiction within such a short passage is to indict the author of rank incompetence – not even able to coordinate the end from the beginning of a short narrative story. It is rather more reasonable and fair to see that the first reference is to *temptation* and the second to *conviction*. Having 'put it into the heart' of Judas to betray his Master is the terminology of temptation; Satan *having entered* Judas is the finality of possession and control. Luthardt writes of Judas, "It is no longer a foreign thought to him; it has become his own, and thereby he himself has become the dwelling-place of Satan in the circle of the disciples. There is a majestic, tragic power in this simple narrative."²⁴⁹ That power continues in the short sentence that relates Judas' self-destructive act.

Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night. (13:31)

There is that same majestic, tragic power in the short phrase ending this pericope: *And it was night*. "Having surrendered himself to the Prince of this world, Judas is banished from the light, and passes into darkness under the judgment of God."²⁵⁰ Beasley-Murray adds, "Judas was enveloped in an unilluminated night, never to be relieved. He was on the way to his own place."²⁵¹

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God. (3:18-21)

²⁴⁹ Luthardt; 89.

²⁵⁰ Hoskyns; 443.

²⁵¹ Beasley-Murray; 239.

Week 7: The Way, the Truth, and the Life

Text Reading: John 13:31 – 14:31

“Peace is Jesus’ bequest to His disciples.”
(Leon Morris)

The student of Scripture is constantly reminded that the chapter divisions of our modern English Bibles are not inspired. It is hard to imagine a more natural break in the narrative than Judas’ departure – the betrayer has finally left the fold, now Jesus can *“love His own who were in the world.”* To be sure, Jesus did not begrudge Judas the same manifestations of humble love that He gave to the other eleven – He washed Judas’ feet and perhaps even partook of the sacramental supper with *“his favored friend, who lifted up his heel.”* But Judas’ departure could not but bring a different tenor to the entire gathering – not a particularly happy tone, but one wholly different from what went before. Judas’ departure also sets in motion the final scene in the drama as Jesus moves inexorably toward the cross. “The departure of the traitor was a significant happening. It meant that the little company was purged of its evil element. It meant also that the betrayal was under way and that therefore the great saving act to be consummated on Calvary was fairly launched.”²⁵² Carson adds, “It is almost as if, now that Judas has gone, the last barrier to the onset of the impending ‘hour’ has been removed.”²⁵³

With Judas gone, Jesus may now freely commence His ‘farewell discourse’ which comprises Chapters 14-17 of the Fourth Gospel. It is in this discourse that Jesus introduces the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth who will guide the disciples into all truth and will make those sayings of Jesus clear, that remain to them obscure even at this late hour. Jesus will speak of the sorrowful event of His departure as something for which the disciples ought to rejoice, and tells them that though He is leaving them, He will not leave them as orphans. Most importantly throughout, Jesus emphasizes the union between Himself and His disciples, that where He is they will be also, and that though He will no longer be present with them, He will nonetheless be with them always. The foundation of the interpenetration of Lord and believer is *love*, and its prototype is the loving relationship of

²⁵² Morris; 630.

²⁵³ Carson; 482.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

the Triune Godhead. On the basis of His departure, and the consequent sending of the *Parakletos*, Jesus pronounces the one, true *Shalom alechem* – ‘Peace be to you’ – as the abiding foundation of the admonition, “*Let not your heart be troubled nor be afraid.*” This admonition was not merely for those disciples remaining with Jesus in the upper room – Jesus’ High Priestly prayer extends these thoughts to all believers across the millennia. In a sense, Jesus was about to fight the ‘War to End All Wars,’ and from His victory to grant true and everlasting peace to His own. It is not too much to say that these four chapters constitute some of the most powerful theology, and most pastoral, in the entire Bible.

But none of this comfort, none of this victory, none of this peace will come from the effort of man. Not even the ‘chief’ apostle Peter will stand on his own two feet. Indeed, before the night is out, Peter will deny ever having known Jesus. The scene is more dramatic than any human could conceive as a fiction: betrayal, the promise of further betrayal, scattering, sorrow, despair, hope, peace, joy – all woven together in the lives of the disciples and the farewell discourse by which Jesus, in a sense, says goodbye...for now.

So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (13:31-35)

Jesus’ comment in verse 31 establishes the transition that takes place with Judas’ departure: *Now the Son of Man is glorified...* If, as surmised in the previous lesson, the sop which Jesus handed to Judas was the bread of the Supper, then it may be that in that act – an otherwise rather odd way to single out the perpetrator – Jesus handed Himself over to Judas and, through Judas, to Satan. In any event, we should recognize the change in Jesus’ tone – to one almost of relief – that the act has been finally set in motion. “With the departure of Judas all the actors in the drama, and Jesus in particular, are committed to their courses of action, which makes the crucifixion virtually accomplished.”²⁵⁴ Jesus’ statement must be viewed eschatologically, as it represents the fulfillment of the eschatology of Israel, of the Old Testament prophets and the expectation of the divine

²⁵⁴ Beasley-Murray; 246.

intervention of Yahweh in the affairs of His people. Simply put, the time has come. “Now the eschatological present which, with the presence of Jesus, has always tended to usurp the eschatological future enters more explicitly into its own.”²⁵⁵

This moment continues to be the same obedient act of the will of the Son of God as everything up to this point, and everything afterward. It is Jesus who essentially triggers Judas to his intended act of betrayal by singling him out and then essentially commanding him to do his worst, “*That which you do, do quickly.*” We are constantly reminded throughout the Passion that “*No one has taken My life from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative.*”²⁵⁶ Thus it is Jesus who sets the moment; not even Satan can do that. “Even when Satan strives with Him, and He submits Himself to him, Satan is still subject to Him.”²⁵⁷ This is why it seems quite plausible that Jesus handed His body to Judas in the transfer of the sop. And by so doing he purges the evil from the midst of the disciples, freeing Him to continue His most intimate discourse with them to date. “By his provocation of it [*i.e.*, the betrayal] he has made the Satanic opposition to His love assume a hostile ground, and thus He has cut it apart from the circle of his disciples. So much the more, therefore, can He now devote himself to this circle in full love.”²⁵⁸ Accordingly, Jesus gives the remaining disciples, the faithful ones who are truly His from the Father, a ‘new commandment.’

Commentators are quick to point out what should be obvious to anyone who has read the Old Testament: to love one another is not a new commandment. Jesus Himself points out that the second greatest commandment – the second half of the hinge upon which the Law and the Prophets turn – is “*love your neighbor as yourself.*”²⁵⁹ Hence we are challenged by Jesus’ giving of a ‘new’ commandment, to investigate just what is ‘new’ about it. The answer to this flows from the other ‘new’ that Jesus brings in, that also is not really new – the New Covenant. The newness of the commandment, then, is based in the fulfillment of divine love through the obedient sacrifice of God’s Son, which also inaugurates the New Covenant as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic. In addition, as we see

²⁵⁵ Hoskyns; 449.

²⁵⁶ John 10:18

²⁵⁷ Luthardt; 90.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*; 93.

²⁵⁹ *Cp.* Leviticus 19:18

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

in Paul's writings (*cp.* Romans 13:8-10 and elsewhere), love becomes the ruling motif of the Church, the body of Christ, on account of the supreme love God has shown man through the sending of His Son. "Its newness would appear to consist in its being the law of the new order, brought about by the redemption of God in and through Christ."²⁶⁰ This is the "*for God so loved the world*" and "*we love, because He first loved us*" in the form of a commandment, that we should respond as recipients of the divine, gracious love by loving one another. The motive force of this display of love from the Father through the Son had never before occurred in human history. "Such a love of God towards men as had been revealed in Christ Jesus, the world had not yet seen."²⁶¹

Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward." Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake." Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times. (13:36-38)

Perhaps Peter can be defended by surmising that he only said what everyone else was thinking. In judging Peter we ought not question his motives or his sincerity, and as far as questioning his self-confidence, that is something he ought to have done himself. Thus he stands as a lesson to all generations, as Jesus Himself will say later in this discourse, "*for apart from Me you can do nothing.*"²⁶² But the point of this narrative is not to castigate Peter, nor even to prophecy his denial of Jesus later that same night. The point is to show just how comprehensively the disciples *did not* understand what Jesus had been talking about, let alone what He was about to do. The language Peter uses is telling: I will *lay down my life for You*. "He proposes to do for his Master what the Good Shepherd does for His sheep."²⁶³ This has been the essence of all manmade religion throughout time, and all perversions of Christianity from Peter's time to now: that we can do ourselves what only God in Christ can and must do for us. Paul warns all believers against the spirit which controlled Peter at this moment in the upper room, "*Take heed, lest you fall.*"²⁶⁴ And, of course, the most memorable take-away of this exchange is the historical fact that Peter

²⁶⁰ Beasley-Murray; 247.

²⁶¹ Luthardt; 100.

²⁶² John 15:5

²⁶³ Hoskyns; 452.

²⁶⁴ I Corinthians 10:12

did fall, and did deny any knowledge of Jesus, three times before the cock crowed the following morn.

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know. (14:1-4)

The first thing to recognize in this opening verse of our 'official' Chapter 14 is that Jesus' words of comfort form an *inclusio* with verse 27,

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (14:27)

At the beginning of this most intimate of Jesus' discourses we have every reason to believe that the disciples' hearts were *very* troubled, and should be able to sympathize with them. They just learned that one of their number is a traitor and that the head of their little band of disciples will deny that he even knows their Master. Jesus has been talking in oblique allusions to death, but the death of the Messiah is an impossible paradigm shift for their Second Temple Jewish minds. All things considered, "How could they fail to be troubled? Jesus himself was 'troubled in spirit' by the presence of treachery in his company."²⁶⁵ To fully appreciate this discourse, full scope must be given to the emotional upheaval that was occurring within the circle of Jesus' followers in the upper room.

Peter has been thrown into consternation at the prediction of the threefold denial, and we cannot doubt that this had its effect on the others also. If Peter was to deny Jesus did not that mean that some great trial was imminent? Moreover Jesus had spoken of His impending departure, a departure to a place where they could not follow. To men who have left everything for their Leader to be told that He is about to leave them is shattering. They are all very disturbed. And Jesus knows that within a few short hours they will be even more disturbed. So he tells them to be calm.²⁶⁶

The foundation for the disciples' comfort is perhaps the clearest statement of Jesus' self-awareness as divine as one could find in the New Testament, *Believe in God; believe also in Me*. Carson notes that this statement assumes a "formidably high Christology, for it

²⁶⁵ Newbigin; 179.

²⁶⁶ Morris; 636-637.

links Jesus with the Father as an appropriate object of faith.”²⁶⁷ Israel’s God made it very clear to His people that He would not share His glory with another; He would not allow them to put their faith or trust in any other being but Himself. Even the slightest devotion directed to one who is not God, is idolatry. Luthardt quotes Martin Luther, “Here seest thou how Christ speaks and testifies of himself, that he is equal to the almighty God, because he desires that we shall believe on him as we believe on God. Were he now not true God with the Father, the belief would be false, and would be idolatry.”²⁶⁸ The statement as it stands in the Greek, due to the common form of the indicative and imperative moods, can be rendered any one of three ways, each of which leaves us in the same place with regard to Jesus’ self-attestation as equal in worship with the Father.

Indicative/Imperative: “*You believe in God, believe also in Me!*”

Indicative/Indicative: “*You believe in God and you believe also in Me.*”

Imperative/Imperative: “*Believe in God; believe also in Me!*”

The preceding admonition, “*Let not your heart be troubled,*” is in the imperative mood so it is probably best to continue understanding Jesus as commanding something that the disciples were currently not doing. This would also, though rather subtly, reinforce what Jesus has been saying all along about Himself being the complete representative and word of the Father: if people do not believe in Him then they really do not believe in God.

Then Jesus cried out and said, “He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me.”
(12:44-45)

We see in this admonition one of the most important characteristics of the Christian life: that faith is the antidote to anxiety. Again, the bookend verses set opposite to each other *troubled hearts* and *peace*. “Confident belief in God and His Son is thus set in opposition to disturbance of mind which proceeds from unbelief.”²⁶⁹ This belief is firmly established on the fact that God in Christ has done all that is necessary for the salvation and eternal well-being of His people. “*In My Father’s house are many dwelling places...*” Jesus is going ahead of the disciples to “*prepare a place*” for them, promising to come back and to

²⁶⁷ Carson; 488.

²⁶⁸ Luthardt; 105.

²⁶⁹ Hoskyns; 453.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

receive them unto Himself. This promise extends to all who will believe on the testimony of these disciples (*cp.* John 17). Jesus' departure is by no means the end of the road; indeed, in many respects, it is only the beginning. But Jesus' promise regarding His Father's house requires a bit more unpacking.

'Mansions' in verse 2 is perhaps an unfortunate translation for the term used by Jesus. In fact, it does not actually translate the Greek word used, but rather the Latin word *mansiones* used in the Vulgate. The ancient meaning of this word is perhaps harmless enough – it meant a way-station, a resting place, almost an inn. But today the word 'mansion' has an entirely different meaning, one that plays all too well in the hands of the modern prosperity gospel preacher (who, often as not, already has at least one mansion down here on earth). The Greek word is *monai* which is a derivative of the verb meaning 'to dwell or abide.' The thought of 'abiding' will form a central cord in Jesus' farewell discourse in John 14-17, so the use of a cognate noun here in 14:2 needs to be interpreted within the overall emphasis and not locally. The meaning of the word is more literally, *abiding places*, and the meaning probably has reference to the apartments that were built into the Temple complex for the priest, Levites on rotation from the outlying territories, and at times, visiting dignitaries. 'My Father's House' usually has reference to the Temple, though in Jesus' usage of the phrase we hear strong echoes of the original, heavenly prototype.

The particular meaning of "*My Father's house*" in this passage has by no means reached universal understanding. Some see it as a reference to the whole universe, others to heave, others to the kingdom of God. Newbigin interprets it in light of the other 'abiding' statements that Jesus will make in this discourse. "It is that new dwelling place of God in the Spirit which is constituted by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead."²⁷⁰ This interpretation has merit, not least in the generally-accepted theological principle that the future dwelling place of the redeemed is not to be heaven, but the New Earth. Coupled with the New Testament teaching of Jesus as the true Temple, we can see here a more comprehensive meaning to the *abiding places* in *My Father's house* without recourse to the mundane thought of actual buildings, much less elaborate mansions. Still, it remains

²⁷⁰ Newbigin; 180.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

evident that Jesus is *going somewhere*, and the *abiding places* have reference to that place where He is going. Thus there remains also the idea of a heavenly dwelling for those who are 'in Christ.'

Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (14:5-6)

This discourse is unique for the number of disciples that get in on the conversation. Peter is remarkably silent, due undoubtedly to what Jesus has already said about his impending denials before the night was out. But his place is now taken up by three other disciples rarely heard from : Thomas, Philip, and Judas (John is quick and clear to note, *not Iscariot*). All three give expression to the disciples' shared confusion; they simply do not know what Jesus is talking about. He has said that they know where He is going and that they know the way He is going. To Thomas, and assuredly to all the others, such knowledge completely escapes him, "*How can we know the way if we don't even know where You are going?*" But Jesus has been quite clear about where He is going: He is returning to His Father who sent Him into the world; He is going back to where He was before He came into this world. And knowing where Jesus is going provides the answer as to the way there: He is the Way, "*No one comes to the Father except through Me.*"

It is not that he teaches the way, or guides us in the way: if that were so, we could thank him for his teaching and then proceed to follow it on our own. He himself is the way, and therefore it is only by being made part of his humanity that we are on the way and know that we are not lost even though we do not see the destination.²⁷¹

Jesus' statement concerning Himself is, of course, one of the characteristic 'I Am' statements of the Fourth Gospel. There is one more, in Chapter 15, but this one is perhaps the most astounding of them all. It is certainly, from a religious perspective, *exclusionary*. Believers must remember that it is not Christianity that sets itself up as exclusive, it is Jesus Himself who said (and says), "*No one comes to the Father but through Me.*" And this 'I Am' statement explains just why it is that Jesus is the Way, and the only Way: it is because He

²⁷¹ Newbigin; 181.

is the Truth and the Life. “He is the way, in that he is the truth and the life.”²⁷² These two words – Truth and Life – are woven throughout the Fourth Gospel, and at all times they point to the One who *is* Truth in Himself and the One who *is* Life in Himself.

These two terms are coordinate, and are seeped in ancient philosophical history. During Jesus’ trial, we will hear Pilate rhetorically ask, “*What is truth?*” while standing before the One who is the answer to that query. Each term describes Jesus essentially, though each is different in perspective on the divine nature in Christ. Carson writes, “Jesus is the way to God, precisely because he is the truth of God and the life of God.”²⁷³

Jesus is the truth, because he embodies the supreme revelation of God – he himself ‘narrates’ God, says and does exclusively what the Father gives him to say and do...He is God’s gracious self-disclosure, his ‘Word’ made flesh. Jesus is the life, the one who has ‘life in himself,’ ‘the resurrection and the life,’ ‘the true God and eternal life.’ Only because he is the truth and the life can Jesus be the way for others to come to God.²⁷⁴

Jesus’ declaration of Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life is the very foundation of the Christian’s faith and of the faith of the Christian Church. No religious experience or thought of man could ever be ‘the Way,’ because that Way could only have been revealed by the One who is the destination. Human religion – even in Christian guise – is common in this one trait: it is man’s attempt to establish the way to heaven, nirvana, Elysium. But “We do not come to the true knowledge of God by any kind of induction from human experience, even human religious experience. In face of the fact of death that enterprise is doomed in advance. We come to the true knowledge of God by knowing Jesus, and following him along the way which he goes and which he is.”²⁷⁵ Hoskyns adds, “No man can attain the Father except by perceiving the Truth and participating in the Life which is revealed to men in His Son. Thus, while being the guide, He does not guide to what is beyond Himself. Knowledge of the Son is the knowledge of God.”²⁷⁶

Morris points out how remarkable, even incredible, Jesus’ words are in this setting,

²⁷² Luthardt; 111.

²⁷³ Carson; 491.

²⁷⁴ *Idem*.

²⁷⁵ Newbigin; 182.

²⁷⁶ Hoskyns; 455.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

We should not overlook the faith involved both in the utterance and in the acceptance of those words, spoken as they were on the eve of the crucifixion. 'I am the Way,' said One who would shortly hang impotent on a cross. 'I am the Truth,' when the lies of evil men were about to enjoy a spectacular triumph. 'I am the Life,' when within a few hours His corpse would be placed in a tomb.²⁷⁷

"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. (14:8-12)

Philip now joins the conversation, deepening the hole that Thomas began to dig. It is as if this disciple say, "Forget about the Way, just show us the Father and everything will be good." Jesus responds with justifiable frustration, to reiterate that the unity that exists between Himself and the Father (remember, "I and the Father are one" from 10:30) means nothing less than "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." Theologically, of course, this will be codified by the author of the letter to the Hebrews, though even this is nothing more than John himself has written in the prologue to this Gospel.

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:1-3)

Showing His disciples the Father constitutes everything Jesus has been doing since His first days with them. He had shown them the Father through His teachings; He had shown them the Father through His works; there was nothing left to show them that they had not already seen, as they had seen Him. "But Jesus cannot refer to any one beyond himself. There is no proof for him except his self-proof. After so much intercourse between them, Philip ought to know that."²⁷⁸ Still, Jesus makes use of Philip's frustrating question to once again assert His unit with the Father, a unity that could not be merely moral or

²⁷⁷ Morris; 641.

²⁷⁸ Luthardt; 114.

volitional, but could only be essential if Jesus' words have any meaning at all. "These are words which no mere man has a right to use."²⁷⁹

Jesus begins to move on in the discussion, however, when He says "*and greater works shall he [i.e., the believer in Jesus] do because I go to My Father.*" This statement has engendered a great deal of misunderstanding across the millennia, and is a favorite of modern charismatics and faith healers. The 'greater works' phrase is the conundrum – what does Jesus mean by this? In what way would the disciples' works be *greater* than Jesus'? It has been common to interpret the 'greater' in terms of quantity. Jacobus, for instance, writes, "He proceeds to show how by faith in Him they, the Apostles, should acquire such wonder-working power."²⁸⁰ But it is hard to imagine anyone doing more miraculous miracles than Jesus did – the example of raising a man already four days in the tomb was intended, among other things, to show the inimitable life-giving power of Jesus.

The emphasis, then, is often place on *quantity* of miracles: the disciples will do *more* miracles than Jesus did. If this is the case, it is odd that Luke does not record the apostles performing more miracles than are recorded in the Gospels. Perhaps the quantity was meant to be spread over the history of the Church. That, of course, consequently touches on the issue as to whether miracles are to be considered an essential, constitutive part of the Christian Church. The charismatic would say so; but most theologians across the ages would say not.

It seems that the key to understanding Jesus' statement is the cause given, "*because I go to the Father.*" This indicates that the efficacy of the believer's works is due to Jesus' ascent, which is itself predicated on His death and resurrection. In other words, it is the result of His finished work that "*greater works than these will he do*" can be said of the believer. As will be developed later in the Farewell Discourse, the immediate benefit to the believer of Christ's ascent is the sending and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Considering that Jesus will say in this same discourse, "*apart from Me you can do nothing,*" it is safe exegesis to conclude that the 'greater works' that the believer does are entirely due to this gift of the Spirit and are in no way things that the believer does on his or her own.

²⁷⁹ Morris; 644.

²⁸⁰ Jacobus; 253. It is noteworthy that Jacobus seems clearly in this section of his commentary to limit this grant of 'greater works' to the Apostles – with the capital 'A.' Jesus' own words are more general: *He who believes in Me...*

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Hoskyns writes, “The life and death of the Christ do not result in the emergence in human history of a race of supermen whose works are their own glorification. These miraculous acts are wrought by faith in Jesus and by prayer in His name. They are in fact His acts, the signs of His Ascension, and of the glory of the Father.”²⁸¹ Carson adds, “The works believers are given to do through the power of the eschatological Spirit, *after* Jesus’ glorification, will be set in the framework of Jesus’ death and triumph, and will therefore more immediately and truly reveal the Son.”²⁸² The history of the early Church as recorded in the Book of Acts does not narrate greater miracles than Jesus did but rather a greater harvest of conversions than Jesus experienced. “What Jesus means we may see in the narratives of the Acts. There there are a few miracles of healing, but the emphasis is on the mighty works of conversion.”²⁸³

It is often considered trite to say that the greatest miracle is the conversion of a sinner, but it is true. Mundane miracles are, to be sure, quite popular as they address immediate needs – but miracles of healing do not prevent eventual death; even Lazarus was to die after being raised from his grave. The miracles that people so often seek and clamor after are, every one, temporal; conversion is eternal. ‘Greater works’ in terms of more and greater miracles, were not done in the early Church and have not been done since. But from a small handful of disciples in the upper room, the body of Jesus Christ – His Church – has extended to all corners of the earth. “The going of Jesus to the Father by the path of suffering, death, and resurrection is the setting in motion of a far vaster movement in which the glory of the Father will be manifested through the works of the disciples done in the name of the Son. The eschatological theme of the mission of the Church to all the nations now begins to open up.”²⁸⁴ Luthardt adds, “Such new power was at once revealed in the apostles, who could reap where Christ had only sown. It means, therefore, the entire activity which served the founding, forming, and gathering the church of Jesus Christ, and which is conditioned upon Jesus’ diving position and the spirit of the new birth.”²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Hoskyns; 457.

²⁸² Carson; 496.

²⁸³ Morris; 646

²⁸⁴ Newbigin; 183

²⁸⁵ Luthardt; 117-118.

And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. (14:13-14)

It is commonplace among Christians to end one's prayer with "In Jesus' Name, Amen." But have we given sufficient thought to what this phrase means? As with any phrase or prayer, this suffix to our prayers can easily become rote tradition, meaningless. The underlying principle to praying *in Jesus' Name* has already been revealed in this very same chapter, "No one comes to the Father but through Me." (14:6) Thus fundamentally praying *in Jesus' Name* means recognition that the approach to the Father, who hears and answers prayer, can only be through the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Prayer can only be effective in reaching the Father if it is through the Son, and one can only pray through the Son if one is *in* the Son. Thus, "He prays in the name of Christ, who when he prays is in Christ, and who prays to God as one who is in Christ."²⁸⁶ This is another of the exclusionary principles of the Christian faith, that God does not hear all prayers but only those who are offered in and through His Son. From the time of Christ's advent, and certainly from the time of His glorification, prayers may only be made *in the Name* of Jesus Christ. "From now onwards, therefore, men must address themselves in prayer to the Father of Jesus Christ, and in the name of Christ."²⁸⁷

This is the 'sectarian' prayer that is no longer permitted in many of our public forums such as public school and Congress. One may pray all day long, and one may pray to a 'higher being,' but one may not pray in the name of Jesus Christ. In 2007, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a suit against the County Board of Commissioners of Forsyth County, North Carolina. The complaint was initiated by two people who attended a board meeting in December of 2006 and who witnessed the standard, Christian prayer with which the meetings were typically opened. The prayer ended "For we do make this prayer in Your Son Jesus' name, Amen." Initial and appellate rulings were in favor of the plaintiffs as it was maintained that such prayers represent an affirmation of one religion over others, and are therefore unconstitutional. The U. S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case, thus allowing the lower court decisions to stand.

²⁸⁶ Luthardt; 119.

²⁸⁷ *Idem*.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

This case is but one example of the political ramifications of praying “*in Jesus’ Name*.” But that is not the point Jesus is making here.

Not only does praying *in Jesus’ Name* mean self-consciously coming to the Father through the Son, it also means praying according to the will of the Son, which is itself the will of the Father, as we have seen so often in the Fourth Gospel. In John’s first epistle he offers a synonymous statement with regard to prayer,

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (I John 5:14-15)

Hoskyns comments, “No doubt prayer in the name of Jesus means primarily the powerful invocation of His name. But the synonymous phrase *according to his will* (I John v.14) shows that the idea expressed here is that the prayers of the disciples will be heard because the faithful petitioners belong to Christ, and, being united with Him, offer only such prayers as are agreeable to Him.”²⁸⁸ This fact should be on every believer’s mind when he or she prays *in Jesus’ Name*. The suffix phrase is not a magical formula that renders prayer effective – like closing one’s eyes, kneeling, or holding one’s hand just so – regardless of the content of the prayer. “It means that prayer is to be in accordance with all that the name stands for. It is prayer proceeding from faith in Christ, prayer that gives expression to a unity with all that Christ stands for, prayer which seeks to set forward Christ Himself. And the purpose of it all is the glory of God.”²⁸⁹

If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. (14:15-18)

This passage is entirely consistent with the above interpretation of praying *in Jesus’ Name*. To keep His commandments is to be in and do His will, the only acceptable position for the believer’s prayer *in Jesus’ Name*. But Jesus knows that this is not something the believer will be able to do on his or her own power; true prayer does not flow from the fallen human heart, even the regenerate one. In order that all of this might indeed come to

²⁸⁸ Hoskyns; 457-458.

²⁸⁹ Morris; 646.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

pass, Jesus here promises the One who will make it come to pass, the ‘Helper,’ the ‘Spirit of truth.’ This gift alone will enable the believer to truly pray according to Jesus’ commandments and thus *in Jesus’ Name*. Although he does not mention the same phrase, the Apostle Paul speaks of the same phenomenon in Romans,

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

This is our first introduction to the *Parakletos* – often translated ‘Comforter’ in many English Bibles. Carson notes that the word ‘comforter,’ in Elizabethan English, meant one who strengthens,’ and thus was not a bad translation at the time. However, “In today’s ears, ‘Comforter’ sound either like a quilt or like a do-gooder at a wake, and for most speakers of English should be abandoned.”²⁹⁰ As is often pointed out, the word literally refers to one who “comes alongside” to assist another, hence the New American Standard translation as ‘Helper.’ In secular Greek, the *parakletos* refers to a ‘legal assistant, advocate,’²⁹¹ and this designation fits with what we read of Jesus in I John, where the very same word is used.

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (I John 2:1)

Thus we can understand why Jesus promises *another* Parakletos, as He has been and will remain the Advocate for the believer, “*ever living to make intercession*” for us. “Jesus is the original *Paraklētōs*, the one who intercedes with the Father for the disciples and who comforts and exhorts them in their distress.”²⁹² Thus we must interpret the person and the role of the Parakletos as similar to that of the Son, which is also why Jesus tells His disciples that He will not leave them as orphans, He will come to them. This begins also to indicate that the One whom Jesus will pray the Father to send to His disciples is of the same nature as the One whom the Father sent into the world, Jesus Himself. As Jesus’

²⁹⁰ Carson; 499.

²⁹¹ *Idem*.

²⁹² Newbigin; 187.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

monologue continues, He becomes ever more specific on this score – that the coming of the Spirit of truth is the same as His coming to them, and this is the same as both He and the Father abiding with them. The essential equality of the Parakletos with both the Father and the Son, as well as His distinct Personhood, is established beyond question in this discourse. “This passage has always been regarded as expressing the personality of the Holy Ghost.”²⁹³

Jesus mentions here and elsewhere, that what He will be sending them – the *Paraketos, peace, etc.*, is something unique to His believers; the world cannot receive what He gives to His own. This concept will baffle another of the disciples – Judas (*not* Iscariot) – a few verses down. But what Jesus is saying here is a continuation of the Good Shepherd discourse, in that the distinction between ‘My sheep’ and ‘not My sheep’ will continue even after His glorification. The human condition is not naturally prepared to receive the gift of God in the Holy Spirit, it must be prepared by Him first. “The soul can apprehend that only for which it has an affinity. They who stand apart from Christ have neither the spiritual eye to discern the Paraclete, nor the spiritual power to acknowledge Him.”²⁹⁴

A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, “Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.” (14:19-24)

At the heart of what Jesus is saying to His disciples is the resurrection, but they do not understand that yet. Jesus has already said that He possesses the authority to lay down His life, and to take it up again – “*this commandment I have from My Father.*”²⁹⁵ But in spite of what they have seen Jesus do, not least in the raising of Lazarus from the grave, the disciples do not comprehend the resurrection as coming in a single person, and by that person’s own will. Their thoughts are in concert with Martha’s, “*I know that he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.*”²⁹⁶ Furthermore, Jesus will not be returning to them

²⁹³ Luthardt; 121.

²⁹⁴ Westcott; 205.

²⁹⁵ John 10:18

²⁹⁶ John 11:24

in the manner that He has been with them these three or so years. He is 'going to His Father' and they will see Him no more. "He speaks from his higher position of life, into which he enters with the glorification and ascension, and he speaks in the present, in so far as that life stands already as if present before his soul."²⁹⁷ All this, which seems so clear and comprehensible this side of Pentecost, had to be terribly confusing and depressing to the disciples.

There is some questions as to which 'day' Jesus is referring to when He says, "*At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.*" The only 'day' to which this applies, at least at its beginning, is the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out into the disciples. The coming of Jesus and the Father to 'make their home' within the disciples is, of course, parallel to the giving of the Holy Spirit after Christ's ascension – the Godhead indwells every believer by virtue of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This will be elaborated further in the Farewell Discourse. For now, however, what Jesus has said is sufficient to confuse at least one of the disciples whom we have not heard speak before: Judas, *not* Iscariot.

Judas' comment makes more sense to modern readers when we realize that the Jewish expectation of the Messiah left no room for a 'secret' manifestation. The Messiah was to come very publicly, in conquest and victory, to take up the throne of David in Jerusalem and to deliver Israel from her oppressors. We have already seen the contrast between Jesus' entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey versus the political expectations of Second Temple Israel, that her deliverer would be a conquering king. But Jesus' kingdom "*is not of this world*" otherwise His army would indeed be fighting for Him.²⁹⁸ Thus, "Judas hears these distinctions between what the world will perceive or be given, and what the disciples will enjoy, and in his mind he cannot square this distinction with his belief that the kingdom must arrive in undeniable and irresistible splendour."²⁹⁹ Jesus, as often, does not answer Judas' question directly, but simply reiterates that which will show the distinction of which He speaks: those who are His, those who love Him, will walk in obedience.

²⁹⁷ Luthardt; 125.

²⁹⁸ John 18:36

²⁹⁹ Carson;504.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

This passage has often been pointed to as evidence of the Pelagian view, that man has the ability to obey God within himself, and indeed must do so if he is to be saved. This perspective erroneously sees obedience as causal in this passage – the relationship between the believer and God as the *result* of the believer's obedience. This is refuted in many other places in Scripture, too numerous to occupy us here. It is sufficient to look to the Old Testament prophecies of the event to which Jesus refers, and to see that obedience was to be the *effect* of God's sovereign, saving work. Key among these prophecies, of course, is the 'gospel' in Ezekiel 36,

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

(Ezekiel 36:25-27)

It is irrefutable that the order of events in this prophecy is (1) the giving of the Holy Spirit and the new heart and (2) *consequently*, the obedience of the one now indwelt. This is no more or less than what Jesus is saying in the Farewell Discourse. The evidence of those who are His – the *distinction* between those who receive the Spirit and those who cannot – will be the former's obedience to the word and will of God. The final refutation of the Pelagian (and Arminian) error is the biblical fact that man has rendered himself both incapable and unwilling to walk in obedience to the statutes and commandments of a holy God. In His infinite mercy and grace, God has determined a way to be "*both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*"³⁰⁰

It is worth noting that Jesus' expression regarding His and His Father's coming "*to make Our abode/home with him*" uses the same root word as we found in verse 1, so often translated 'mansions' in the English. Jesus' Father's house is the fullness of the presence of the Father through the Son, Jesus Christ. Hence the consistent use of the term 'abide' or 'abiding place' in this section. The underlying thought is not huge and ornate mansions in heaven, but abiding in and with the Godhead – the Father and the Son, through the indwelling or abiding of the Holy Spirit. This sense of abiding, of a 'home' in and with

³⁰⁰ Romans 3:26

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

God, is emphasized by Jesus when He comforts His disciples (in all ages), *“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”* (v. 18)

These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

(14:25-27)

Understanding His disciples' confusion, Jesus returns to them that He had just introduced, the *Parakletos*. Here He identifies this one as the Holy Spirit, which ties the *Parakletos* with what the disciples themselves have heard from their Scriptures. The connection, therefore, between Jesus' Farewell Discourse and Ezekiel 36 (among other Old Testament passages) is made clear. Jesus says two more things here about the *Parakletos* to add to the introduction He has given earlier in the passage. The first thing is that the Holy Spirit will be sent by the Father *in His name*. Even though the Holy Spirit is Himself fully God, He will not come as an independent authority in the disciples' lives. Rather, as Jesus points out secondly, He will *“bring to remembrance all things that I said to you.”* As the *“Spirit of Truth,”* the Holy Spirit testifies only what the One who is the Truth (14:6) has said. Just as the Son witnessed only to the Father and not to Himself, so now the Spirit will witness of the Son and not of Himself. *“As Father and Son are related to each other in the sending of Jesus, so are the Son and Spirit related to each other in the sending of the Spirit.”*³⁰¹

This guiding by the Holy Spirit into all truth becomes the theme of His upcoming and abiding ministry within the Church after Christ's ascension. Jesus told His disciples many things that they did not understand, and told them that there were many things He could not yet tell them, because they were not able to understand. *“Jesus has told his disciples the whole counsel of God (cp. 15:15, 17:6), but not yet in the many-sided development of the truth. The task of the Spirit was to bring to full unfolding the seeds of knowledge laid in the hearts of the disciples.”*³⁰² A clear understanding of what the Father was doing in and through the Son, could not be attained prior to the outpouring and indwelling of the Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. This guidance by the Holy Spirit would not

³⁰¹ Luthardt; 130.

³⁰² *Ibid.*; 131.

be limited to the disciples themselves, but was to be the motive, life force of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout the ages. Newbigin comments on how the Spirit leads each generation afresh in the remembrance of Jesus' sayings, "The Spirit will take 'these things' – the words and works of Jesus which belong to that particular and very limited world of first-century Judea – and by bringing them afresh to the remembrance of the disciples in every place and every time, teach them 'all things,' until 'all things' find their true unity in Jesus as the head and king of the cosmos."³⁰³

In the meantime, the disciples' troubled hearts are to be at peace, for Jesus leaves them 'Peace.' The concept of 'peace' here and in the Hebrew thought world, is 'shalom' – wellness, wholeness, stability. "*Peace* is one of the fundamental characteristics of the messianic kingdom anticipated in the Old Testament."³⁰⁴ What Jesus is saying here in verse 27 ties in with an ancient Near Eastern custom of 'peace' as a capacity within the human soul. This concept comes out in Jesus' charge to His disciples when He first sent them out into the villages of Israel,

Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. (Matthew 10:11-13)

But of course the peace that Jesus leaves with His disciples, and through them to His Church, is not the 'peace' that the world gives; Paul tells us it is the deepest form of peace imaginable: it is peace with God (*cp.* Rom. 5:1). "But it is not the kind of peace which the world knows – only a temporary cessation of strife, a cease-fire at the end of a period of fighting. It is in fact, as will be made clear, something given while the battle is still going on."³⁰⁵ Significantly, Jesus gives His disciples *His* peace, a peace that truly passes all understanding, as it manifests itself here on the verge of death and separation from His Father. It is, therefore, a peace born of trust, a self-awareness that He is in the will of His Father and consequently there is no room for anxiety, no room for fear. "But Jesus displays transcendent peace, his own peace, *my peace*, throughout his perilous hour of suffering and death. And by that death he absorbs in himself the malice of others, the sin of the world,

³⁰³ Newbigin; 191.

³⁰⁴ Carson; 505. *Cp* Nu.6:26; Ps. 29:11; Isa. 9:6-7; 52:7; 54:13; 57:19; Ezek. 37:26; Hg. 2:9.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*; 192.

and introduces the promised messianic peace in a way none of his contemporaries had envisaged.”³⁰⁶

“Peace is Jesus’ bequest to His disciples.”³⁰⁷ This peace belongs to all of Jesus’ disciples in all ages, because it is secured by His resurrection and ascension and is established in every believer’s heart by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Thus Jesus’ “*let not your heart be troubled*” becomes Paul’s,

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here. (14:28-31)

This passage has engendered controversy within the Church because of Jesus’ statement, “*My Father is greater than I.*” Does this indicate a subordination amounting to Jesus being ‘less’ divine than the Father? Such a conclusion is impossible in light of the admonition with which this chapter opens, “*Believe in God; believe also in Me.*” Philosophically, the definition of ‘god’ does not allow a sharing of divinity. Theologically, at least in terms of the theology of the Bible, Israel’s God will not share His glory with another. There is God and there is not-God; there is no ‘part-God.’ Thus it is necessary to interpret Jesus’ words in light of all of His references to His Father, and to the subordinate role He Himself took when ‘sent’ into the world by His Father. This is not a denial of the essential equality of the Second Person of the Godhead with the First. It is rather another acknowledgement that in the economy of redemption, and as the God-Man, Jesus holds a ‘lesser’ position than the Father: the Father *sends*, the Son *is sent*; the Father *wills*, the Son *obeys that will*. Hoskyns quotes Chrysostom as maintaining the orthodox doctrine concerning both the unity of the Godhead and the economic trinity in the plan of redemption, “If any one say that the Father is greater in so far as He is the cause, we will

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*; 506

³⁰⁷ Morris; 657.

not contradict this. But this, however, does not make the Son to be of a different essence.”³⁰⁸

It appears that at this point Jesus leaves the upper room and continues His remaining time with His disciples on the way to and in the garden of Gethsemane, though this is not explicitly stated by John. The end approaches, and Jesus again makes it clear who His adversary really is: Satan, “*the ruler of the world*” who is coming. “The human agents are not forgotten, but they are given no stress. In the coming of Judas and the soldiers Jesus saw the coming of the evil one.”³⁰⁹ Speaking of the evangelist, Luthardt notes, “Thus he beholds in the opposition between Jesus and the Jews, which predominates in his gospel, the conflict between Jesus and Satan.”³¹⁰ In this conflict there will only be the appearance of victory for Satan, for ahead of time Jesus declares to His disciples that Satan “*has nothing in Me.*” There was no sin within Jesus for Satan to latch onto, no disobedience or rebellion against God for Satan to accuse Jesus of before the Father. Satan had never taken on a completely innocent man, though his encounter with Job is analogous. “There was in Christ nothing which the devil could claim as belonging to his sovereignty. In others he finds that which is his own, and enforces death as his due; but Christ offered Himself voluntarily.”³¹¹ Newbigin provides an excellent overview of what is transpiring,

There is not much more time for the Eternal to speak. Judas is already on his way. But behind Judas are the powers of law and government and religion, and behind these stands ‘the ruler of the world’ who is blind and blinds men’s eyes to the true glory (I Cor. 2:8f). In the trial that will follow, the ruler of this world through his representatives will declare Jesus guilty. But, as always, his supposed wisdom is self-deceived and his power is powerless. The action which is to follow is not the action of the ruler of the world; it is the action of Jesus who will disarm him and expose the foolishness and powerlessness of his claim; it is the action of Jesus, an action of pure love and obedience, by which the world will be enabled to know his love for the Father. And the time for action has come. So ‘Up, let us go.’³¹²

³⁰⁸ Hoskyns; 463.

³⁰⁹ Morris; 659.

³¹⁰ Luthardt; 137.

³¹¹ Westcott; 210.

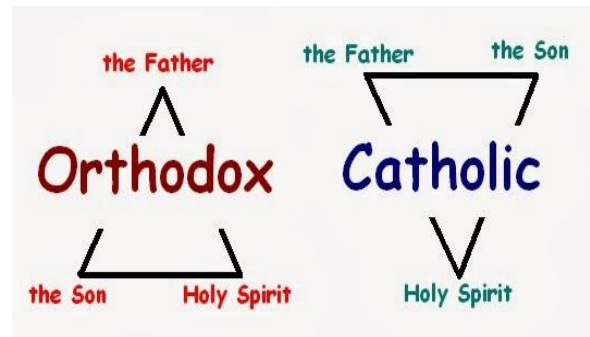
³¹² Newbigin; 193.

Week 8: The Vine, the True One

Text Reading: John 15:1 - 27

*"The love of Christ is, as it were,
The atmosphere in which the disciple lives.
It is not something realized at a momentary crisis,
But enjoyed continuously."
(Brook Foss Westcott)*

The heretical teachings of Arius, that Jesus was not fully God, were condemned at the Council of Nicæa in AD 325, but they did not die out in the Church after that. Indeed, they flourished for centuries, especially in the Greek-speaking Eastern branch of the Church and within the imperial court at Constantinople. In AD 589, in far off Toledo in Visigoth Spain, another council weighed in on the matter in a manner that was to prove the final straw between the Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) branches of the Christian Church. In an effort to emphasize the co-equality of the Son with the Father from all eternity – essentially the full deity of Jesus Christ – the Council introduced new wording to the Nicæan Creed, saying now that the Holy Spirit proceeded not only from the Father, but also from the Son. This became known as the *filioque controversy* from the Latin which means ‘and Son.’ The original creed of Nicæa reads thus,



And [we believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver-of-Life, who **proceedeth from the Father**, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. And [we believe] in one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. We acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, [and] we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Whereas the Toledan modification reads, "*proceedeth from the Father and the Son.*" Again, the insertion was felt necessary due to the ongoing Arianism, especially of the Visigoths, and sought to defend the divine dignity of the Son as co-sender of the Holy Spirit. The

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

filioque controversy, which seems rather silly to the modern reader, was nonetheless quite heated and, in the 11th Century, would be cited as a main cause for the division between the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity, a division that remains to this day. To be sure, the *filioque clause* was not the only reason for the “Great Schism” of AD 1054; arguably the claim of primacy by the Roman Bishop – by then called the ‘Pope’ – was a greater cause (and remains so). Another issue was the use of icons and images in worship, a practice that the Western churches had already adopted but was condemned as heretical by the Byzantine Emperor Leo III in the early 8th Century.

In the years leading up to the Great Schism, the church in the East was led by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius (circa 1000–1058), while the church in Rome was led by Pope Leo IX (1002–1054). At the time, problems sprang up in Southern Italy, which was part of the Byzantine Empire. Norman warriors had invaded, conquering the region and replacing Greek bishops with Latin ones. When Cerularius learned that the Normans were forbidding Greek rites in the churches of Southern Italy, he retaliated by shutting down the Latin rite churches in Constantinople. Their longstanding disputes erupted when Pope Leo sent his chief advisor Cardinal Humbert to Constantinople with instructions to deal with the problem. Humbert aggressively criticized and condemned the actions of Cerularius. When Cerularius ignored the pope’s demands, he was formally excommunicated as Patriarch of Constantinople on July 16, 1054. In response, Cerularius burned the papal bull of excommunication and declared the bishop of Rome to be a heretic. The East-West Schism was sealed.³¹³

Which side of the Church was correct with regard to the *filioque clause*? When first introduced by Jesus, it appears that the Eastern (Nicæan) perspective is the correct one:

*And I will ask the Father and **He will give you another Helper**, that He may be with you forever.*
(4:16)

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom **the Father will send in My name**, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.*
(14:26)

But in our focus chapter in this lesson, John 15, Jesus seems to complicate the matter,

*But when the Helper comes, **whom I shall send to you from the Father**, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.*
(15:26)

³¹³ [The Great Schism of 1054 and the Split of Christianity \(learnreligions.com\)](https://www.learnreligions.com/great-schism-1054-split-christianity). Accessed 02April2022.

The two ‘verse 26s’ are, in fact, complimentary, and this is the aspect that the Council of Toledo sought to bring to the fore. The Holy Spirit – the *Parakletos* – was to be sent *by the Father in My Name* and *by Jesus from the Father*. Jesus’ “*I shall send*” is therefore equivalent to His “*I will ask*.” This is, of course, because the Father always grants what the Son asks (*cp.* 11:41-42). “It is plain that the Spirit is regarded as being connected in the most intimate fashion with both the Father and the Son.”³¹⁴ The theological interpretation of the phrases is that of ‘*double procession*’ which attempts to define the sense in which the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, *which fact no one opposes*, and that He also proceeds, or is sent by, the Son. It is interesting that even modern Orthodox theologians do not dispute the theology of the *filioque clause* but only its historicity and place in conciliar law. In other words, since Toledo was not an ‘ecumenical’ council, it cannot stand on par with the Councils of Nicæa, Constantinople, and Chalcedon, all of which affirmed the Creed without the clause. What it really boils down to, it would seem, is that for the Eastern Churches to accept the *filioque clause* would be tantamount to accepting the primacy of the Roman bishop, which, after almost a thousand years and several recent, friendly meetings between popes and patriarchs, the Eastern Church is still vehemently unwilling to do. A contemporary Orthodox scholar confirms this thought:

The understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit ‘from the Father and the Son’ is prevalent in writing of many of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. Many accepted a sense of double procession as a correct understanding of the faith. There are numbers of Eastern Theologians who would not declare double procession as heresy. The fundamental objection to it, is putting it in without an Oecumenical Council, at which point I imagine they would oppose its inclusion. Perhaps this is the point that gets down to the nub of the issue. The Pope, (aka the Patriarch of Rome) asserts a primacy that has never been accepted in the East. The Patriarch of Constantinople holds a primacy as ‘the first among equals’, very much in the way Anglicans understand the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury. For the Eastern Church to include the Filioque clause requires them to accept the Primacy of Rome (which sees its authority as ‘the vicar of Christ’ rather than the more conciliar approach of the Eastern Patriarchs) which is unlikely the happen any time soon.³¹⁵

³¹⁴ Morris; 683.

³¹⁵ [The Filioque Clause – Black Swan Theology \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.blackswantheology.com/2022/04/03/the-filioque-clause/). Accessed 03April2022.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

As a defense against Arianism, the *filioque clause* was a signal failure (as most conciliar pronouncements have been against heresy). Theologically, of course, the clause further expounds on the essential equality of the Son to the Father, which is amply borne out by Scripture and probably does not need a Council of Toledo to establish. Conversely, the Orthodox devotion to the ‘ancient’ ecumenical Councils of Nicæa, Constantinople, and Chalcedon merely highlights the stagnation of that branch of professing Christianity, frozen as it is in the 4th Century.

John 15 is a continuation of the Farewell Discourse, but there has been much debate as to just *where* Jesus and His disciples are at this time. It appears from the closing verse of Chapter 14 that they have left the upper room; it is hard to argue for a continuation of the Upper Room Discourse once Jesus says, “*Arise, let us go from here.*” The theory that the contents of Chapters 15 & 16 were later material left by the Apostle John and incorporated into the Gospel that bears his name, fails on account of the evidently poor transition between the end of Chapter 14 and the beginning of Chapter 15. The advocates of ‘redactors’ never fail to ignore the great probability that such an editor would smooth the transition of his material into the original text so that such seemingly abrupt jumps from one context to another would be avoided. Knowing, as we do, that Jesus was to be betrayed in the Garden and not in the upper room, it is most reasonable to see Chapter 14 as a continued discourse spoken by Jesus as they walked from the city to the Garden of Gethsemane. This form of *peripatetic* – literally, ‘walking around’ – teaching was common in the ancient world. It was apparently the style of choice for no less a philosopher than Aristotle. Thus we conclude that with the opening of the Vine metaphor, Jesus is continuing His Farewell Discourse, continuing to teach His disciples about who He is and what it is He is about to do.

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.
(15:1-4)

This is the seventh and final ‘I Am’ statement in the Fourth Gospel. As we have seen with the previous ones, the statement ‘I Am’ is emphatic – literally, *I Myself Am* – and

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

thus may reasonably be interpreted as an allusion to the memorial name of God: YHWH – *I Am that I Am*. Each of the ‘I Am’ statements recorded by John thus reinforce the overall teaching of essential equality between the Son and the Father, as well as providing an important attribute of the Son as the Messiah, an attribute that further elucidates the redemptive significance of His Person. All told, there are seven ‘I Am’ statements with predicates, and seven (not counting repetitions) absolute ‘I Am’ statements.

<u>Passage</u>	<u>Verse</u>	<u>Passage</u>	<u>Verse</u>
<i>I am the bread of life</i>	6:35, 41, 48	<i>I who speak to you Am</i>	4:26
<i>I am the light of the world</i>	8:12; cf 9:5	<i>But He said, ‘I Am, do not be afraid’</i>	6:20
<i>I am the door of the sheep</i>	10:7, 9	<i>Unless you believe that I Am, you shall die in your sins</i>	8:24
<i>I am the good shepherd</i>	10:11, 14	<i>Before Abraham was, I Am</i>	8:58
<i>I am the resurrection and the life</i>	11:25	<i>So that when it does occur, you may believe that I Am</i>	13:19
<i>I am the way, the truth, and the life</i>	14:6	<i>They answered Him, ‘Jesus the Nazarene.’ He said to them, ‘I Am.’</i>	18:5, 6, 8
<i>I am the true vine</i>	15:1		

Richard Bauckham writes, “Most distinctive of the Christology expressed by the Johannine Jesus are the two sets of seven ‘I am’ sayings. These are the ‘I am’ sayings with predicates (‘I am the bread of life,’ etc.), and the absolute ‘I am’ sayings...The absolute ‘I am’ sayings declare who Jesus is in his divine identity, as the one who gives eternal life...All the ‘I am’ sayings with predicates are Christological interpretations of parabolic actions or parabolic sayings of Jesus.”³¹⁶ If one reviews the predicate ‘I am’ statements, it is apparent that the first six speak to the whole of humanity in terms of the exclusivity of salvation in Jesus Christ. His ‘I am’ sayings are both an echo of the divine name and a negation of all else: *I Am*, and no one else is. It is worth noting that three of these statements include ‘life,’ for Jesus is the One who has life in Himself and is therefore the only source of life for fallen man. The seventh saying, however, belongs to those who have already come to Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. This one speaks of the on-going, abiding nature of that eternal and abundant life of which Jesus is the only source. “The

³¹⁶ Bauckham; 194.

earlier theme of life is now developed in terms of intimate union with Jesus, a sharing in his own life.”³¹⁷

Literally Jesus opens this section of the discourse by saying, “*I Myself am the Vine, the true one.*” The allusion is one that every Israelite would have immediately recognized, but is one that Gentile readers may need to be reminded of: Israel was God’s vine. The Old Testament references are almost legion, the most familiar being the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5.

*Now let me sing to my Well-beloved; A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard:
My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill.
He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine.
He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it;
So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes.
And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,
Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard.
What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?
Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?
And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard:
I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned;
And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste;
It shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns.
I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.”
For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel,
And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression;
For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help. (Isaiah 5:1-7)*

This song shows a common feature among the vine and vineyard references in the Prophets – in each case Israel, God’s chosen vine, failed to produce the fruit that God sought and required. Hence each vine/vineyard prophecy ends in judgment and destruction.

*For of old I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds;
And you said, ‘I will not transgress,’ when on every high hill and under every green tree
You lay down, playing the harlot.
Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality.
How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?
For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap,
Yet your iniquity is marked before Me,” says the Lord GOD. (Jeremiah 2:20-22)*

³¹⁷ Whitacre; 371.

*You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it.
You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land.
The hills were covered with its shadow, and the mighty cedars with its boughs.
She sent out her boughs to the Sea, and her branches to the River.
Why have You broken down her hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit?
The boar out of the woods uproots it, and the wild beast of the field devours it.*

(Psalm 80:8-13)

Jesus' reference to Himself – using the emphatic *ego emi* ("I Myself Am") – as the 'true' vine can only mean that He is Himself the fulfilment of Israel; He is Israel as God intended her to be. "He is the real one, the fulfilment and truth of that which nature was to typify. Israel is the first realization of it. God planted it as his vine or his vineyard. But it has degenerated. Christ is now the true vine."³¹⁸ Israel as God's vine was always to derive her life from Him, just as Jesus teaches here about Himself. No matter how numerous Israel became, even with the distinction of her twelve tribes, she was but one people, branches connected to one Vine. Westcott comments "Christ in His Person brings to complete fulfilment these vital relations of the parts to the whole – of unity and multiplicity – of growth and identity, which are shadowed forth in the vine."³¹⁹ Whitacre adds,

When Jesus refers to himself as the *true vine* he is once again taking an image for Israel and applying it to himself. Jesus himself is true Israel...Israel's place as the people of God is now taken by Jesus and his disciples, the vine and its branches. This is not a rejection of Judaism as such, but its fulfillment in the Messiah. The identification of the people of God with a particular nation is now replaced with a particular man who incorporates in himself the new people of God composed of Jews and non-Jews. Israel as the vine of God planted in the Promised Land is now replaced by Jesus, the true vine, and thus the people of God are no longer associated with a territory.³²⁰

The second statement Jesus makes has troubled souls unnecessarily for millennia. "*Every branch that does not bear fruit, He takes away.*" This statement, combined with verse 6, has convinced too many that a true believer can lose his or her salvation, "*If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into*

³¹⁸ Luthardt; 141.

³¹⁹ Westcott; 216.

³²⁰ Whitacre; 372.

the fire, and they are burned.” The statements are without error: fruitfulness can only happen when the branch is connected to the vine. But does that mean that our abiding in the vine is measured by our fruitfulness? And if so, how does one define fruitfulness? How can the believer ever know that he or she is bearing ‘enough’ fruit to remain? Thus, along with Hebrews 6, this section of Scripture has caused more than its fair share of anxiety. But, also along with Hebrews 6, that anxiety is neither biblically nor theologically sound – Jesus is not teaching that a true disciple can lose that salvation that only Jesus can provide, for that would be tantamount to Jesus taking away what He has given.

One way to consider the matter is to ask a more fundamental question than ‘Can a believer be cut off from the vine?’ That question is, ‘Can a branch joined to the true vine *not* bear fruit?’ Consider what Jesus says just a few verses after these ‘troubling’ ones,

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.
(15:16)

The purpose of Jesus’ having chosen His disciples - and His High Priestly prayer in John 17 should assure us that this was never limited to the eleven, but to all who would believe because of their testimony – is that they should bear fruit. To think that the bearing of fruit is now the responsibility of the believer, and that his or her continuation in the vine is now dependent on that fruit-bearing, is a gross perversion of the sovereign work of divine grace in regeneration. One might quote Paul at this point, “*You who began in the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the works of the flesh?*”³²¹ His denomination of such a mindset is ‘foolish.’ God is the Husbandman of the vineyard, and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, “*He who began a good work in you will bring it to perfection at the day of Christ Jesus.*”³²² God has taken it upon Himself – His Triune Self – to plant the true Vine in the midst of the world; there can be no doubt that those branches that He grafts into that Vine will be fruit-bearing to His glory. The responsibility of the branch is not to bear fruit, but to abide in the vine. Thus Newbigin writes insightfully,

³²¹ Galatians 3:3

³²² Philippians 1:6

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

The disciple, following him, can be relieved of anxiety about fruit-bearing. He has only one task – to ‘abide in the vine.’ The rest is the work of the Gardener. And this abiding, as we shall learn, is for them as for Jesus through love and obedience...The one who ‘holds’ is Jesus himself, and therefore ‘abide in me’ must be linked at once with ‘and I in you.’ And this mutual indwelling is the absolute condition of fruit-bearing, as the production of much fruit is the purpose of the Gardener.³²³

Furthermore, if we let Scripture interpret Scripture, we learn from the same author of the Fourth Gospel what it means to abide in Christ: it is the Word and the Spirit that abides in the believer, and through these the believer abides in Christ Jesus.

Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us – eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. (I John 2:24-27)

So who are the branches that are cut off? If we remember that Jesus came for the lost sheep of Israel, and remember therefore to interpret what He says within the context of His messianic mission to Israel, we may see a connection between this statement by Jesus and the recent departure of Judas Iscariot from the group. Jesus has consistently spoken of the division that He was bringing *within Israel*, without reference to the rest of the world or to the Church that would grow from His death, resurrection, and ascension. Following up on the persistent negative tone of the prophetic ‘vine/vineyard’ passages, Hoskyns writes, “Since these passages almost invariably conclude with a description of the corruption of the vine, the metaphorical language is, with some adjustment, capable of application to the fate of Judas and of those who have gone out into the world and separated themselves from the Christian fellowship.”³²⁴ Thus the primary focus of the passage continues to be *within Israel*, for Pentecost has not yet come.

This fits with Paul’s teaching in Romans 11, that the unbelieving Jews in spite of their many advantages, have been ‘cut off’ from the one olive tree (another common metaphor for Israel as the people of God). Paul does indeed threaten the Roman church

³²³ Newbigin; 198.

³²⁴ Hoskyns; 474.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

that they, too, will be cut off if they do not continue in faith. But when one understands that faith is itself the gift of God (Eph. 2:8) and that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the manifestation of the interpenetrating ‘abiding’ of the Triune God in and with the believer, the only conclusion that can be reasonably made regarding one who abandons the faith, is that he or she never really possessed in the first place. Though such temporary faith might appear fruitful to other believers, the lack of abiding in the vine will become evident, and the Gardener is not mocked (Gal. 6:7).

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (15:5-8)

Those who assign a portion of salvation to the freewill of man, or who teach that a true believer can lose his or her salvation, fail completely to see the eternal purpose of God in the salvation of sinners. Or, if they perceive that it has been God’s purpose from eternity past to manifest the glory of His grace through the unique means of salvation that He determined – life through His eternal Son, purchased through death – they must conclude that somehow the purpose of God can be thwarted. Jesus does not think so, for He has given no reason to doubt that His finished work would glorify His Father. But here He states that His Father is glorified in the ‘much fruit’ that His disciples will bear. That means that, if the glory of the Father is *contingent* on the disciples, Christ’s own work is incomplete and insufficient. Such a thought is blasphemous.

In this second ‘I am the Vine’ statement, made to emphasize and reinforce the first, Jesus goes further to explain what it means to ‘abide’ in Him: “*and My words abide in you.*” The abiding of the Word through the Spirit within the heart of the believer is the abiding in the Vine of which Jesus speaks. And this will bear fruit; it must bear fruit; it cannot do otherwise but bear fruit for the glory of God. This fruit is not evangelistic converts; it is not benevolence; it is not martyrdom – it is, rather, the life of the Vine in the branches. This means that God-glorifying fruit in the believer is, essentially, that believers abiding faith in the Vine, Jesus Christ, and his or her absorption in Christ’s Word. Jesus’ ‘*apart from*

Me you can do nothing' has at its counterpart Paul's statement, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*³²⁵

The Vine metaphor has one more prophetic aspect that bears on our interpretation of what Jesus is saying, albeit a negative one. Jesus speaks of the unfruitful branches as worthy only of gathering for the fire. Ezekiel points out how vinewood is essentially worthless – an interesting fact considering that Israel is so often referred to as God's vine. The wood of the vine has absolutely no other use than to bear fruit. This is a lesson regarding all of mankind, worthless indeed unless living in the will and for the glory of God.

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: "Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any other wood, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? Is wood taken from it to make any object? Or can men make a peg from it to hang any vessel on? Instead, it is thrown into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both ends of it, and its middle is burned. Is it useful for any work? Indeed, when it was whole, no object could be made from it. How much less will it be useful for any work when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned?"
(Ezekiel 15:1-5)

As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.
(15:9-11)

Verses 9 and 10 form the core of everything Jesus is saying with regard to the Vine and the branches. It is no more true that the believer either earns or maintains God's love through obedience than it was true of Jesus Himself. Obedience flows from love, it does not cause it. What Jesus is saying here must not be interpreted in isolation from what He is also saying in this Farewell Discourse regarding two very important events: first, *His going to the Father*, and second, *His sending the Holy Spirit from the Father*. Interpreted, as it must be, in light of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' words can only mean that the relationship between the believer and Jesus Christ will be of the same nature at the relationship between Jesus and the Father. "The relation of the Father and the Son is the type and original of the relation between the Son and His disciples."³²⁶ This interpenetrating love of the Triune God, mediated into the heart of every believer through

³²⁵ Philippians 4:13

³²⁶ Hoskyns; 476.

the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is the very essence of the ‘abiding’ of which Jesus speaks. “Now we are shown how Jesus is the mediator both of God’s love to us and of our obedience to him, and how it is through love and obedience that we abide in Jesus and Jesus in the Father.”³²⁷

This alone explains how, in the midst of sorrow and the impending death of their Master, and with the promise of persecution, the disciples might actually have joy. And not only joy, but the joy of the Son who, “*for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising its shame.*”³²⁸ This joy comes from knowing oneself to be in the Father’s love and manifests through obedience to the Father. This Jesus has perfectly, even facing temporary separation from His Father through death. And this is the joy that He bequeaths to His disciples. “The joy which he has by reason of the love of his Father wherein he stands, he imparts to those who remain in his love, and, moreover, causes it to be active in them for making their own joy full, the joy which is already in them because they stand in his love.”³²⁹ John knew that a constant reminder of these things would bring joy to the believer, a joy the world could not take away.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us – that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (I John 1:1-4)

This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another. (15:12-17)

This interpenetrating love of the Godhead is to characterize the new community formed by Christ through the outpouring of His Spirit. Jesus returns to this theme again and again in this discourse. Here we have a succinct statement – bracketed by two

³²⁷ Newbigin; 200.

³²⁸ Hebrews 12:2

³²⁹ Luthardt; 148-149.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

references to Jesus' commandment to His disciples (vss. 12 & 17) to love one another. Here these repetitions of the 'new commandment' serve to highlight the changed condition between God and His people on account of Christ's finished work on the cross. No longer 'slaves,' Jesus' disciples are now 'friends.' But once again we find that the disciples did not do anything of their own accord to become Jesus' friend; His was the initiative from the start, just like it is for every believer. "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you.*" Newbigin writes, "It is not their obedience which will make them his friends. It is Jesus who has taken the initiative and made them his friends. They are beloved, because he loves them and lays down his life for them."³³⁰ Westcott adds, "The stability of the connexion [*sic*] of 'friendship' between the Lord and His disciples is assured by the fact that its origin lies with the Lord and not with man."³³¹

Again, the purpose of all of this is the glory of God, nothing less. This fact forms the biblical basis for prayer – not the believer asking to have his needs and wants met by a vending-machine God, but the seeking wisdom and strength through the Holy Spirit to bear fruit that remains, and thus glorify God (compare vs. 16 with vs. 8). "There is in much religion a slavish obedience which is concerned with rewards and punishments. But the obedience which Jesus asks of his friends has a quite different center of concern. Its one concern is the concern of Jesus that the Father be glorified."³³² Obedience born of love is the unique characteristic of Christianity among all religions. "This love has come into the world in Jesus and is now to remain in the world in the community of his disciples."³³³ But the association of Jesus' disciples comes at the same cost as Jesus Himself paid: the enmity of the world.

If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.
(15:18-19)

The path of the disciple of Christ in the world is the *Via Crucis*, the way of the cross. When Jesus says in Mark that any who would follow Him must 'take up his cross' He was not speaking of believers offering atoning sacrifice for their sins, let alone the sins of the

³³⁰ Newbigin; 202.

³³¹ Westcott; 221.

³³² *Ibid.*; 203.

³³³ Whitacre; 380.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

world. Again, it is imperative that a distinction be made between what man can do (essentially nothing) and what only God can do in Christ Jesus.

When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

(Mark 8:34-35)

Here in John 15 Jesus provides the same lesson from a different perspective. Believers are not to embrace conflict with the world; martyrdom is not a 'sure path to heaven.' Rather the case is that those who identify with Jesus repudiate the world by that identification, and are consequently repudiated by the world. *"Friendship with the world is enmity to God."*³³⁴ John reiterates the principle in his first epistle.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

(I John 2:15-16)

In His Farewell Discourse, then, Jesus is simply saying that the *normal* condition between the believer and the world is enmity – enmity from the world that matches its hatred of Jesus. *"For God so loved the world..."* but the world does not reciprocate that love. The world has rebelled against God, seeking to be its own god or to deny god altogether. The world's mantra is 'Me'; Christ's will is the glory of His Father. *"Self-assertion mutually necessarily hate and reject self-denial. Therefore the world hated and rejected Jesus, finding in the end no place for him but a cross."*³³⁵ How can it be different for Jesus' friends? *"A church which is conformed to the world will not be recognizable as the company of the friends of Jesus."*³³⁶

What is important to note in Jesus' declaration is that the believer does not need to do anything but 'abide in Christ' in order to be hated by the world. *"The attitude of the world to Jesus conditions its attitude to His disciples."*³³⁷ This fact has not always been appreciated by believers, and many have earned the enmity of the world not by simply

³³⁴ James 4:4

³³⁵ Newbigin; 205.

³³⁶ *Idem.*

³³⁷ Hoskyns; 480.

being disciples of Jesus Christ, but by being meddling troublemakers, sanctimonious busy-bodies, judgmental critics, and the like. Whitacre rightly notes, “Sometimes Christians today say they are being persecuted for the sake of God, when in fact they are being rejected because they are obnoxious.”³³⁸ The offense for which a disciple must suffer is that of his or her association as disciples of the One whom the world rejected and killed, Jesus Christ.

It is worth noting the subtle change in Jesus terminology. Up to the Farewell Discourse, He has focused on the enmity of the Jews toward Him and toward His Father. Now the scope broadens to include ‘the world.’ Speaking of those who will reject and persecute His friends because they have rejected and persecuted Him, “Jesus now refers to them as *the world*, since the world is that which is in rebellion against God. The disciples would face rejection by Gentiles as well.”³³⁹ This broadening of the scope of Jesus’ ministry in and through His disciples is of the same tenor as His assertion that He is the true Vine. As we saw in exegesis of that passage, the focus of God’s redemptive work is now moving beyond Israel and ‘the Jews’ and moving into the world at large. “This verse is a good example of the way John can give emphasis by repeating a word. Here he makes ‘world’ linger in the mind by using the word five times in a single verse.”³⁴⁰ The disciples in this world will ‘*bear much fruit*’ and ‘*greater works shall they do because I go to the Father*,’ but the price that they will pay will be the price He has paid – rejection, persecution, death. This was not long in coming. The Roman historian Tacitus provides us with corroborating evidence from the reign of the Emperor Nero. Here we see what Jesus announced beforehand that His disciples would experience.

Such indeed were the precautions of human wisdom. The next thing was to seek means of propitiating the gods, and recourse was had to the Sibylline books, by the direction of which prayers were offered to Vulcanus, Ceres, and Proserpina. Juno, too, was entreated by the matrons, first, in the Capitol, then on the nearest part of the coast, whence water was procured to sprinkle the fane and image of the goddess. And there were sacred banquets and nightly vigils celebrated by married women. But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero

³³⁸ Whitacre; 383.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*; 381.

³⁴⁰ Morris; 679

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.³⁴¹

Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.
(15:20)

Jesus used this maxim in the upper room when He washes His disciples feet (*cp.* 13:16) but the assumed familiarity with the saying might indicate that He said it more often. Certainly He often taught the disciples that their path would be similar to His, without the overarching redemptive meaning that alone attached to His. This particular saying is meant both as a warning of impending persecution – thus a continuation of what Jesus has just said – and an admonition against discouragement. “The saying reminds them that the treatment given the Master determines that accorded the servant.”³⁴² Jesus’ “*If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you,*” fits with the immediately preceding thought, but His “*If they kept My word, they will keep yours also,*” stands as encouragement that their work will not be without fruit. In this verse, then, is one of the most fundamental principles with regard to the life of the Church in the world; there is no getting around the fact that, as the Church stands with Jesus, the world either stands or falls away. Not because of the Church, but because of Jesus.

³⁴¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44 [Cornelius Tacitus, The Annals, BOOK XV, chapter 44 \(tufts.edu\)](http://www.tufts.edu/~cjs/tacitus/Annals/Book%20XV.htm). Accessed 05 April 2022.

³⁴² Morris; 679.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.' (15:21-25)

One of the most difficult things for a new believer to come to grips with is the new enmity that exists where once there was friendship. To be sure, as noted above, this enmity may be exacerbated by improper zeal and arrogance on the part of the believer. But what is fundamental is that the true believer is no longer *of this world*; he or she has been transferred from this kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's Son. But even more intense than the rejection of the unbeliever to the new convert is the amazing opposition that comes from those who profess to know God. This was, of course, especially true within Second Temple Judaism – Jesus' Jewish disciples suffered initially from their fellow Jews, who persecuted the Way (i.e., Saul of Tarsus) thinking they were doing the will of Israel's God. But by persecuting Jesus' friends, both Jews and Gentiles show that they not only do not know Jesus, they also do not know the Father who sent Him. Jesus continues to warn His disciples of what they were to expect, so that when it came to pass they would not be surprised or discouraged. And Jesus' admonition is as true today as it was two thousand years ago.

The disciples shall be prepared for the hatred of the world. But they must understand this hatred aright. That they are to know to their comfort, that it is the name of Jesus which the world hates and persecutes...But the world persecutes the name of Christ in His own, because it knows Him not; and that, because it knows not the Father who sent Him. The revelation of God in Christ Jesus has remained foreign to it.³⁴³

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning. (15:26-27)

Once again, and as He will do once more in the next chapter, Jesus returns to the underlying basis for the disciples' joy and hope: the gift of the Holy Spirit. As noted in the introduction, Jesus here speaks of the *Parakletos* as being sent by Him from the Father, though He also adds that the Holy Spirit *proceeds from the Father*. The purpose of this

³⁴³ Luthardt; 155.

mention of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, is to encourage His disciples in the light of the world's rejection: they will still bear witness to Him because the Spirit within them will bear witness. They will be empowered to continue to do that which infuriates the world and turns it against them, because they will have the Spirit within them. "Jesus places the testimony over against the rejection. Jesus' name is rejected and hated by the world, but witnessed to by the Spirit, and in the Spirit by the disciples."³⁴⁴

Jesus' closing words in this chapter pertain especially to the group of disciples who remained with Him this final night. The foundation of the new community would be laid on these men, with Jesus being the cornerstone. Thus when it came time to replace the traitor Judas, Peter clarified for the disciples the essential qualification of the replacement, *"It is therefore necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us – beginning with the baptism of John, until the day that He was taken up from us – one of these should become a witness with us of His resurrection."*³⁴⁵ These two things – the gift of the Spirit of truth and their having been with Jesus from the beginning – will serve to guard their testimony and keep it true.

Since the hatred of the World is provoked by the teaching of the disciples, it is of prime importance that they should be clearly instructed concerning the nature and authority of their teaching. They are set in the world as witnesses of Jesus, their ability to bear witness being grounded upon their intimate companionship with Him *from the beginning*...The authority of this witness to the World does not, however, rest solely upon the memory of their companionship with Jesus. The Son will send to them from the Father the Parakete, who is the Spirit of truth. Jesus is the Truth; and the Spirit will bear witness to Jesus by giving the disciples understanding of the words which He spoke and the works which He wrought.³⁴⁶

Though the first disciples occupied a unique place in the history of the Church, just as Jesus Himself occupied a unique place to be followed but not duplicated, so the successive generations of the Church have the same calling vis-à-vis the world, and the very same source of authority: the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit. Thus the next chapter will form the most concentrated teaching in the whole Bible concerning this divine Person and gift.

³⁴⁴ Luthardt; 159.

³⁴⁵ Acts 1:21-22

³⁴⁶ Hoskyns; 481

Week 9: The Spirit of Truth

Text Reading: John 16:1 - 15

*"Disciples need have no horror
of becoming strangers from the congregation
out of which Christ is banished."
(Edwyn Clement Hoskyns)*

The disciples are about to enter into the darkest period Creation has ever experienced – the time between Christ's death and His resurrection. The Synoptic accounts of the crucifixion make it clear that Creation itself suffered as its Maker died. But for the disciples, the depths of despair and doubt to which they were cast are incomprehensible by any other human beings. This is not, of course, to diminish the anguish of suffering that the human race has experienced, and inflicted upon itself, nor to minimize any individual's pain of loss through disease, persecution, or war. *"For man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward."*³⁴⁷ This is merely to attempt to recognize that the death of the Life-giver has no parallel among the deaths of mankind, and the anguish of those who had placed their hope, and the hope of the world, in Jesus must be of the most intense and unique degree. Jesus Himself is aware of what they are facing over the next few days, and seeks in His Farewell Discourse to shore them up against the barrage of sorrow and doubt about to assail them. *"These things I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling."*

The word translated 'stumbling' is a form of the familiar *skandalon* (*skandalistheitei*), from which we get the English, 'scandal.' While there is no doubt that Jesus' teachings scandalized the Jews, nothing more scandalous could be conceived by a Second Temple Jew than that Israel's Messiah should be executed by the horrible Roman method of crucifixion. The disciples, having come to the conclusion that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, were about to witness the unthinkable, and Jesus seeks as best He can to prepare them for that moment. He does this, however, knowing the prophecies, *"Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter."*³⁴⁸ This is the atmosphere of the Farewell Discourse and this is the context in which the passage must be read and interpreted.

³⁴⁷ Job 5:7

³⁴⁸ Zechariah 13:7; cp. Matthew 26:31

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

In the midst of this deep sorrow, Jesus speaks of joy. He tells His disciples that they will see Him no longer, and then that they will see Him. He speaks of His departure as something not only good for them, but even better than if He should remain. They should be happy for Him, for He returns to His Father. But they should not be sad for themselves, for in thus returning, Jesus will be able to return to them and remain forever. Understandably, the disciples are confused. The only thing that will make sense out of Jesus' words is something no one had yet experienced in human history: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Jesus as much as tells them that it will be the Holy Spirit who will inform them of all that they seek to know, all that Jesus would gladly tell them now, only they were incapable of hearing it yet. What is left of what Jesus has to teach His disciples, and after them, all believers, will be brought to them through the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the focal point of this discourse.

John 16 has the third and final mention by Jesus of the promised *Paraketos*, the Helper, the Spirit of Truth. This Farewell Discourse provides the believer with the most concentrated teaching on the Holy Spirit in the entire Bible, so it is worth spending a little time reviewing what Jesus has to say about this divine Person who will come from the Father, through the Son, to dwell within the hearts of believers and of Jesus' Church forever. That He will be with us forever is established in the first introduction of the *Parakletos*, in John 14:16, "*And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper (Parakletos), that He may be with you forever.*" Jesus immediately further defines this Person as the *Spirit of Truth*, a description He returns to in Chapter 16 serving as bookends to the pericope of the Holy Spirit (*cp.* 14:17 with 16:13). In Chapter 14, however, what is important for Jesus to point out at the beginning is that this gift of the *Parakletos* will immediately set His disciples off from the rest of the world, for the Spirit of truth is One "*whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him.*"³⁴⁹ What Jesus says in Chapter 14 will shed light on something He says in Chapter 16, something that the disciples still did not understand,

A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. (14:19)

³⁴⁹ John 14:17

Jesus' mention of the Holy Spirit, the "*Helper*," in Chapter 15 is the briefest of the three, but nonetheless serves to establish the environment in which the Holy Spirit will be so incredibly necessary and comforting. In Chapter 14 Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as One whom the world cannot receive; in Chapter 15 He goes on to tell His disciples that they, too, will be ones that the world not only cannot receive, but will hate, persecute, and kill. In the midst of this hostile situation, the disciples will still be Christ's witnesses, and it will be the Holy Spirit within them and within the Church who will empower that witness.

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning. (15:26-27)

It is noteworthy that each mention so far concerning the *Parakletos* has had some reference to 'the world.' Thus far in the Fourth Gospel, the context has consistently been Jesus versus 'the Jews.' Now that His hour has come, Jesus' focus expands to the fulness of His ministry, a fulness that He will not perform *in Person* but will perform in the *Parakletos* and through His disciples. This shift in focus was foreshadowed by the coming of the Greeks, recounted back in John 12. Though Jesus did not accommodate them at that time, their appearance served as further proof, though He did not need it, that His hour had finally arrived. Jesus was sent to "*the lost sheep of Israel*," and came in the full power of the Holy Spirit. But Jesus' coming as Israel's Messiah was not sufficient either for Israel or for the world, and it is the latter that fully encompasses the scope of the Abrahamic promise. To be sure, what Jesus did was *fully* sufficient in the securing of redemption, but the *application* of that redemption was reserved as the work of the Holy Spirit whom the Father would send in Jesus' name. Hence we can conclude at least provisionally, that the ministry of the Holy Spirit has the world as its purview, and not merely Israel. This conclusion is buttressed by what Jesus says in the third and last *Parakletos* passage, John 16. "*And when He comes, He will convict **the world** concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment.*"³⁵⁰

³⁵⁰ John 16:8

Jesus' work on earth is completed, but His work as Messiah and Savior is not completed. It is by virtue of the work that He will finish on the cross that He can finish the



Hendrikus Berhkoef (1914-95)

redemptive purpose of God from eternity past, through His Spirit. And it must be remembered from Paul's writings, that this Spirit of Truth is the Spirit of Christ, though He is not the same Person as Christ. In light of the modern individualizing of the Spirit's work – the emphasis on 'spiritual gifts' and the 'baptism in/of the Holy Spirit' – we would do well to remember what Jesus has to say about the Spirit's ministry here in the Farewell Discourse, "*He will not speak on His own initiative, but what-*

ever He hears, He will speak...He shall glorify Me."³⁵¹ The Holy Spirit, the promised *Parakletos*, is sent to complete what Jesus began, not to begin a new work entirely. "The Spirit, with all his gifts of conversion, forgiveness, communion with God and joy in him, is the first part of the coming glorification, the foretaste of the Kingdom...The whole work of the Spirit (as well as that of Christ) is an anticipation of the consummation. The New Testament does not know a futuristic eschatology nor a realized eschatology but a realizing eschatology."³⁵²

This is why the world will have the same enmity toward those who are indwelt by the Spirit as it has toward the One who sends the Spirit from the Father, Jesus. It is imperative that our interpretation of these passages concerning the promised Holy Spirit be kept within the established fact of the unity of essence and purpose between the Son and the Spirit. Only a Church filled with the Spirit of Jesus is a true Church (*cp.* Rom. 8:9), but such a Church cannot be loved by the world which hated and hates Jesus. This animosity between the rebellious Creation and the redeemed New Creation is fundamental to the entire redemptive revelation of God in both Testaments, and underlies the prophecy of Revelation, "*The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'*"³⁵³ "In the light of what God has given, we discover how much the present situation of our world clashes with

³⁵¹ John 16:13-14

³⁵² Berhkoef, Hendrikus *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press; 1967); 106-107.

³⁵³ Revelation 22:17

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

God's gifts in Christ and in the Spirit. That makes us look forward eagerly to a world which is re-created according to the gifts already bestowed upon us."³⁵⁴

These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. (16:1-4)

While Jesus was with them, the disciples were unassailable by Jesus' enemies, including the devil. That protection will be physically removed in a matter of hours, and they will be plunged into danger and despair. The passage reminds us of Jesus' words to Peter in particular, recorded in Luke's Gospel, "*Simon, Simon, Satan had demanded to sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you...*"³⁵⁵ A time of sifting was ahead for the disciples as a whole, though Peter's would be harder than the rest. Jesus' prayer for Peter will be sufficient for his preservation, but it appears that the disciples would truly be out of Jesus' hands while He is in the tomb. This seems to be echoed in Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John 17,

Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. (17:11-12)

There are several ways of looking at this situation. The first is the most obvious: Jesus is going to the cross and will be in the tomb for three days. This will be, as noted earlier, the darkest time ever experienced by Creation, and the disciples will occupy the deepest recesses of that darkness.³⁵⁶ The third day will undoubtedly bring light and joy to their hearts, but Jesus' return through the resurrection will not be the 'return' that He promises them in this Farewell Discourse. That is because His post-resurrection time with them will be sporadic and not continual, as it has been for the past three years. It will not be as it was, and it will have a foreboding terminus: Jesus Ascension. That event will introduce another time of danger, though perhaps not as severe as the three days, that will

³⁵⁴ Berkhof; 107.

³⁵⁵ Luke 22:31-32

³⁵⁶ Cp. John 20:19 "*When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews...*"

only end at Pentecost when the promised *Parakletos* finally arrives, and Jesus ‘returns’ to His own just as He promised.

But the danger that the disciples faced became even more real *after* Pentecost than it was before. For now that the Spirit had been poured into their hearts they were fully and even metaphysically identified with the same Jesus whom the Jews hated and killed without cause. Whitacre speaks of the disciples’ newfound intimacy with the Godhead through the promised Spirit, a *Sitz im Leben* that characterizes all believers of all generations, “So the knowledge of the Father and the Son, which is the very source of the disciples’ joy and peace, is also the cause of their troubles in the world.”³⁵⁷

The situation of being ‘ex-synagogued’ was illustrated earlier by the man born blind whom Jesus healed (*cp.* 9:34). This would be the fate of many, if not most, of the Jews who would place their faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, they would be ‘*put out.*’ And that would be the least of their cares, though in that society, as with many Islamic societies today, to be put out of the religious community was tantamount to abandonment and starvation. Many, like the apostle James, would be martyred for their faith. And, as exemplified so graphically in Saul of Tarsus, their murder would be considered an act of worship. The word Jesus uses here in verse 2 is ‘*latreian*’ which is the same Greek term used for the worship service of the Levitical priest in the tabernacle and Temple. “They will regard the shedding the blood of the Christians as a *latreia*: not merely as a good work, but as an act of sacrificial worship.”³⁵⁸ Scripture leaves us with no doubt that this is how Saul of Tarsus viewed his persecution of those who followed the Way.

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2)

Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. (Acts 26:9-11)

³⁵⁷ Whitacre; 387.

³⁵⁸ Luthardt; 163.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

(Galatians 1:13-14)

*If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; **concerning zeal, persecuting the church**; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*

(Philippians 3:4-6)

That the persecution of Christians had entered into the religious service of unbelieving Israel is manifest by the twelfth of the Eighteen Benedictions, a late 1st-Century rabbinic prayer ritual that has remained a standard in Jewish services to this day (though the 12th Benediction has been modified to remove the hostile attitude toward Christians). In its ancient form, the 12th Benediction states, “For the apostate let there be no hope, and let the arrogant government [=Rome] be speedily uprooted in our days. Let the Nazarenes and the Minim [=heretics] be destroyed in a moment and let them be blotted out of the Book of Life and not be inscribed with the righteous.”³⁵⁹ Whitacre quotes the Midrash Rabbah on Numbers 21:3, “If a man sheds the blood of the wicked it is as though he had offered a sacrifice.”³⁶⁰

Sadly, not heeding the spirit of what Jesus says will come upon His disciples, the Church has itself countenanced persecution and murder against both those who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ and those within the professing Church who refuse to abide by the institutional edicts of the developed hierarchy. This is not as shocking as one might think, since the paradox of the Church is that it is populated by human beings; redeemed, for the most part, but with residual, indwelling sin still rampant in its members. Persecution and murder, however, are the hallmarks of human religion and a sure sign that the Church that persecutes and murders has strayed far from God in Christ. “That this is so is the terrible demonstration of the fact that it is in real darkness that the light shines, that human religious zeal is in fact ignorance of God, that those who say ‘We see’ are blind.”³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ Quoted by Beasley-Murray; 277.

³⁶⁰ Whitacre; 386.

³⁶¹ Newbigin; 208.

But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. (16:5-7)

At first glance, verse 5 seems a bit out of place. Did not Peter ask Jesus, “Lord, where are You going” back in Chapter 13, and Thomas followed in Chapter 14 with, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?” Some commentators have tried to solve the apparent mystery by saying that the disciples *no longer* were asking Jesus where He was going, but that is an insufficient explanation given the fact that their queries were perhaps only a matter of minutes earlier. The answer lies in what Jesus has said about what their emotional framework ought to be: joy on His behalf (14:28) and even on their own, because His going away will occasion the sending of the *Parakletos*. Though the disciples – represented by Peter and Thomas – have asked where Jesus is going, Jesus Himself knows that what they are really asking is ‘Why do You go away?’ Or more precisely, ‘Why do You go away and leave us?’ Though they form their questions within the context of ‘Where,’ they are really asking ‘Why,’ and thus showing that the Where of Jesus’ departure is really not on their minds. Carson writes,

Although Peter’s question was phrased in terms of Jesus’ destination (‘Where are you going?’), in fact it was concerned not with Jesus’ destination but with his departure. In that sense Peter had not really asked the question his words seem to convey...they [the disciples] are so concerned with their own problems, their feeling of abandonment, their sense of impending crisis and doom, that they do not really *listen*. They love themselves much and their master little; and therefore they neither rejoice with him in his prospect of returning to the Father, nor mourn with him in his prospect of the cross. They grieve only for themselves; and, regardless of how they are phrased, their questions are concerned only with themselves.³⁶²

But it is the destination of Jesus that matters so much, and He has not been obscure on that matter, either. “It means the goal towards which he advances, in that he goes to the Father; that is to say, the significance of his departure to the Father.”³⁶³ He has announced clearly that He is returning to His Father as the completion of His mission draws near. The disciples’ obtuseness is understandable, given that their inherited understanding of the

³⁶² Carson, D. A. *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1980)l 135.

³⁶³ Luthardt; 166.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

messianic mission did not include the Messiah dying, at least not without first having defeated Israel's enemies and reestablished Israel's sovereignty. But Carson is probably correct that the disciples were not really listening to Jesus, they were listening to their own sorrow and fear. The previous three years just did not make sense in light (or dark) of an impending death for their great Master and Lord. Jesus' words in verse 5 are undoubtedly a rebuke, though gently delivered: You hear Me, but My words make no impression on you; you are not even inquisitive about *where* I am going. But the rebuke is followed by further instruction as Jesus continues to love His own to the end, and to try to prepare them for what is about to happen.

There must be a transfer of mission: Jesus to the Holy Spirit, the *Parakletos*, the 'another Helper.' This alone will empower the disciples to continue what Jesus has begun. More fundamentally, this alone will unite the people of God with God Himself, with God truly dwelling in the midst of His people, not in building but in their hearts. This is the gospel promise of Ezekiel 36 and the full meaning of the entire tabernacle/Temple complex throughout the ages. The Temple is not consecrated unless the Spirit is poured out upon it, and the true Temple of Jesus' body, the Church, could not be that Temple until the Holy Spirit was poured into it. But just as the tabernacle and the Temple were dedicated by sacrifice, so also the true Temple must be dedicated with the blood of the full and final sacrifice of God's Son. Jesus has already said that His purpose for coming into the world was to die, and here He says that His purpose for returning, through death and resurrection, to the Father is to send the Holy Spirit, that the Temple of His body might truly be established. "There can be no mission of the Spirit that proceeds from the Father, until the Son has accomplished the command of the Father, and has returned to His side."³⁶⁴

The disciples no doubt fail (again) to appreciate what Jesus says in verse 7, that it is a better thing for them that Jesus depart so that the Spirit could come. But it will become apparent in the continuation of the Farewell Discourse and in Jesus' High Priestly prayer, that the intimacy that the disciples have enjoyed with Jesus during the past three years, walking with Him, eating with Him, listening to His teaching and observing His miracles,

³⁶⁴ Hoskyns; 483.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

is nothing compared to the intimacy they will have with Jesus indwelling them through the promised Spirit. And this cannot happen unless Jesus departs to the Father, unless He finishes *His* work and that work is accepted by the Father, evidenced by Jesus' ascension and session at the Father's right hand. The union and communion of the Church with her Head, the same union and communion that subsists eternally in the Godhead, is to be wrought only through the sending of the Holy Spirit. Sinclair Ferguson writes, "The coming of the Spirit is the equivalent of the indwelling of Jesus. This is for the disciple's good, since it implies such a close union with Christ that he dwells *in* them, not merely *with* them."³⁶⁵



Sinclair Ferguson (b. 1948)

The nature of the transfer of mission within the Triune God, from the Son to the Spirit, is described in different terms by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15, where we can see from a different perspective just how important it was, and how beneficial it was, that Jesus depart to return to the Father and send the Spirit. Nothing Paul writes would have come to pass otherwise, and we would of all men be most pitiable.

*So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." **The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.***
(I Corinthians 15:42-45)

And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.
(16:8-11)

By common consent this is the most difficult passage to exegete in the Farewell Discourse, due largely to its incredible brevity alongside the evident fulness of meaning contained in so few words. Jesus is His most concise here, and even the 'explanations' He gives of sin, righteousness, and judgment are somewhat opaque. This has led to a diversity of comment on the meanings of these three terms in verses 8-11, with little agreement among even evangelical scholars as to exactly what Jesus means by them. It seems the

³⁶⁵ Ferguson, Sinclair *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1996); 71.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

primary difficulty lies in the exegetical interpretation of the verb '*convict*.' The Greek word *elegxō* has as diverse a meaning in that language as the English word 'convict' has in ours. It can mean *reprove* as in *disgrace* or *put to shame*; it can mean *to cross-examine* or *question, for the purpose of convincing, convicting, or refuting*; it can mean *to censure* or *accuse*.³⁶⁶ If the word carries the same meaning with respect to all three parameters – sin, righteousness, and judgment – then the meaning of the passage is very difficult to discover indeed. It might then boil down to a tautology: The Holy Spirit will convict – as in accuse or condemn – the world of *sin*, and of its own false *righteousness*, and of the impending *judgment* that is coming upon that sinful self-righteousness. But that seems too simplistic an exegesis for terms as diverse in meaning as sin, righteousness, and judgment. Again, Jesus' own explanations are short and require unpacking from further light of Scripture.

One thing seems certain from the manner in which Jesus phrases the statement: the interpretation of the three parameters, and of the Holy Spirit's work in *convicting* the world concerning these three, must be interpreted as a whole and not in an atomistic manner. In other words, the meaning of *sin* cannot be arrived at separately from the meaning of *righteousness* or *judgment*. And the meaning of each, and all together, is tied inextricably with the finished work of Jesus Himself. The Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, *because they do not believe in Me*; of righteousness, *because I go to the Father*; and of judgment, *because the ruler of this world has been judged* [implied: *by Me*]. It is a complete work, and its reference is fully centered upon Jesus Christ. When the Spirit works in this manner in the Church, we have a situation like that described by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians,

*Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is by all, he is **convicted** by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.* (I Corinthians 14:23-25)

The word here in I Corinthians is the same word as in John 16:8-11. Paul further illustrates the pattern of John 16:8-11 in the format of his epistle to the Romans. Having announced the gospel, of which he is not ashamed because it is the power of God unto

³⁶⁶ Vincent, Marvin R. *Word Studies in the New Testament; Volume II* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; 1918); 102.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

salvation, the apostle takes a different path from that taken by many modern evangelists. Before getting to the ‘good news,’ he delivers the bad news or, as Jesus puts it in John 16, the Holy Spirit through Paul *convicts the world of sin*: “*For in it [the gospel] the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.*”³⁶⁷ This statement is followed by a thorough treatise on the total depravity of fallen man, leaving out neither Jew nor Gentile from the indictment, “*for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.*”³⁶⁸

It is not until Paul has firmly established the universal *conviction* of mankind in sin that he returns to the ‘good news’ theme of the gospel, “*But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been manifested...*”³⁶⁹ This verse connects back to his opening statement concerning the gospel: “*For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.*”³⁷⁰ This moves forward toward *judgment* – the judgment of the unbeliever, of course, but more importantly to Paul’s exposition of the gospel, the fact that in Jesus Christ, God is shown to be “*just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*”³⁷¹ Much of the epistle is dedicated to showing how the righteousness of God has executed judgment upon Jesus Christ, so that “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.*”³⁷² This is by no means to say that Paul had John 16 open in front of him when he wrote his letter to the Roman church – indeed, Paul’s Epistle to the Romans was written almost a half century before the Fourth Gospel. It is merely to point out that the pattern of the apostle’s argumentation to the Romans follows the promise of the Spirit of Truth in convicting the world *of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*. Newbigin writes, “Once more we see that the Spirit is not the domesticated auxiliary of the Church; he is the powerful advocate who goes before the Church to bring the world under conviction.”³⁷³

If we understand this passage correctly, we must conclude that the world is incapable of coming to a right knowledge of either sin, or righteousness, or judgment apart

³⁶⁷ Romans 1:18

³⁶⁸ Romans 3:9

³⁶⁹ Romans 3:21

³⁷⁰ Romans 1:17

³⁷¹ Romans 3:26

³⁷² Romans 8:1-2

³⁷³ Newbigin; 211.

from the inner work of the Holy Spirit. This, in turn, proves the complete inability of any sinner to come to God in Christ apart from the prior work of the Holy Spirit. “The conversion of a sinner has never taken place without the convincing work of the Spirit.”³⁷⁴ Carson adds, “these verses, however they are interpreted, suggest (though they do not explicitly state) that, apart from the work of the Counselor, fallen human beings cannot truly come to grips with sin and righteousness and judgment.”³⁷⁵ Thus human religion, and human innovations and perversions of the true religion, tend inexorably toward moralism, and the standard of righteousness, the definition of sin, and the meting out of judgment, become the purview and edict of the hierarchy of that religion. Only the Spirit of Truth, in pointing to the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, can convict any sinner of the real meaning of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

Jesus says that the Spirit will convict the world of sin, “*because they do not believe in Me.*” This is the fundamental characteristic of moralizing religion: to define sin in terms determined by the moral standards of the clergy and not according to the revelation of Scripture. But the Holy Spirit, through the gospel rightly preached, boils sin down to its essential nature: unbelief. “Unbelief in Christ is here taken to be the root and ground of all sin.”³⁷⁶ Just as the exposure (another meaning of the Greek word ‘convict’) of the world’s rebellion in Romans 1 forms the basis for the revelation of God’s righteousness in Jesus Christ, so also all true preaching of the gospel will lay heavy on human sin – not *sins*, but sin. This precludes all moralizing crusades from the Christian pulpit, for there are no sins which, by the rejection and reclamation from them, can sanctify the soul before a holy God. Only sin, the fundamental rejection of God Himself and not the failure to live up to a list of standards, no matter how commendable the list, condemns man before God. And only faith is the answer to that sin; faith in Jesus Christ. The world is without excuse now that Jesus has come and revealed the true nature of sin, and now that the Holy Spirit has come to indwell the Church and to proclaim the message, convicting the world of sin.

He further convicts the world of righteousness, *because I go to the Father*. This is perhaps the most opaque of the statements, but once again what Jesus says serves as the

³⁷⁴ Jacobus; 282.

³⁷⁵ Carson; *Farewell Discourse*; 138.

³⁷⁶ Jacobus; 282.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

foundation of a biblical understanding of righteousness. Paul, in Romans, well establishes two important points concerning righteousness: first, that man does not possess any native righteousness and, second, that the righteousness of God will not be obtained or attained through the Law, though it is itself *holy, righteous, and good*. But why does Jesus link the Holy Spirit's revelation of true righteousness with His return to the Father? Commentators are all over the place on this one, due largely to the fact that they have been all over the place on the meaning of righteousness for two millennia.

While we might not arrive at a definitive answer to the question, it seems reasonable to start with the meaning of Jesus' ascension to the Father. Then, perhaps, we will be able to see how this event ties in with 'righteousness.' The ascension of Jesus Christ after the resurrection was the signal proof of the acceptance of His Person and His work by the Father; it was and remains the manifestation of Jesus' victorious exaltation, having fully and successfully accomplished all that He was sent by the Father to do. Peter mentions this in his first sermon on Pentecost,

This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.
(Acts 2:32)

In his second sermon, the apostle returns to the same theme of the exaltation of Jesus, the Righteous One,

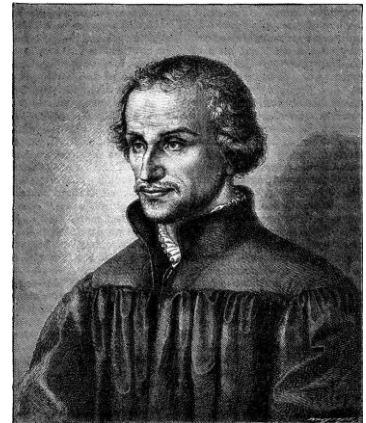
The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just [i.e., Righteous], and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.
(Acts 3:13-15)

Jews and Romans – Israel and the world – conspired to put Jesus to death, manifesting their unbelief in murderous hatred. But God vindicated Jesus by raising Him from the grave, and established Jesus as the revelation of the righteousness of God, not merely in that Jesus committed no sins, but that "*He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*"³⁷⁷ So righteousness is no more

³⁷⁷ II Corinthians 5:21

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

defined by a set morality than sin is defined by the lack of one. The German Reformer Philip Melancthon wrote, The Spirit will accuse this very opinion of human reason, which feigns that men are righteous, that is, have remission of sin, on account of creditable actions and virtues of their own.”³⁷⁸ Nor is true righteousness merely acknowledging that Jesus was a righteous man; that much is, or should be, obvious. The righteousness of God manifested in Jesus comes through the exaltation of His ascension and His sitting down at the right hand of God on high. “But His righteousness is not authenticated by human perception only; it is vindicated and ratified by the Father in His resurrection and Ascension. The return to the Father is God’s imprimatur upon the righteousness manifested in the life and death of His Son.”³⁷⁹



Melancthon (1497-1560)

Finally, the Spirit will convict the world of judgment, *because the ruler of this world has been judged*. Contrary to the popular view that Jesus’ victory over the devil is yet future, Jesus Himself speaks of it as having already occurred – or soon to occur through the work that He will accomplish on the cross. In the condemnation the Jesus brings upon Satan’s head, crushing it through the resurrection from the grave, Jesus serves notice (through the Spirit) of the ultimate judgment of the world that remains under Satan’s thrall. “The judgment of Satan – his condemnation by Christ’s triumphant death and resurrection, will be a ground of proof by which the Spirit will show that *all* will be judged, and that the ungodly world will be condemned along with its Prince, or Leader.”³⁸⁰ Is this not exactly what the Apostle Paul says to the gathered philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens?

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.

(Acts 17:30-31)

In this statement in John 16, Jesus once again tells us who the real enemy was. It was not ‘the Jews,’ nor indeed was it the Romans – their role was merely as servants,

³⁷⁸ Quoted by Jacobus; 283.

³⁷⁹ Hoskyns; 485.

³⁸⁰ Jacobus; 283.

however unwittingly, of the one against whom Jesus had come and with whom Jesus intended to do battle to the death – His death, and through it the death of Death, Satan's power. Thus divine judgment does not work its way up from the meanest human sinner to the chief of all rebels, Satan, but rather starts at the top, the very root of all sin and its father, Satan, and from there establishes the firm foundation of judgment against all sin everywhere.

The victory of Jesus over the World, and the derived victory of His faithful disciples, involve the judgment of the Prince of this World who opposed the Son of God and procured His death by empowering Judas to be the instrument of his murderous activity. Though it is still true that the whole world lies in the power of the Evil One (I John 5:19), yet he is fallen from power, and the World has been judged by a righteous decree of the Father following the manifestation of the Son of God who came to *destroy the works of the devil*...The dethronement of the devil must be exposed to the World and become the theme of the apostolic preaching.³⁸¹

This, then, is the basis for that enigmatic statement in the closing chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans: "*And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.*"³⁸²

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you. (16:12-15)

This is one of the most important passages in biblical Pneumatology, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Sadly it is one of the least read and understood among many believers who claim to have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit – among the Pentecostals and Charismatics. By elevating and exalting the work of the Holy Spirit in continuing revelation and 'gifts,' these denominations manifest their lack of understanding of just who the Holy Spirit is, and what He has been sent to do. He will guide the Church into all truth, meaning He will guide the Church at all times to Jesus, who is the Truth (*cp.* 14:6). "Jesus is the Way in which the disciples must be led by the Spirit, and He is also the Truth to which they must be guided."³⁸³ The Spirit now occupied the place of economic

³⁸¹ Hoskyns; 485.

³⁸² Romans 16:20

³⁸³ Hoskyns; 486.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

submission to the Son that the Son occupied in relation to the Father during His earthly ministry. It is clear from what Jesus says here that the Holy Spirit must never be considered as the private possession of any believer, even less that He has come for the purpose of the believer's personal sanctity or 'victory.' He has come to bear witness to the Son, and to empower the Church to do the same.

The power of the Spirit does not consist in secret and mystical revelations, but in the external preaching of the Gospel, which makes men revolt from the World and attaches them to the Church; and His action does not consist in delivering new truths to the disciples, but in providing a larger, deeper, and more perfect understanding of the teaching which Jesus had given them...As the teaching of the Son was derived from the Father, so the Spirit will declare only what He shall hear, the identity of the teaching of the Son and of the Spirit being guaranteed by an identity of origin.³⁸⁴

The Spirit's role as the witness to Jesus and the purveyor of truth from Jesus does not in any way diminish the glory of the Father. Jesus has already more than established that He Himself did nothing but what He saw the Father do, said nothing but what the Father willed Him to say. The union of the Son with the Father allows Jesus to lay claim to being the source of revelation from the Spirit to His disciples; this role He has won, as it were, by His own obedience unto death. *"All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you."* Whitacre notes, "Jesus' staggering claim to have complete knowledge of God is the foundation for the Christian claim that Jesus is the unique and only way to the Father."³⁸⁵ The exclusivity of Christianity is not a fabrication of religion; it is rather founded on the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And as no man can come to the Father but through Jesus, so also the Spirit will guide no man in any other direction but toward Jesus. Luthardt beautifully sums up the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church,

And all progress of the church in knowledge will only consist in greater study of Christ, in deeper, more comprehensive understanding of Christ, as all growth in holiness will consist only in the more thorough, more manifold representation of the image of Christ.³⁸⁶

This is the work of the *Parakletos* to the end of the age.

³⁸⁴ *Idem.*

³⁸⁵ Whitacre; 392.

³⁸⁶ Luthardt; 174.

Week 10: I Have Overcome the World

Text Reading: John 16:16 - 33

“The life of the Church will thus be a strange paradox – the peace which is the mark of God’s victorious reign enjoyed here and now in the midst of the battle with the powers of this world.”
(Lesslie Newbigin)

Throughout the Farewell Discourse Jesus speaks of His return to the disciples, and scholars have debated and disagreed for two millennia on just which ‘return’ the Lord is referring to. The options are generally between the Resurrection, after which Jesus appeared to His disciples on several occasions prior to His Ascension, and the Second Coming, at which time Jesus will remain visibly with His people forever. Both answer the point of Jesus’ disciples ‘seeing’ Jesus again, but neither has gained universal agreement. It would, however, seem that within the context of this passage – with its emphasis on the sending of the *Parakletos* – that perhaps both options are incorrect. That is not to say that they are incorrect in the sense that they will not happen: the Resurrection *did* happen and the Second Coming *will* happen. It is just to say that perhaps neither of these is the event to which Jesus refers.

The hermeneutical mistake that is most commonly made in this regard is to look for the fulfillment of Jesus’ words in the physical presence of Jesus Himself – again, either in the days after the Resurrection or at the consummation of the age when Jesus returns. This is a simple mistake to make, but should become evident when one listens to what Jesus is saying about the One whom He will send from the Father. It seems that Jesus makes it very clear that the coming One will be essentially a continuation of His own presence. He first speaks of the Holy Spirit as *another* Helper (14:16) and there can be no doubt that the first Helper is Jesus Himself. In the same breath Jesus says, “*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*” (14:18) The logical connection of the pericope demands that Jesus’ *coming* to the disciples (so that they not be left as orphans) is the same event as the *sending* of the other Helper, the *Parakletos*. This thought continues in Chapter 16, where Jesus teaches that the promised Holy Spirit will not speak on His own initiative, but will continue to guide the disciples into the truth that Jesus both is and has proclaimed.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you. (16:12-15)

The key to unlocking this interpretive conundrum is to recognize the unity of the one God in the ministry of the three Persons. This has already been established in the Fourth Gospel with respect to the relationship between the Son and the Father; the problem has been that scholars (and believers) have failed to continue this revelation to the relationship between the Spirit and the Son. As to the first, we have the clearest statements earlier in John's Gospel,

Then they said to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also." (8:19)

I and the Father are one. (10:30)

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works." (14:9-10)

In the last of these Jesus reiterates the oft-repeated statement that He did not "*speak on My own authority*" but rather repeated what He heard the Father say. This is the exact same thought Jesus transfers to the promised Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, "*He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak.*" (16:13) The implication is fairly clear from the context, that just as Jesus only spoke what He heard the Father say, so also the Spirit will only speak what He hears the Son say. The upshot of this is that the presence of Jesus in the Spirit is of the same nature as the presence of the Father in Jesus. Just as Jesus can say, "*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*" so also He is saying, though not in so many words, "*He who has the Spirit sees Me.*" This must be the key that unlocks the "*little while*" statements that so confuse the disciples during the last hours of Jesus' presence with them. "*A little while and you will no longer behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.*" (16:16)

Unlocking this mystery is critical to unlocking the mission and ministry of the *Parakletos*, the Spirit of Truth. This is because failure to do so will lead to an unholy dichotomy between the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior, and the Person and work of the Holy Spirit – a phenomenon that has sadly repeated itself generation after generation in the Church. Theologically, we are correct in maintaining the distinct ‘personality’ of the Holy Spirit as the third Person of the Trinity. But we go beyond that which is written when we give to the Holy Spirit an independent ministry in the Church or in the believer; that is to do what Jesus here expressly denies. Furthermore, and perhaps more to the immediate point, the failure to properly understand the work of the Holy Spirit is tantamount to a failure *to see Jesus*. Just as a failure to see Jesus aright was the same as a failure to see the Father, so it is with our recognition of the Holy Spirit.

If this is true, then the ‘little while’ before the disciples again see Jesus cannot refer to the days after His Resurrection. During that time not only were Jesus’ visits with His disciples sporadic, they were destined to come to an end once more, with His Ascension. As to seeing Jesus again with respect to the Second Coming, as true and as comforting as that eschatological hope is, the intervening time can hardly be called ‘a little while.’ No, if we recognize the ‘coming’ of Jesus in the promised Spirit, then we also recognize the ‘seeing’ of Jesus in the ‘*another Helper*.’ Luthardt writes, “Hence, if we have recognized in xiv.18 ff the promise of Christ’s presence in the Spirit, the passage before us is to be taken in the same way.”³⁸⁷ Thus the event to which Jesus is referring all through the Farewell Discourse must be the same: Pentecost. This is the day when the Holy Spirit was given; this is the day that the presence of Jesus returned to His disciples, never to leave them again (*cp.* 14:16), and this is the day that can reasonably be considered to be in “*a little while*.”

It must be admitted that this view is by no means universal, or even common. Most commentators see in Jesus’ reference either the Resurrection or the Second Coming, as Newbigin points out in his commentary. “From early times interpreters have been divided. Some have understood that Jesus is speaking of his appearances to the disciples after his resurrection; others have taken it to refer to the Parousia at the end of time.”³⁸⁸

³⁸⁷ Luthardt; 175.

³⁸⁸ Newbigin; 218.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Scholars like Newbigin, however, see that neither of these events can answer to Jesus' language in this passage, and offer intermediate solutions that serve rather to confuse the issue than to solve it. Luthardt, for instance, offers this interpretation, which seems to point to Pentecost but denies it at the same time: "It therefore means not a definite event, but rather a condition; the discourse, moreover, in concluding passes into the promise of the granting of prayer. The time of the Spirit is accordingly denoted, in which Spirit Christ will be present."³⁸⁹ Westcott muddies the water further, "The fulfilment of this promise must not be limited to any one special event, as the Resurrection, or Pentecost, or the Return. The beginning of the new vision was at the Resurrection; the potential fulfilment of it was at Pentecost, when the spiritual Presence of the Lord was completed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. This Presence slowly realized will be crowned by the Return."³⁹⁰ As true as these words may be in the light of the whole counsel of Scripture, it is hard to read them into Jesus' comments here in John 16.

A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father. Then some of His disciples said among themselves, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying." (16:16-18)

If we are uncertain what Jesus means by the two 'little whiles' that He speaks of in verse 16, we at least have the company of the disciples to keep. "The disciples still have no category to allow them to make sense of a Messiah who would die, rise from the dead, and abandon his people in favour of 'another Counsellor.'"³⁹¹ However, we have less excuse, for the disciples at this stage were still on the far side of Pentecost, and the Spirit of Truth had not yet been given to guide them into all truth and to make things clear to them. We ought to be better able to interpret what Jesus is saying on the basis of what these disciples recorded, and on the basis of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And it is evident that Jesus' words contain definite clues. For instance, the phrase "*because I go to the Father*" is one that Jesus has already used, and it is reasonable to think that He is using it here in the same context as He has used it just a few minutes earlier.

³⁸⁹ Luthardt; 175.

³⁹⁰ Westcott; 231-232.

³⁹¹ Carson; *The Gospel According to John*; 543.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. (16:7-11)

Jesus' going to the Father is the necessary precursor to the coming of the *Parakletos*, the Spirit of Truth. The latter cannot happen without the former happening. Therefore, when Jesus says, "because I go to the Father" we are to understand the immediate result of that going, which is the sending of the Holy Spirit. That Jesus did use this phrase is interestingly only implied by the disciples' ruminations; verse 16 does not actually have the phrase explicitly. This probably indicates that the overall conundrum that the disciples were dealing with was the imminent departure of their Lord: they still really do not know where He is going and are too timid and fearful to ask (*cp.* 16:5 & 19). This disturbing fact is the context of the whole discourse, but where Jesus knows fully what He is about to do and what will result from that work, the disciples are groping about in a cloud of confusion and sorrow. Still, for us, we must see the linkage that Jesus makes in this discourse between His departure and the sending of the Spirit, and maintain that linkage as key to our exegesis and interpretation.

It is worth noting that Jesus does not use the same word for 'seeing' in verse 16, though the New King James Version quoted above renders both words by the English 'see.' While it is always dangerous to read too much into the usage of different, but roughly synonymous words in any literature, the fact that two different words are used in otherwise identical sayings is of significance. The first Greek word is *theōreite* which, in spite of the being the root of our English *theory* and *theoretical*, means 'to behold' and emphasizes physical sight. The second 'see' in verse 16 translates the Greek word *ophesthe* which has perhaps a more intuitive or spiritual meaning. Vincent writes, "*Theoreō* emphasizes the *act* of vision, *oraō* the *result*."³⁹² Thus Jacobus comments, "The former means to see with the eyes – to *behold*. The latter means to see in a wider sense, including spiritual sight."³⁹³ Westcott, assuming that the 'little while' refers to the Resurrection, adds, "As long as His earthly presence was the object on which their eyes were fixed, their view

³⁹² Vincent; 257.

³⁹³ Jacobus; 286.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

was necessarily imperfect. His glorified presence shewed Him in His true nature.”³⁹⁴ The problem with Westcott’s interpretation of the event that brings this perfect sight is the fact that even after the Resurrection the disciples did not fully understand what Jesus was doing, and asked Him if He was at that time going to set up His kingdom. It seems more accurate to understand this new and better sight to be coincident with the overall thrust of the Farewell Discourse, which is the sending of the Holy Spirit. This interpretation would fit hand in glove with Paul’s beautiful words, referring undoubtedly, though implicitly, to the divine gift of the Holy Spirit.

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

(II Corinthians 4:6)

Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, “Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’? Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. (16:19-22)

Jesus knows, of course, that the disciples were ruminating among themselves, afraid to ask Him a direct question: “What are You talking about?!” However, and again of course, He does not answer their confusion directly but rather intensifies it by telling them that they will weep and lament, while the world rejoices. He does, however, elaborate on the ‘little while’ statement but giving them a parabolic metaphor: a woman in childbirth. The metaphor is easily understood, even by men (though not so keenly as women). The pain of childbirth is among the most intense forms of pain common to the human condition, but its duration is of a limited time. The entire gestation period is not labor pains, and it has been said that if women remembered the pain of childbirth the human race would have stopped with Cain. In other words, intense pain but for a limited, and relatively short, duration. This analogy should have ruled out, it would seem, the interpretation that the disciples would again ‘see’ Jesus at the Parousia – for that has been

³⁹⁴ Westcott; 231.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

a childbirth of nearly 2,000 years and counting. That would not be very comforting to the disciples, but it is evident that Jesus here intends to do just that: to comfort them.

In addition to being a commonplace event in human life (no pun intended), childbirth also stands as an Old Testament prophetic and eschatological image that the disciples were likely to catch, at least after the Spirit of Truth had been given to them. “The combination of intense suffering and relieved joy at childbirth is in the Old Testament a common illustration of the travail God’s people must suffer before the immense relief and joy brought about by the advent of the promised messianic salvation.”³⁹⁵

*LORD, in trouble they have visited You,
They poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them.
As a woman with child is in pain and cries out in her pangs,
When she draws near the time of her delivery, so have we been in Your sight, O LORD.
We have been with child, we have been in pain; We have, as it were, brought forth wind;
We have not accomplished any deliverance in the earth,
Nor have the inhabitants of the world fallen.
Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise.
Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs,
And the earth shall cast out the dead.* (Isaiah 26:16-19)

*Before she was in labor, she gave birth; Before her pain came, she delivered a male child.
Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things?
Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once?
For as soon as Zion was in labor, she gave birth to her children.
Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not cause delivery?” says the LORD.
“Shall I who cause delivery shut up the womb?” says your God.
Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her;
Rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her;
That you may feed and be satisfied with the consolation of her bosom,
That you may drink deeply and be delighted with the abundance of her glory.* (Isaiah 66:7-11)

Hoskyns writes, “The parable of the joy of the woman in childbirth is therefore no mere general comparison, it is Old Testament messianic resurrection imagery.”³⁹⁶ Again Jesus mentions joy: their sorrow will be turned to joy (v. 20) and no one will take their joy from them (vs. 22). This is Jesus’ joy made full in His disciples, and again can only become theirs through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, uniting the believer to his or her Savior.

³⁹⁵ Carson; 544.

³⁹⁶ Hoskyns; 488

“The disciples will know joy instead of sadness because Jesus, having left them in death, will meet them in resurrection life...From that time on, therefore, life for them is existence in the shared fellowship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”³⁹⁷

Aware of the danger of reading too much into a parable or analogy, it is still worth noting that Jesus gives as the reason for the woman’s joy, “*that a child has been born into the world.*” The allusion here is possibly to the new work – the new birth and new creation – that will result from Christ’s own travail on the cross. One of the immediate manifestations of the newness of things after Jesus’ resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be a new regime of communication between the disciples – God’s people – and their covenant God. The New Covenant introduces a new form and a new confidence in prayer, as the veil that visibly separated God’s people from Him has been removed in Christ’s body. What results is “the advent of a wholly new and effective economy of prayer – prayer to the Father in the name of Jesus.”³⁹⁸

And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. (16:23-24)

“*In that day*” again signifies an event that will bring in the new regime of prayer. And again there is disagreement as to just when that ‘day’ occurred. Clearly Jesus does not speak of the Parousia, for prayer in Jesus Name is the form and power of prayer throughout this present age. And it does not seem that the Resurrection alone provided the basis for this ‘wholly new and effective economy of prayer,’ though it was the indispensable *sine qua non* of Christian prayer. That which truly unites the believer’s prayers with the Father, through the Son Jesus Christ, is the indwelling Holy Spirit, as Paul explains more expansively elsewhere,

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

³⁹⁷ Beasley-Murray; 285.

³⁹⁸ Hoskyns; 488.

The intensity and intimacy of the prayer of which Jesus speaks in these and the following verses must be viewed in light of all that has gone before with reference to the intensity and intimacy of the relationship and communication between Jesus Himself and the Father. This is because Jesus is setting forth the exact same relationship for the believer who prays in Jesus' Name and the Father, and therefore this entire paradigm furnished a crucial framework for what it truly 'Christian' prayer. In short, believers will pray in Jesus' Name only when they pray according to the will of Jesus, which is and has always been identical with the will of the Father. It cannot be otherwise and remain true prayer.

These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father. (16:25-28)

Listen carefully to what Jesus is saying here because it seems to contradict something He said earlier, but it really does not. Earlier Jesus told His disciples that He would not speak more with them because "*you cannot bear it now.*" (16:12) That was immediately followed by the last installment of the *Parakletos* promise, "*But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth.*" (16:13) What Jesus now says in the passage above must be understood in light of these earlier statements. In other words, when Jesus says "*I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father,*" He is speaking no less about the ministry of the Holy Spirit than He was earlier. Jesus is going back to the Father and will not return in His physical, bodily form until the consummation of the age, the *Parousia*. What Jesus speaks of is the intimacy of communication that the Holy Spirit will bring between the believer and the Godhead – Jesus and the Father hearing and answering prayer through the intercession of the Spirit. "The communication will go both directions. The disciples will be able to hear from God with understanding and they will be able to pray to God in accord with his own purposes."³⁹⁹ Luthardt adds, "Jesus speaks here of a directness of the relation to the Father,

³⁹⁹ Whitacre; 397.

which directness is conditioned upon the paraclete.”⁴⁰⁰ But of course, no one said it better than Paul,

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (I Corinthians 2:10-16)

This intimacy with the Father – the same intimacy enjoyed by the Son – is the fruit of the gift of the Spirit by which, as Paul also says, “*we cry out, Abba! Father!*”⁴⁰¹ The result of Jesus’ obedient self-sacrifice was to be that “*He will see His offspring*”⁴⁰² and these ‘offspring’ – believers in every age – become the adopted children of God through the Holy Spirit. Therefore believers now “*draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.*”⁴⁰³ And while Jesus “*ever lives to make intercession for them*”⁴⁰⁴ this does not mean that the Father is ill-disposed toward believers and must constantly be appeased by Jesus, as some wrongly teach. No, Jesus here declares remarkably that “*I do not say that I will request the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you.*” (16:26-27) “It is clear that the emphasis in this passage is on the freedom of access which the disciples will have to the Father.”⁴⁰⁵ Newbigin adds, “Jesus will no longer be – so to speak – a separate mediator standing between them and the Father. They will come in Jesus’ name, as those whose life is his life, who can say ‘Abba’ with the same freedom as his, and who are beloved by the Father as he is.”⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁰ Luthardt; 182.

⁴⁰¹ Romans 8:15

⁴⁰² Isaiah 53:10

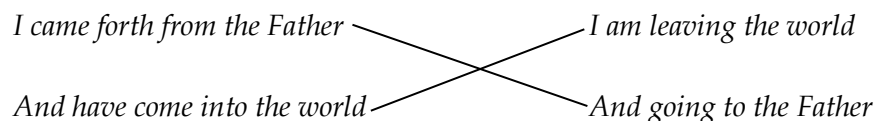
⁴⁰³ Hebrews 4:16

⁴⁰⁴ Hebrews 7:25

⁴⁰⁵ Beasley-Murray; 287.

⁴⁰⁶ Newbigin; 221.

The cause for this glorious and gracious situation is again elucidated in verse 27, and done so in a poetic, chiastic structure perhaps for ease of memorization, as it is itself a concise Christology from John's pen.



His disciples said to Him, "See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God." Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. (16:29-32)

The primary exegetical debate surrounding these verses is whether or not to take the disciples seriously when they exclaim, *"See, now You are speaking plainly..."* On the one hand, it seems that Jesus touches an understanding nerve when He gave them that chiastic 'memory verse' concerning His coming and His going, though it is noteworthy that while the disciples acknowledge here *"that you came forth from God,"* they fail to acknowledge the flip side, that Jesus was returning to God. Perhaps they are somewhat embarrassed that they are so ignorant and that Jesus, always aware of their thoughts, exposes their ignorance (though He does not berate them for it). Jesus' own response to this expostulation from His disciples seems to confirm the opposing view: they still did not get it. Hence it seems most reasonable to interpret the disciples' statement as no less empty bravado than Peter's boisterous vow to die with Jesus. *"Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone."* No doubt this

Page 191

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

was hard for the disciples to hear, but the sequel proves Jesus' words to be truly prophetic, and the disciples' words to be truly empty.

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (16:33)

Thus ends the Farewell Discourse with a clean and neat *inclusio* between the closing and the opening verses of Chapter 16, indicating that those who set the chapter divisions probably got this one right.

These things I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling... (16:1)

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace... (16:33)

Here is the abiding dichotomy faced by every generation of the Church, the Body of Christ in the world. "In so far as the church is in Christ, it has *eireinein* ('peace'); in so far as it is in the world, it has *thlipsis* ('tribulation')." ⁴⁰⁸ This, Jesus teaches, is an essential, unavoidable situation that must exist if the Church is being the true Church and is not compromising ('stumbling') with and in the world. "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (15:19) Just as verse 27 was concise Christology, so also verse 33 is concise Ecclesiology; the peace that passes understanding is in the community of believers and not in the world. "Meanwhile the Church will have peace in the midst of tribulation, the peace which is God's gift in Jesus Christ. The life of the Church will thus be a strange paradox – the peace which is the mark of God's victorious reign enjoyed here and now in the midst of the battle with the powers of this world." ⁴⁰⁹

The basis of the believer's (and the Church's) firm stand in this hostile world is the knowledge that Jesus has overcome the world, a thought that should be on every believer's mind each and every day of his or her life. The Greek word rendered 'overcome' in most English Bibles is *nikaō* which does not mean so much to overcome as *to conquer*. This is the same word allegedly seen in that celestial vision Constantine received prior to the Battle of Milvian Bridge in AD 312, *en toutōi nika* – 'in this conquer.' Carson reminds us that the "verb rendered 'overcome' does not merely refer to a personal

⁴⁰⁸ Luthardt; 187.

⁴⁰⁹ Newbidin; 222.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

overcoming, the preservation of personal integrity in the face of protracted opposition. Rather, the verb indicates victory; Jesus has *conquered* the world, in the same way that he has defeated the prince of this world.”⁴¹⁰

It is at this point, and on this point, that the Church and all believers in her must walk by faith and not by sight. It requires the firm conviction that Jesus did not suffer in vain, nor did Satan triumph over Jesus in the cross, but quite the reverse. “Finally the paradox is uttered. The Christ in His humiliation, desertion, and death, has conquered the world.”⁴¹¹ Thus Paul exclaims,

*And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. **Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.*** (Colossians 2:13-15)

Because of the hostility of the world, and the tribulation that Church has both been promised and has experienced in the world, the complete victory of Christ over the world is not visible to the eyes of the flesh. It must remain clearly visible, however, to the eyes of faith. No less than Satan (*cp.* Rom. 16:20), “We must regard the world as a vanquished enemy.”⁴¹²

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written:

“For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

*Yet in all these things **we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.** For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:31-39)

Amen

⁴¹⁰ Carson; 550.

⁴¹¹ Hoskyns; 492.

⁴¹² Jacobus; 290.

Week 11: The Lord's Prayer

Text Reading: John 17:1 - 26

*"The revealed word of God is the only rule
to direct us how we may glorify God and enjoy Him."
(Melancthon Jacobus)*

All believers, and most Western unbelievers, are familiar with the 'Lord's Prayer' which begins *"Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name..."* But the very first phrase – *Our Father* – should have clued us in a long time ago that this was not the *Lord's* prayer; it is, rather, a model prayer for the Lord's *disciples*. It is noticeable in the Gospels that Jesus never refers to the Father as 'our' but only ever as 'My' Father. It is probably too late to change the millennia of tradition and rename this prayer the 'Disciples' Prayer,' but it should not be too late to realize that there is another recorded prayer that is most definitely, and exclusively, the Lord's – the prayer recorded in John 17.

Known commonly as the 'High Priestly Prayer,' this the longest of the recorded prayers of Jesus, is the culmination of the Farewell Discourse and the recapitulation of the entire Fourth Gospel, spoken by Jesus to His Father on the very eve of His crucifixion. Not all modern scholars agree with this moniker, but Morris writes, "This common name does draw attention to the solemn consecration which is so much a feature of the prayer and to the way it looks forward to the cross as the consummation of Christ's priestly work."⁴¹³ As such, the prayer seems to encompass in Jesus' own words what is written of him by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews.

*Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.
(Hebrews 3:1-6)*

⁴¹³ Morris; 716.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

(Hebrews 8:1-6)

Though the prayer recorded in John 17 is the *real* Lord's Prayer, as prayed by Jesus Christ the Lord, there are definite similarities between it and the Disciples' Prayer that is universally known as the Lord's Prayer. D. A. Carson points out that both begin with an address to the Father:⁴¹⁴ the simple 'Father' in John 17 compared to the 'Our Father' of the familiar prayer. The *name* of God is frequent in this prayer on Jesus' last night, as the opening of the traditional Lord's Prayer has "*hallowed be Thy Name.*" Implicit connection can be made between "*Thy Kingdom come*" and Jesus' request of His Father to "*glorify Thy Son.*" Finally, the prayer of the believer not to be led into temptation corresponds with Jesus' prayer to the Father that His disciples be "*kept from the evil one.*" These similarities point out that what is important in prayer is important in prayer, whether the one praying is the Lord to His Father, or the disciples to Our Father.

More noticeable, however, are the differences, for the prayer recorded in John 17 is not one that any disciple could pray, no matter how spiritual or sanctified he or she may be. This is the unique prayer of the *Apostle and High Priest* Jesus Christ. This is, first and foremost, the final prayer of the Son of God as He has come to the completion of the mission for which He has been sent by the Father. "The prayer is the solemn consecration of Himself in the presence of His disciples as their effective sacrifice; it is His prayer for glorification in and through His death; it is His irrevocable dedication of His disciples to their mission in the world, and His prayer that both they and those who believe through their teaching may be consecrated to the service of God; and finally, it concludes with the prayer that the Church thus consecrated may at the End behold the glory of the Son and

⁴¹⁴ Carson, *Farewell Discourse*; 174.

dwell in the perfect love of the Father and the Son.”⁴¹⁵ No High Priest of Israel could have prayed this prayer, as no High Priest of the Aaronic line could offer himself as a sacrifice – a perfect sacrifice – for the sins of God’s people. This “is the Intercessory Prayer of our Great High Priest. He was on earth as a Priest, to offer the one sacrifice of Himself, and to His Priesthood belongs also the great work of Intercession, which He here begins, and which He ever liveth to carry on in heaven, in the true Holy of Holies.”⁴¹⁶

Various attempts have been made to outline the prayer, and some commentators despair of the attempt. It is a prayer, not a teaching, so it should not surprise us that it does not fall into a systematic layout compete with bullets points, Introduction, and Summary. It is worth noting that there are eight references to glorify/glory in the prayer and five mentions of unity/one(ness). Newbigin holds that “the central theme, therefore, of the consecration prayer is the theme of glory.”⁴¹⁷ It is hard to deny that this concept – *glorify, glory* – is the core of Jesus’ prayer, indicating that the ultimate goal and result of His impending suffering will be that of the Father’s glory through the Son, in which glory the disciples of Jesus will also share. It may not be too much of a stretch to coordinate this final prayer of Jesus with the earlier dedicatory prayers of the tabernacle and Temple, after each the *glory of the LORD*, the *Shekinah*, entered the house of worship in a powerful and visible manner. That same event will also happen to the true Temple of Christ’s Body, but not until He has made the ultimate and perfect sacrifice of Himself, and not until the Father has approvingly accepted that sacrifice and sent the Holy Spirit, the presence of God and His glory, into the Church.

The most integral feature of this glory that is to be revealed through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ is the unity of His people in the love of God, a unity that is analogous to and founded on the unity of the triune Godhead. This is the true High Priest consecrating and interceding for the true people of God, His Body the Church. Unity within that Body is predicated on union with Christ, through which the unity of the Godhead is communicated to the Church through the Holy Spirit. “It is of fundamental importance to recognize that in the prayer the basis of the unity of the Church is the nature

⁴¹⁵ Hoskyns; 494-495.

⁴¹⁶ Jacobus; 290-291.

⁴¹⁷ Newbigin; 225.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

of God and the reality of his redemptive activity. More specifically, it is an outflow of the relations withing the Triune God and of his action in and through the incarnate Son, whereby his saving sovereignty become operative in the world...[The Church] finds the locus of unity in the Temple of his body and has become one flock under the one Shepherd.”⁴¹⁸

The consecration of Jesus to His final work is also coupled with the commission of His disciples to the continuation of His work. This is not merely the High Priestly prayer of the perfect Passover Lamb, to be sacrificed for the sins of the world the very next day. It is not so final as that, for the continuation and fruition of this work that only the Son of God and Son of Man could do, would be continued through His disciples and through those who would believe because of their word. In this the glory of the Son would be magnified to the greater glory of the Father, and through this the Church will behold that glory in greater and greater measure (*cp.* II Cor. 3:18). “The Church is sent into the world to challenge the false pretensions of the prince of the world, not in any power or wisdom or greatness of its own. It is sent in the power of his consecration. Its victory is the paradoxical victory of the cross.”⁴¹⁹

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “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. (17:1-3)

Jesus begins His prayer with the same content as He began the Farewell Discourse with His disciples after Judas Iscariot departed, “So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.”⁴²⁰ It has become commonplace for believers to see the glorification of the Son in the cross, due to the fact that we know of the Resurrection – which the disciples did not yet know of on the eve of Christ’s death – and because we have heard it taught and preached for almost two thousand years. Still, the shock and confusion that the concept must have caused Jesus’ disciples this last night should remain a fresh consideration whenever this prayer is read. *Glory* through a horrible

⁴¹⁸ Beasley-Murray; 306.

⁴¹⁹ Newbigin; 233.

⁴²⁰ John 13:31-32

and ignominious death is a paradox that should never lose its power to astound. “The hour of His death, as the hour of His triumph, and as leading to His resurrection and exaltation.”⁴²¹ Jesus’ has been speaking of His death for some time now, though the disciples are probably no more comprehending as when He first mentioned the path that He was to trod, the baptism He was to undergo. But through this baptism the Father would not only be glorified in the Son, but would glorify the Son through the victory of the resurrection.

Were there no cross-work, no resurrection, no exaltation, then sin could not be forgiven; for the Lamb of God would not have removed it. Jesus would not then have been the first person with a glorious new resurrection body; who then could have been thus transformed? The blessed Paraclete could not have been sent to convict the world of its sin, its righteousness, and its judgment, or to generate new life in believers. The great commission would have lost not only its meaning but its basis: *all authority given go Jesus* is its foundation.⁴²²

Jesus’ speaks of the result of His passion: *authority over all flesh*. This corresponds to the Lord’s words in Matthew 28, often referred to as the Great Commission, “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth...*” There, as here, this authority forms the foundation of the Church’s mission in Jesus’ Name. And here, as there, the authority given to Jesus on account of His victory over Satan, sin, and the grave is to be exercised in the making of disciples, the saving of souls. “The glorification of the Son is for the glorification of the Father, and the glorification of the Father is the salvation of men.”⁴²³ But this salvation is circumscribed by the same limits as we found in the Good Shepherd discourse, “*to as many as You have given Him.*” Luthardt writes, “Christ is not to give eternal life to humanity in general, but to those given him by God.”⁴²⁴ Morris adds,

The thought that the authority is given to Christ to convey life, used as it is in the context dealing with the passion, reminds us of that other thought which meant so much to some of the Fathers, that Christ reigned from the tree. The cross was not to be defeat but victory. He exercised authority in bringing men life even as He hung, apparently helpless, on the cross.

⁴²¹ Jacobus; 291.

⁴²² Carson, *Farewell Discourse*; 179.

⁴²³ Hoskyns; 497.

⁴²⁴ Luthardt; 193.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

But, though life is His gift, He does not confer it on all indiscriminately. Once again we have the thought of the divine predestination.⁴²⁵

John continues this thought in his first epistle,

And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. (I John 5:11-13)

In spite of the common conception that to live everlastingly is just to live forever, time without end, Jesus provides the most succinct ‘definition’ of eternal life to be found in any philosophical or theological writing anywhere: *To know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.* “Eternal life is best seen not as everlasting life but as knowledge of the Everlasting One.”⁴²⁶ Man is a knowing being, a creature not only capable of knowledge but achieving his fullest meaning and potential through knowledge. The epitome of that knowledge is the knowledge of the One in whose image Man is made: God. And the knowledge of God, as Jesus has been saying all along, has now been mediated in Himself, the Sent One from God. “The Father cannot be truly known or worshiped except as having sent the Son, nor can there be any true, saving knowledge of God, except as God in Christ.”⁴²⁷

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:1-3)

The knowledge of God has been a perennial pursuit among mankind since the beginning and forms the foundation of all manmade religions. Even within both Judaism and Christianity there have been and are those who seek to ‘know’ God through personal, esoteric experience, through ritual, or through self-abnegation and abuse. None of these are paths to God. “The only way to know God is through the revelation He has made, and

⁴²⁵ Morris; 718-719.

⁴²⁶ Carson; 180.

⁴²⁷ Jacobus; 293.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

He has revealed Himself in His Son. It is not possible to know God in any way that we choose. We must know Him in Him whom He has sent, namely, Jesus Christ."⁴²⁸

The world rejects this claim as arrogant and exclusionary. While it is the latter it is certainly not the former: it is not arrogant to claim that Almighty God, a Being 'wholly other' than Man, cannot be mentally recognized through the rational faculties of Man. Nor can He be spiritually apprised by men who are 'natural' (*cp.* I Cor. 2:14). It is the grace and mercy of God that He has chosen to reveal Himself and it is the wisdom and power of God that He has revealed Himself in His Son become Man. The Church of Jesus



Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Christ does the world no service by diluting this message through false ecumenism or 'interfaith movements' in which the exclusiveness of this true knowledge is corrupted by 'other paths.' If Jesus is the only way to the Father, which He says He is, then to entertain the possibilities of other ways is criminal deception and spiritual homicide. Luthardt quotes Martin Luther as emphatic on this point, which the Church must and should ever be: "He who will find the true one God, must seek

him alone in the Lord Christ; for else truly there is no God, save the one who sent Christ. He, now, who has not the Christ, must also fail of the right true God, even though he knows and believes, that there is only One true God. For he does not believe on him who sent Christ, and who gives eternal life through him."⁴²⁹ The 21st Century Church must realize again that the connection to God is not through Abraham, but only through Jesus, Abraham's promised Covenant Seed.

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. (17:4-5)

Jesus knew that the 'work' was finished, even though the trial and crucifixion still lay ahead. His commitment to the Father's work has been in perfect obedience, *even to death, and that on a cross*. Having given the sop to Judas Iscariot, Jesus views Himself as good as dead. His attention thus turns to two things – the exaltation that will be His

⁴²⁸ Morris; 720.

⁴²⁹ Luthardt; 195-196, quoting Luther's *Werke*; Erlangen ed. Volume 1; p. 176.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

return to His Father, and the protection of His disciples while He is gone from them. The opening verses of the High Priestly prayer deal with the former; beginning verse 6 Jesus focuses on the latter.

Jesus' prayer that the Father would restore to Him the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, is both an unmistakable statement of Christ's preexistent deity and an expectation of something new. To speak of the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, is something no human being can do apart from mental insanity. This Jesus can say, however, because He is the incarnate God (*cp.* John 1:1ff). To *return* to that glory now is for Jesus not a reassumption of that deity, for He never lost that. It is rather the taking up of His glorious position at the right hand of majesty *as Man*. "He desires again the glory which he 'had,' only he desires it now as the incarnate one."⁴³⁰ The divine answer to this prayer forms the basic content of the apostles' witness to Jesus through the rest of the New Testament.

This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:31-33, 36)

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. (17:6-10)

Jesus turns His attention to His disciples, recognizing the extreme danger and vulnerability they will soon face with His departure. Thus these words do have a

⁴³⁰ Luthardt; 199.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

particular and unrepeatable application to the eleven (and other disciples that may also have been with Jesus that last night). But that which will protect these disciples is that which protects all disciples throughout the ages – the word of God. The only difference between these men and the rest of history's believers is that the Holy Spirit had not yet been given, and therefore Jesus entrusts His disciples to the care of His Father while He is gone from them. Believers are, as we learned in the Good Shepherd discourse, first the 'property' of the Father and then (though in eternity past) given to the Son for redemption. Thus the Son is simply placing the possession of the Father back in His hands, as it were, for a short period of time, until such time as He has returned to the Father and has sent the Spirit, who will keep them for all time.

Yet in spite of the particularity of the prayer to the disciples who were with Jesus both from the beginning and this last evening, the content of the prayer applied equally to the Church across the ages. Newbigin writes,

The work of Jesus is the communication of the name of God to a community. He does not bequeath to posterity a body of teaching preserved in a book – like the Qur'an. He does not leave behind an ideal or a program. He leaves behind a community – the Church. This community exists not because of decisions which its members have made. It is not constituted by the faith, insight, or moral excellence of its members. It exists because God has called its members out of the world by his own action and given them to Jesus. They are those whom God had chosen 'before the foundation of the world' (Eph. 1:4).⁴³¹

The mention of God's name here in Jesus' prayer brings up another theological issue that has perennially been a bone of contention: what is the proper name of God? The Jews, of course, will not pronounce the tetragrammaton – the 'memorial name' of God, Yahweh or Jehovah. Even in Jewish writings the word 'God' will miss the middle letter: G_d. This is an attempt to honor the 'name' of God, but by virtue of what Jesus is saying here, it is wide of the mark and actually dishonors the divine Being by trying to encapsulate His glory in a name. According to Jesus, there is a direct connection between '*manifesting Your Name*' and '*giving them the words which You have given Me.*' Thus the real meaning of the 'name' of God is the fullness of His self-disclosure: "We are not to think of a definite name, as, for example, the name Jehovah. The name, according to the scriptural

⁴³¹ Newbigin; 228.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

use of terms, is the essence itself in so far as it reveals itself. Here, therefore, it is God as the God of the saving revelation.”⁴³² So long as this revelation is faithfully preached in the world, the name of God is manifested to the world.

But Jesus has not manifested the Father’s Name, nor given the words that the Father has given Him, to the world. And therefore He does not pray for the world, because the Johannine conception of ‘the world’ is the body of mankind in rebellion against its Creator and Sovereign God. Later, Jesus will expand this prayer to all those who will believe on account of the testimony of the disciples, and we can apply that expansion even here – Jesus knows that the propagation of the Gospel will bring in the elect “*from every tongue, tribe, and nation*”; in other words, from ‘the world.’ But the world, as the world, is not the object of Jesus’ intercession and never will be. Among the human race, only those who belong to the Father from eternity past, by way of predestination, are the objects of Jesus’ intercession. It is notable that when Paul speaks of the redemption of the creation in Romans 8, he does not use the term ‘world,’ rather he uses ‘cosmos’ or ‘created order.’ But the redemption of the cosmos is to be mediated through the redemption of Man, creation’s crown jewel, and for that redemption Jesus intercedes only for the Elect. Hoskyns writes,

Thus the work of Jesus is not defined as a general proclamation of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of men, but rather as the creation of the Church, the *Ecclesia* of God, consisting of men of flesh and blood extracted from the world to which they had hitherto belonged – by the power of God.⁴³³

We might be a little incredulous at the seeming high praise that Jesus gives to His disciples in relation to their understanding of what He has taught them. Throughout the Fourth Gospel, as well as in the Synoptics, we encounter the disciples as dull of hearing and slow to believe. But we must not hear Jesus in this place as saying that these disciples have attained the fulness of knowledge in the revelation of God’s Word brought to them by Jesus. What He says is simply, “*they have received it*” and the emphasis is then upon their acceptance of the *source* of these words, “*and have known surely that I have come forth from You.*” This prayer does not contradict what Jesus has said earlier about the disciples not being able to understand the ‘more’ that He had to tell them, nor the fact that they

⁴³² Luthardt; 200.

⁴³³ Hoskyns; 499.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

would not understand until they had received the *Parakletos* from the Father. It merely acknowledges, and therefore emphasizes, that the disciples for all their confusion still and firmly recognized that Jesus “*has the words of eternal life.*”

But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

(John 6:68-69)

And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. (17:10-12)

Jesus attention to His disciples, loving them to the end, focuses on two important facts concerning the Church, the Body of Christ. The first is that believers belong to God from eternity past, from the ‘Council of Redemption,’ as theologians call it, in which the Father and the Son purposed to redeem a people to the glory of God. The language is predestinarian through and through, though this by no means obliterates the responsible reaction of man, as the example of Judas Iscariot here shows. Those who wish to deny predestination often refer to the ‘election’ of the disciples, or of Pharaoh, or David, as unique within the human race: these particular men are ‘chosen’ as necessary instruments for the working out of God’s plan to provide the offer of salvation to all men. But to violate the free will of a few men in order to (hopefully) save many more is no more just, by the Arminian’s own reckoning, than the ‘violation’ of the free will of all who will eventually come to believe. No, the simple (though complex) truth is that all who will believe in time belonged to the Father from before the foundation of the world, and were given to the Son to be kept in the Father’s Name both in time and for eternity.

The second point concerning these disciples, and those who will believe because of their testimony, is their unity: *that they may be one as We are one*. The unity of the Body of Christ is a major theme that runs through the High Priestly prayer and, in light of the subsequent divisions in the professing Church of Jesus Christ, is well worthy of a separate and lengthy study. It is even more worthy of intense prayer, for it is likened by Jesus to the unity of the Godhead and there can be no greater oneness than that. This unity, as it

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

applies to the Church, is not an institutional unity achieved by one, overarching ecclesiastical structure, as Rome claims. Nor is it a vapid ecumenism by which everyone simply accepts as brother or sister anyone who claims to be a Christian. “It is something much more difficult. It is unity of heart and mind and will.”⁴³⁴

The unity of the Body of Christ is a unity in faith and in holiness. It is also a unity that is under constant attack from the enemy of Christ, Satan. “To be kept in this name is to be holy, for holiness is the quality of that which belongs wholly to God. It is also to be one, for God is one. Holiness and unity are therefore not alternative options for the Church. If the disciples are kept in the name which Jesus has received from the Father, they will be one. This unity is threatened by the power of the devil, the evil one whose characteristic work is to divide, to undermine faith, to sow suspicion and strife. This work of the devil has always threatened the company of disciples.”⁴³⁵ Thus the foundation for the unity of the Church of which Jesus speaks, is laid for us by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesian Church.

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Jesus mentions Judas Iscariot almost by way of caveat. While it is true that Jesus ‘lost’ Judas, it is evident that Judas was not of Jesus’ sheep – as He had already stated earlier (cp. 13:10-11). The reference to the ‘son of perdition’ shows that the betrayal of Jesus was foretold and therefore was part of the divine will. This is not to say that Judas did not act from his own devices, or that he could not help but do what he did. Judas received all the love from Jesus - all the teaching, all the authority to cast out demons, all the care – that the other disciples received. He did not unite that blessing with faith. “There was no falling from grace, because he had no grace to fall from, for none is able to pluck His sheep out of His hands.”⁴³⁶ Morris writes, “This does not mean that Judas was an automaton. He was a responsible person and acted freely. But God used his evil act to bring about His

⁴³⁴ Morris; 728.

⁴³⁵ Newbigin; 230.

⁴³⁶ Jacobus; 298.

purpose. There is a combination of the human and the divine, but in this passage it is the divine side rather than the human which receives stress.”⁴³⁷

But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.
(17:13-16)

As in the Farewell Discourse itself, Jesus’ prayer shows a sharp dichotomy between His disciples – His budding Church – and the world. Disciples should know beforehand that their association with and in Christ will create hostility from the world, as Jesus had just told them, “If the world hates you, know that it hated Me before it hated you.” (15:18) This enmity of the world, and the uniqueness of believers in the world, has convinced some in every generation of the Church that the right thing for a believer to do is to withdraw from the world and remain physically separated from it in all things. But such an attitude runs directly contrary to Jesus’ prayer, for in spite of the inevitable hatred that the world will show His disciples, He does not ask the Father to remove them from it. “Since they are not ‘of the world’ it might be thought that the prayer would be made that they should be removed ‘from the world.’ Jesus now makes it plain that He has nothing of the sort in mind. Their place is still in the world. It would be bad for them and disastrous for the world to have them taken out of the world...The place of God’s people is in the world, though, of course, not of it.”⁴³⁸

Monastic vows are ungodly and have always led to a perversion both of the concept of the Church and of the disciple who takes them. In our time, however, the great danger among believers is not monasticism but retirement. Retirement from the world through a modern-day cloisterism in which the entire life of a congregation is oriented around mega-church complexes that remove the need for believers to defile themselves through worldly contact. Retirement from occupation, whether ‘religious’ or ‘secular,’ is another modern epidemic among believers: the thought that after a certain age it is time to live for oneself and to take one’s ease in terms of interaction with the world. Jacobus, writing in the 19th Century before individual retirement was really even an option (people did not tend to

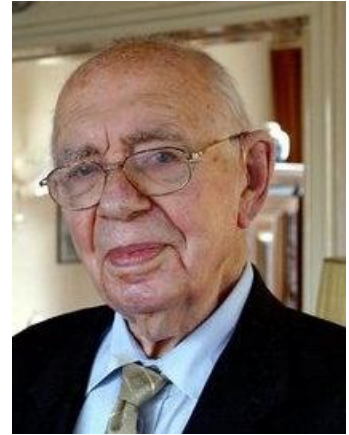
⁴³⁷ Morris; 728.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*; 729-730.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

live long enough to even contemplate retirement), still recognized the danger of the concept. “We are not to seek our removal from the earth before the time – nor to retire from active part in the affairs of this life – but we are to labor in our business here, seeking only to be preserved from the evil, and to grow in grace.”⁴³⁹

There is an entire lesson series in these few verses regarding the disciples and the world. There is the clear recognition of antagonism between the world and believers, an enmity that the Church can only minimize or palliate by becoming something other than the Church, by becoming like the world. But the Church is left in the world for the same reason Christ was sent to the world, “*For God so loved the world...*” This does not mean that the Church’s work is atoning or salvific, but only that Christ’s atoning, salvific work is continued in the Church by the Holy Spirit. Herman Ridderbos noted, “The disciples’ place in the world is not something that they can give up because the world is not something that God can give up.”⁴⁴⁰



Herman Ridderbos (1909-2007)

What Jesus is teaching His disciples in the midst of this very real prayer to His Father, is that they will possess a unique and powerful position vis-à-vis the world due to the fact that He is returning to the Father. He has already told them that it was to their benefit that He depart, and that after He departed “*greater works shall they do*” because He has gone to the Father. His position seated at the right hand of the Father in glory, and His sending *another Parakletos* to be with His Church forever, have given the Church the only real vantage point from which to change the world – not to change the world from being rebellious to being obedient, but to change individual men, women, and children from being children of darkness to children of light. Newbigin provides an excellent insight, “Archimedes said: ‘Give me a point outside the world for a fulcrum and I will move the world.’ If the Church does not rest on a point outside the world it has no leverage with the world.”⁴⁴¹ He continues, “Between the Church and the world, therefore, lies the boundary line which is called ‘conversion,’ and if the Church seeks a relation with the world which

⁴³⁹ Jacobus; 298.

⁴⁴⁰ Quoted by Whitacre; 413.

⁴⁴¹ Newbigin; 231.

ignores this, it falls into the power of the evil one.”⁴⁴² But Jesus provides the protection from this danger: Sanctification.

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.
(17:17-19)

‘Sanctify’ means to make holy, to separate for holy service. It does include, of course, cleansing from defilement, but this was the mode of sanctification, not sanctification itself. Hence Jesus is telling His disciples both what they are and how they are to remain so, and to grow. Modern Church teaching has emphasized sanctification as the believer ‘gaining victory’ over sins. This formed the central core of John Wesley’s perfectionism: that the believer can attain sinless perfection in this life through ‘methodism.’ “Contextually speaking, the sanctification in question is not only to personal holiness, as important as that is. That purpose of God for which these first believers are especially set aside is expressed in the next verse.”⁴⁴³ Here Jesus links the sanctification of His disciples with His own sanctification, showing that the essence of sanctification is not victory over sin (Jesus certainly did not need to overcome any personal besetting sins), but rather to be consecrated to God’s service. “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” Hence the context of sanctification - in this prayer and theoretically then throughout the fulfillment of this prayer in the rest of the New Testament - is consecration for the continuation of God’s mission to the world.

There are two elements to the sanctification of which Jesus speaks: the Word and suffering. The first of these is explicit in the text, “Sanctify them in truth; Thy word is truth.” There is no sanctification of the believer apart from immersion in God’s word. “The revealed word of God is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify God and enjoy Him.”⁴⁴⁴ Jesus Himself is the Word, the *Logos*, of God (1:1) and He is the Truth (14:6). What Jesus brought to the world is fundamentally the Word of God, Himself; this is what the disciples - and not just the original eleven - bring to the world in each successive

⁴⁴² *Idem.*

⁴⁴³ Carson; 193.

⁴⁴⁴ Jacobus; 299.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

generation. It is what the Church has to offer, and it is more powerful than anything the world can put up against it.

The second aspect of sanctification is more implicit in the text, for it encompasses just what Jesus is doing these final hours of His life: suffering. Jesus has made it clear that *“in this world you will have tribulation,”* but this is not a bad thing, for it marks out Jesus’ disciples as the children of God. They are hated because He is hated, and He is hated because the Father is hated. The student is not above His master; they hated Jesus, they will hate His disciples. But through that enmity and its resultant persecution of Jesus and of His disciples, sanctification takes place. We may not comprehend how it was that Jesus was sanctified (unless, of course, we think more broadly than just the ‘overcoming’ of sins), but the writer of Hebrews makes explicit what is implied here in John 17.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren. (Hebrews 2:10-11)

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (17:20-23)

This passage shows that at this point in His passion Jesus is looking beyond the suffering that He is about to experience. *“For the joy set before Him”* He not only endures the torture and humiliation to follow, the death and abandonment by His Father, He truly triumphs over it by looking ahead, *“He will see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.”* Jesus does not pray for future generations of His disciples as a mere possibility, nor even a probability, but of a definite and present reality. He prays for believers yet unborn (and yet un-reborn) *as He prays for those who are right before Him.* They are all before Him, and He prays for their unity in Him and each other, which is the true power of the Church’s witness to the world.

These particular disciples, of course, hold a unique place among the generations of regenerate – they are those with whom it all starts, they are the foundation of the true

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Temple that Jesus will build (*cp.* Eph. 2:20). “It is the apostolic word which mediates the belief of the church of all succeeding ages. No other word is to be added to it; but this propagates itself in the church, as well in the preaching by word of mouth as in the written copies.”⁴⁴⁵ The early congregations “*devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching*” and this has always been the pattern of a solid, sound, biblical congregation in every age. Novelty and ‘cultural relevance’ cannot advance the message that Jesus left His Church through His apostles. Nor can programs and innovations maintain the unity for which Jesus prays, the unity that characterized the Godhead because that is the very environment in which the Church lives, indwelt as it is by the Holy Spirit. Beasley-Murray contrasts manmade attempts at unity – he uses the example of the Qumran community of Jesus’ day – as being transient and futile. “By contrast the unity of Christian believers, for which prayer is here made, is more radical and fundamental: it is rooted in the being of God, revealed in Christ, and in the redemptive action of God in Christ. The prayer ‘that they be *one*’ accordingly is defined as ‘that they may be *in us*.’”⁴⁴⁶

Jesus drives this powerful reality home in this short passage by reiterating the concept of the comparative unity of the Church with that of the Godhead twice, in verse 21 and 23. Notice the emphasis, almost a concatenation of ‘oneness.’ The conclusion of each is that the world may know that the Father has sent the Son.

<u>Verse 21</u>	<u>Verse 23</u>
<i>Thou in Me</i>	<i>I in them</i>
<i>I in Thee</i>	<i>Thou in Me</i>
<i>They in Us</i>	<i>They perfected in unity</i>
<i>Thou didst send Me</i>	<i>Thou didst send Me</i>

But verse 23 adds the icing to the cake: “*and didst love them even as Thou didst love Me.*” Carson writes of believers in all ages, “Theirs is a common experience of grace, a common object of faith, a common eternal destination, a common regeneracy, a common rejection of the ‘world,’ a common perception of the Lord’s glory.”⁴⁴⁷ The lesson here for true believers is that there is far more in common, far more of unity, among them through

⁴⁴⁵ Luthardt; 212.

⁴⁴⁶ Beasley-Murray; 302.

⁴⁴⁷ Carson; 199.

the Spirit, than there is of that which divides. Though it is historically true that the Church has not attained the outward measure of this truth, it is not for that reason any less true. “The prayer of Jesus is for a unity which is a real participation of believers in the love and obedience which unites Jesus with the Father, a participation which is as invisible as the flow of sap which unites the branches with the vine, and which is at the same time as visible as the unity of branch and vine – as visible as the love and obedience of Christ.”⁴⁴⁸

Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (17:24-26)

Jesus moves from the immediate eschatology of the growth of His Body, the Church, through the ages, to the ultimate eschatology of the consummation of the age, “that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am.” Hoskyns notes three periods of the Church’s history in this High Priestly prayer: “the time of the manifestation of the glory of God to the original disciples, *I have made known to them thy name*, the time of the manifestation of the name of God to the Church and through the Church to the world, *I will make it known*, and the final and eternal manifestation of the love of God, *that the love with which thou hast lovedst me may be in them, and I in them*. The last verses of the prayer concern the eschatological hope of the Church, not of individual believers.”⁴⁴⁹

That which holds these three periods together is the love of the Father which was given without measure to the Son, and is promised in the same measure(less) manner to those who are His. It is a doctrine rejected by the world, but “God can love with this love only those who have been born as children unto him by the Spirit of Jesus, upon the basis of the fact of the Son.”⁴⁵⁰ The notion of God loving all mankind is simply not biblical; there can be no love to those who hate His Son, and Jesus has made this very clear throughout the Fourth Gospel. Those who have known the Father through the revelation of the Son will finally share in the perfect love of the Father and the Son; but, since the world cannot receive, nor behold, nor know, the Spirit of Truth, neither can it share in the love of the

⁴⁴⁸ Newbigin; 235.

⁴⁴⁹ Hoskyns; 506.

⁴⁵⁰ Luthardt; 219.

Father and the Son.”⁴⁵¹ But secure in this love, the Church may look forward with confident hope to the time when she will behold the glory of her Lord Jesus Christ to the fullest. “The conclusion of the prayer is therefore pure eschatology, the prayer that the *Ecclesia Militans* may become the *Ecclesia Glorificata*, and that the *Theologia Crucis* may be transformed into the *Theologia Gloriorum*.”⁴⁵²

Excursus: Unity and Ecumenism

On the face of it, there has been a real problem with Jesus’ prayer for the unity of His disciples: it has not happened. The Church is divided and has been divided since the earliest years (*cp.* Paul’s letters to the Corinthians). Historically, some of the worst atrocities that have been committed against believers have been perpetrated by ‘the Church.’ The world sees all of this, and mocks. And because of this there have been attempts within the professing Church to create unity among widely divergent branches of Christianity. Indeed, this ecumenical movement has also spawned attempts to unify the whole of mankind under ‘interfaith’ religion. That this latter effort can lay no claim on the Christian faith, even though it is propagated by professing Christians, is shown by the following comment by Bishop George Appleton (1902-93), a founder of the World Congress of Faiths. Speaking of his proposed attempt to bring more Jews, Orthodox, Muslims, Buddhists, and even men of non-faith into Christian (specifically Anglican) services, Appleton proposed “that this attempt could be achieved if we concentrated more on God and less on Jesus.”⁴⁵³ A more difficult organization to access is the World Council of Churches, founded in 1948 as an attempt to bridge doctrinal and ecclesiastical divides between Christian confessions. At one of the early, preparatory assemblies leading up to the founding of the WCC, strong statements were made regarding the importance of maintaining the doctrinal integrity of Christianity while making the ecumenical effort proposed. At a meeting in Madras in 1938, “the Barthian Hendrik Kraemer asserted the exclusiveness of Christianity in uncompromising terms: the Bible did not reflect man’s search for a transcendent God, but God’s free and unilateral approach to man. The biblical revelation was discontinuous with all human longings for a concept of God. While Christ-

⁴⁵¹ Hoskyns; 507.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*; 506.

⁴⁵³ Pollitt, Herbert J. *The Inter-faith Movement* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust; 1996); 9.



Hendrik Kraemer (1888-1965)

ians were at the same level as all human beings, the biblical message was totally different in kind from man's religions."⁴⁵⁴ Many evangelicals were involved in the formation of the WCC, typically for the laudable goal of ending unnecessary division and separation. But before long, unity became an end in and of itself, a goal to be achieved at any cost. By the famous (or rather *infamous*) WCC General Assembly in Uppsala in 1968, the movement had abandoned all pretense to

doctrinal integrity in pursuit not only of 'unity' among professing Christian communions, but also the unity of mankind through the uniting of all faiths. "The most extraordinary proposal came from the Nairobi Assembly (1975): the catechetical, liturgical and theological materials of the churches should be examined and revised by people of other faiths. Non-Christians, that is to say, were to be called in to tell Christians what they ought to believe and how they ought to worship."⁴⁵⁵ Thus the answer the 'Church' has come up with to attain the unity of which Jesus speaks is first, to abandon Jesus and second, to embrace other religions in the world.

But do these failures mean that evangelicals should give off any attempt to promote unity among true believers? To do so would be to contradict Paul's admonition, "*being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*"⁴⁵⁶ It should be noted that Paul does not speak of creating unity, but of preserving it. Perhaps the first thing that the Church must both believe and persevere in believing, is that she already has the unity that Christ promised, for she has the Holy Spirit. As with so many things that pertain to life in Christ, in this the Church must also walk by faith and not by sight. But it cannot be walking by faith when the Church seeks to synthesize unity by abandoning truth. Speaking of the word, *Christian*, Carson writes, "However, if the term is to have anything like its New Testament meaning, then for a person to be a Christian he cannot legitimately hold to a belief structure which the New Testament explicitly disallows, or adopt practices which the New Testament explicitly forbids. More positively, he must at very least hold to

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*; 81.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*; 90. This stratagem is also the key to proper church growth according to *The Purpose-Driven Church* by contemporary Christian-now-Interfaith pastor Rick Warren.

⁴⁵⁶ Ephesians 4:3

what the New Testament itself insists is a minimum confession or an essential practice. If he does not, he prostitutes the term *Christian*.”⁴⁵⁷

Lesslie Newbigin is an interesting example of an evangelical who was also closely involved with the WCC, having served as Associate General Secretary (though before Uppsala). Newbigin maintained the exclusivity of Christianity and the centrality of Jesus Christ to the true faith, as is shown in his commentary on these verses in Jesus’ High Priestly prayer. Speaking of the dichotomy between the world and Jesus’ disciples, Newbigin writes, “The contrast is simply left to stand: The world has not known thee. I have known thee. These have known that thou didst send me. So far as our world is concerned, the line between light and darkness is drawn there. To know that Jesus is the apostle of God is to be in the light. Not to know that is to be in darkness.”⁴⁵⁸ That sounds like a solid foundation, *the* solid foundation, upon which true Christian unity is maintained. *Ecumenism* may be accepted and even pursued upon this singularity of Jesus as the revelation of God, the Son who dwells in the Father’s love; any other form of ecumenism is falsehood.

⁴⁵⁷ Carson; 202.

⁴⁵⁸ Newbigin; 236.

Week 12: Christ on Trial

Text Reading: John 18:1 - 40

*"To hear a sermon of Jesus
is to be implicated in His trial!"*
(Klaas Schilder)

As with so much of the Fourth Gospel, John's account of the Passion of Christ is noticeably different from that of the Synoptic Gospel. Not in essentials, to be sure, but definitely in emphasis. Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, for instance, is not mentioned at all by John, while the Lord's inquisition before (or of?) Pontius Pilate receives four times more ink in the Fourth Gospel than His brief interrogation by Annas, the patriarch of the High Priestly family. These shifts in emphases are important, as they show the reader a perspective of the events that, true to history, are not brought forward in the Synoptics in the same manner as in John's Gospel. The primary difference is the fact of Jesus' command of the entire situation, far more evident in the Fourth Gospel than in the Synoptics. Speaking of John's narrative of the Passion, Newbigin writes, "Throughout the events described Jesus is portrayed not as the passive victim but as the majestic and sovereign initiator and master of all that takes place. It is made clear that in the judgment passed on Jesus it is the judges that are being judged."⁴⁵⁹

John's perspective is, of course, a necessary one. Sadly, it is one that the Church has largely ignored throughout its history, as it has 'reenacted' the events of the Passion Week with actors portraying the political and religious history and conflict that was evident to the eyes of both believer and unbeliever. John reveals that side of the narrative visible only to the eyes of faith, and impossible of being 'reenacted' on a stage. This was the conflict between the Prince of Peace and the prince of this world. This was the cosmic clash of two kingdoms, the fourth and final kingdom of Daniel's prophecy and the kingdom of God, represented by the King, Jesus. And it is only through this lens, provided more emphatically in the Fourth Gospel, that we realize that the outcome was never in doubt. Yes, Jesus was arrested and bound, scourged and crucified. But He never ceased to be the

⁴⁵⁹ Newbigin; 237.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

One laying down His life; at no point were either the Jews or the Romans taking it from Him, and the ultimate triumph was assured. Speaking of Christ's triumph of the Cross, Paul writes,

Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. (Colossians 2:15)

This is John's perspective from start to finish. Without repeating the details provided by the Synoptic authors, John adds the underlying intrigue implicit in the relationship between the Jewish authorities and the Roman governor – the endgame of which is that Jesus was to be crucified as a Roman criminal – a seditionist – and not to be stoned to death as a Jewish blasphemer. This manner of death, of course, is exactly what Jesus Himself prophesied as to the end of His earthly life, and so we are reminded by the Fourth Gospel just how comprehensive was Jesus' statement, *"No one has taken it from Me, but I lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I have from My Father."*⁴⁶⁰

John, as noted, emphasizes the confrontation with the Roman governor far more than Jesus' interrogation by Annas or His trial before the Sanhedrin. This emphasis, it would seem, highlights Jesus' Passion as a greater conflict and confrontation than merely one Jewish 'heretic' being dealt with by the Jewish religious leaders; this was the cosmic battle foretold in Daniel 2. Newbiggin comments, "The great emphasis in John's account is placed upon the confrontation with the power of Rome...The real issue, in other words, is the issue of sovereignty, of the nature of the kingship of God. The ultimate adversary of Jesus is 'the ruler of this world,' and therefore in the final conflict Jewish religion plays only an ancillary role."⁴⁶¹ The 'ruler of this world' is, of course, represented by that fourth empire of Daniel's prophecy, during which time the God of heaven would establish a kingdom (and a king) that would continue forever.

And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the

⁴⁶⁰ John 10:18

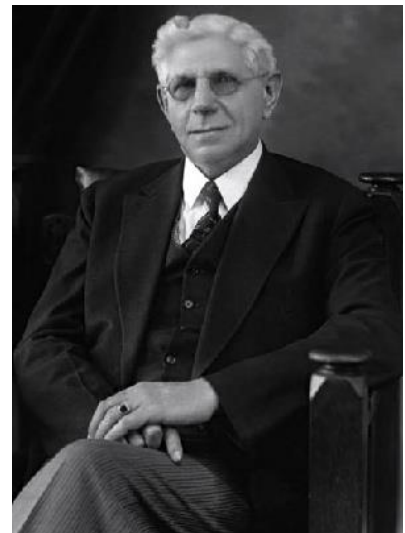
⁴⁶¹ Newbiggin; 238.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

gold – the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.
(Daniel 2:44-45)

This is a confrontation between Christ and Caesar. The former represents the advent of the kingdom of God, the latter the kingdoms of the earth. The former represents divine power through the Spirit; the latter human power through government and the sword. The outcome is, in John's narrative, really never in doubt, "*You would have no authority over Me unless it were granted to you from above.*"⁴⁶² Even Pilate is but a bit part, a 'supporting role,' as he merely represents the one who is Jesus' real adversary, the devil. Still, the narrative follows logically on the entire Farewell Discourse, as Jesus informs His disciples that the enmity of the world (represented primarily by Pilate) is merely the manifestation of the enmity of the prince of this world against Jesus. "But the basic thing is the confrontation of Caesar by Christ, with kingship as the topic for discussion."⁴⁶³

When theologians take up the subject of Christ's Passion, they usually refer to it Jesus' *passive obedience* whereby He allowed Himself to be subjected to persecution and death. Berkhof provides a standard Reformed definition of the concept. "His passive obedience consisted in His paying the penalty of sin by His sufferings and death, and thus discharging the debt of all His people. The sufferings of Christ...did not come upon Him accidentally, nor as the result of purely natural circumstances. They were judicially laid upon Him as our representative, and were therefore really penal sufferings."⁴⁶⁴ The denotation of Jesus suffering passively the punishment for sins that He had not committed does fit with the Isaianic prophecy,



Louis Berkhof (1873-1957)

*He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.*
(Isaiah 53:7)

⁴⁶² John 19:11

⁴⁶³ Morris; 767.

⁴⁶⁴ Berkhof, Louis *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1994); 381.

Yet one must be careful in this consideration, careful not to conclude that Jesus was powerless in the matter. John's narrative dispels such a notion and shows, as Berkhof rightly notes, that the *active* and *passive* obedience of Christ really cannot be separated. "The two accompany each other at every point in the Saviour's life. There is a constant interpenetration of the two. It was part of Christ's active obedience, that He subjected Himself voluntarily to sufferings and death."⁴⁶⁵ Thus we see in John's account especially, from the scene in the garden to the interrogation by/of Pilate, that Jesus was at all times the One truly in charge. "The great emphasis in John's account is placed upon the confrontation with the power of Rome."⁴⁶⁶ Jesus was indeed being judged, but the judges were condemning themselves in the act. John begins his narration of the drama at the same location as do the Synoptic authors: in the garden.

When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered. And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. (18:1-3)

It is likely that the garden mentioned here is none other than Gethsemane, an association made even more probably not only by comparison with the Synoptics, but John's note that it was a place Jesus often went, and therefore the place most likely for Judas to find Him. The narrative is truncated compared to the Synoptics, and Jesus' intense prayer, "*Let this cup pass from Me... Yet not My will, but Thine be done,*" is passed over as having been fully recorded in the other gospels. John's emphasis, as noted above, is upon the active control that Jesus manifests in these events: His *active* passive obedience. Though he does not mention the name of the garden, John makes clear reference to the wadi over which Jesus passed to get to the garden: the *wadi Kidron*. The mention of this location is most likely intended to draw a firm connection between Jesus' path to betrayal and that of His father according to the flesh, David. David fled from his son Absalom over the same dry river bed that Jesus now passes to His betrayal and arrest.

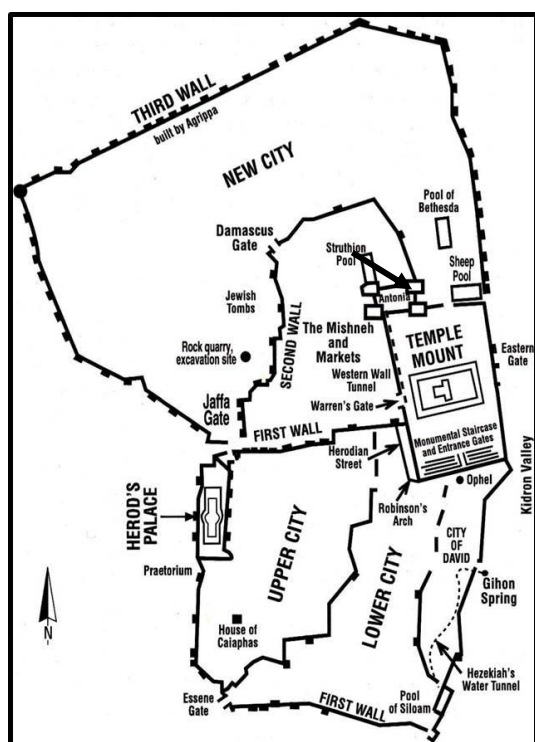
⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*; 379.

⁴⁶⁶ Newbigin; 238.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

So David said to Ittai, "Go, and cross over." Then Ittai the Gittite and all his men and all the little ones who were with him crossed over. And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people crossed over. The king himself also crossed over the Brook Kidron, and all the people crossed over toward the way of the wilderness. (II Samuel 15:23)

The comparison of David's flight before Absalom and Jesus' passage from freedom to bonds is quite striking, including the fact that David's betrayer, Ahithophel, subsequently hanged himself, the only person of whom this demise is recorded in the Bible other than Judas Iscariot.⁴⁶⁷ And Jesus, like David, was pursued by an army: the word used here to describe the Roman soldiers who accompanied Judas is *speiran* or cohort/band, which referred at this time to the Roman cohort of approximately 600 soldiers who occupied the Fortress Antonia which overlooked the Temple complex. It is



unlikely that the entire cohort went across the Kidron to arrest Jesus, but it is not inconceivable. The major feasts were a dangerous time in Jerusalem, a prime season for zealots to stir up insurrection, as had been done often in the past. "The festivals in Jerusalem were always politically volatile, and after the welcome Jesus had received there was good reason to expect trouble – or so it would have seemed to the Roman and Jewish authorities who understood Jesus so poorly."⁴⁶⁸ That the Romans were in league with the Jewish leaders is shown here by the presence of so large a body of Roman soldiers,

but also later when we find Pilate already prepared to meet them as they bring Jesus bound to his tribunal. From start to finish it was an evil joint venture, as Peter was to announce later: *"Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death."*⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ II Samuel 17:23; cp. Whitacre; 425.

⁴⁶⁸ Whitacre; 425-26.

⁴⁶⁹ Acts 2:23

The accoutrements of this armed band are indicative – lanterns (they expected to find Jesus lurking in the dark) and weapons (they expected armed resistance). “They were thus prepared for trouble and equipped to meet it.”⁴⁷⁰ As the narrative progresses, it becomes apparent that the Jews, at least, were hoping that Jesus would resist arrest and perhaps even start a small insurrection. That would have made their work so much easier. But Jesus’ hour had come and, while ever and always obeying His Father, He had no intention in obliging the Jews.

Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, “Whom are you seeking?” They answered Him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am He.” And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, “I am He,” they drew back and fell to the ground. Then He asked them again, “Whom are you seeking?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus answered, “I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way,” that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, “Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.” (18:4-9)

The soldiers need not have troubled themselves with lanterns and swords, as Jesus, actively laying down His life for His sheep, goes out to meet them rather than have them come into the garden. “When the wolves come the good shepherd does not flee, but goes forth to lay down his life so that the sheep may be safe.”⁴⁷¹ To the end His care is for His sheep, and He would not have them incriminated in His arrest – though Peter, as usual, will make things difficult for his Master. Jesus asks them quite civilly, “Whom do you seek?” and upon receiving their answer, says with equal simplicity, “I AM.” It is unfortunate that so many English translations feel the need to add the pronoun ‘He’ to this phrase. While this is not grammatically in error, as the pronoun is implied, the reaction of the soldiers seems very much to indicate that the words Jesus spoke were the powerful self-attestation of God, *ego eimi*, I Myself Am. This is the same expression Jesus uses in John 8:58, upon which the Jews who heard Him took up stones to stone Him. Here, pagan Romans who have no knowledge of God – and hence no calloused reception of that Name – fall back and to the ground upon hearing it. To theorize that Jesus was somehow threatening them by coming out of the garden to meet them, as modern scholars do, is preposterous – these are Roman soldiers; they do not fall back before a band of Jewish peasants.

⁴⁷⁰ Morris; 742.

⁴⁷¹ Newbiggin; 239.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

The soldiers are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, but in finding Him they encounter the mighty Son of God. “Here the most humble and human of Jesus’ names is juxtaposed with the most exalted and divine. The two together are the cross hairs that target Jesus’ identity: he is the human being from an insignificant, small town in Galilee who is also God.”⁴⁷² In this poignant and powerful episode, John begins the narrative of Jesus’ Passion by reminding his readers that it was Jesus who was in charge the entire time; these men had no power to take Him had it not been His hour. “The instruments of evil fall prostrate before their true commander.”⁴⁷³ Luthardt adds, “For Jesus did indeed intend to give himself into the hands of his enemies; but in such a way as to reveal at the same time how incapable these men would be to take him, if Jesus did not wish to give himself up.”⁴⁷⁴ To emphasize this powerful truth, Jesus fairly orders the *chiliarch* – the commander of a thousand – to let His disciples go free, as the condition of His own submission to arrest. Whitacre comments that Jesus “issues orders to those arresting him!”⁴⁷⁵ Newbigin adds, “Jesus alone is in command of the situation. He will give himself up according to the Father’s will, but on condition that those whom the Father has given him are kept safe.”⁴⁷⁶

Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?” (18:10-11)

Peter’s story is woven as a minor plotline in the midst of the main narrative of Jesus’ trial before Annas and, primarily, before Pilate. The purpose of this record is not theological, except to remind the readers that what Jesus was about to do, only He could do it. Peter represents human hubris and impetuosity, and his bravado striking of the servant is matched a few verses later by his denial of even knowing the man Jesus. The significance of this passage to the relation of John’s narrative to that of the Synoptics is Jesus’ mention of ‘the cup’ that He is to drink, a clear allusion to the Gethsemane prayer recorded by the other gospel writers but passed over by John. Luke also mentions the

⁴⁷² Whitacre; 426.

⁴⁷³ Hoskyns; 509/

⁴⁷⁴ Luthardt; 227.

⁴⁷⁵ Whitacre; 427.

⁴⁷⁶ Newbigin; 240.

High Priest's servant, though not by name, and goes on to tell us that Jesus healed the man's ear even as He was being arrested.

Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him. And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. (18:12-14)

Modern textual and higher critics have had a fit over this passage, recording as it does a meeting which none of the other evangelists' record, and mentioning as 'high priest' (v. 19) a man who was *not* the High Priest that year. But John had already noted to his readers that Caiaphas was High Priest '*that year,*' (11:49) and so we ought not consider that the author confused himself in just a few short pages. The meeting he records here is very short, and does not purport to be the Sanhedrin assembly that the Synoptics all record. Indeed, John tells us that after Jesus' interview with Annas, He is led bound to Caiaphas, and undoubtedly the official Jewish trial before the Sanhedrin.

When we learn just who this Annas, before whom Jesus is first brought, was, it all becomes quite clear. Annas had been High Priest from AD 6-15 and was followed in that office by five sons and a son-in-law, our current Caiaphas. Except for Annas' son Eleazar, who served as High Priest in AD 16-17, the other sons only held that office after Jesus' death and resurrection: Jonathan (AD 36-37), Theophilus (AD 37-41), Matthias (AD 41-44), and Annas the Younger, possibly a grandson (c. AD 62). Adding the son-in-law Caiaphas, this was truly a family franchise of the High Priesthood, as Hoskyns notes, "the office of high priest was for a long period monopolized by one family, and Annas himself, so long as he lived, presumably held a patriarchal position."⁴⁷⁷ Morris adds, "There is little doubt but that through these changes the astute old man at the head of the family exercised a good deal of authority. He was in all probability the real power in the land, whatever the legal technicalities."⁴⁷⁸

Taking Jesus first to Annas makes further sense when we remember that, for the Jews, the High Priesthood was a lifetime office. The Romans thought otherwise, of course, and installed and removed men at their whim. But, to paraphrase *Chronicles of Narnia*,

⁴⁷⁷ Hoskyns; 513.

⁴⁷⁸ Morris; 749.

‘once a high priest in Jerusalem, always a high priest in Jerusalem.’ There is little doubt that pride of place went to Annas, though it would be Caiaphas who occupies the ‘official’ chair as president of the Sanhedrin. Thus the initial interrogation of Jesus goes to the patriarch Annas, and it is probably hoped that the elder priest will provide a brief of prosecution for the Sanhedrin to adjudicate in the morning. This is not to be; Jesus, the Law-Giver, knows the Law too well to be shanghaied by these wicked men.

The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. Jesus answered him, “I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.” And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, “Do You answer the high priest like that?” Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me? Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.” (18:19-24)

Annas’ questioning is, however, is subtle and crafty. He asks Jesus two questions in one: he asks Jesus about *His disciples and His doctrine*. “Annas’ questioning is crafty and inquisitorial. It seeks to find something that may form an object of complaint. Jesus’ public acts gave little occasion for complaint, and therefore Annas inquires as to the secret gaining of disciples for ambitious aims, and as to secret doctrines perhaps of political contents.”⁴⁷⁹ It will become apparent through John’s narrative that the high priests are really not trying to nab Jesus on a charge of blasphemy, but rather on a charge of sedition. Probably on account of the adulation of the crowds upon Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, and His consistent appeal to the masses, that the religious leaders are in earnest to have the trial, judgment, and punishment executed by the Romans – by crucifixion as an insurrectionist and not by stoning as a blasphemer. Added to this may have been the Deuteronomic principle that “*Cursed is any man who hangs from a tree,*” motivating the religious leaders desire not only to *kill* Jesus, but to *discredit* Him in so doing. Of course, their schemes merely fulfill God’s plans, and their machinations only serve to bring about the very form of execution that Jesus has prophesied He would suffer, “*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.*”⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ Luthardt; 237.

⁴⁸⁰ John 12:32

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

In asking also of Jesus disciples, Annas is attempting to fill in the gaps in the preferred charge of insurrection: how many followers do you have? Are they well armed? Are they here in Jerusalem? “For, from the point of view of the status of the family of the priest, less depended upon the message Christ proclaimed than upon His disciples, upon the *influence* of His words, the so-called ‘success’ of His preaching.”⁴⁸¹

It is apparent that the ruling dynasty of the priests, as well as the faction represented by the Sanhedrin, was of the opinion that Jesus intended to begin a movement, making His starting point a small nucleus. They were of the opinion also that He had already begun this...This insinuation suggests that Jesus is preaching a secret doctrine to an exclusive circle, or at least that He is preparing plans for a surreptitious conspiracy against the existing authorities.⁴⁸²

Jesus will not play into Anna’s hands, showing once again Who is in control of these events. In the first place, He refuses to mention His disciples; He will not bring them into any greater danger than they are already are in. Secondly, the Law requires witnesses and did not command any defendant to testify against himself. This was a monkey court, and



Klaas Schilder (1890-1952)

Jesus was quick to point that out. “*Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me, as I have only ever taught publicly and in the day.*” So little is Jesus an insurrectionist, His teachings have been public knowledge from the beginning. It is as if Jesus taunts Annas, “Where have you been, that you have not heard of My teaching?” Ask the masses; they have heard and will bear witness of what I taught (something Annas had absolutely no intention of doing). Schilder applies Jesus’ counterargument to all the ages, “How vehement, how forceful the Christ is! They draw Him into court, and by His first sentence He draws you and me into that court also, and involves us in His trial....To have heard a sermon of Jesus is to have become implicated in His trial.”⁴⁸³ To this Annas has no answer and, thus stymied, the ‘court’ resorts to the recourse of the ignorant: brute force.

⁴⁸¹ Schilder, Klaas *Christ on Trial* (Ontario: Paideia Press; 1979); 31.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*; 31.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*; 44.

A servant of the high priest – early commentators postulated that this was a relative of Malchus, but there is both no foundation in the narrative for that, and a counterintuitive reasoning behind it, since Jesus had healed Malchus' ear – strikes the defendant with his palm – sort of a Will Smith slap, to be current. But Jesus had told no joke: He had simply availed Himself of the jurisprudence of Jewish Law – the demand for witnesses – and so He rebukes the assailant with the countercharge: *"If I have spoke amiss, testify; but if you cannot find fault with My words, why do you strike Me?"* Implied ending: *"contrary to the Law."* Jesus "was struck before the accusers were able to set on paper a single formulated charge. Moreover, the blow was dealt Him by one who had no authority to administer blows. A subordinate, a servant, whose business is was neither to determine nor to execute penalties, is the one who struck Christ."⁴⁸⁴ The travesty of the injustice of Jesus' trial is apparent from the very beginning. Indeed, the closest to justice Jesus will come will be in the Praetorium, before the Roman governor, who will quickly conclude His innocence. Annas, however, is powerless and completely stumped; he sends Jesus on His way to the official Jewish court before the Sanhedrin. His inquisitorial mission failed.

And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself... Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not!" One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.
(18:15-18; 25-27)

The purpose of this narrative, woven into the overall scene as the night passes into day, is to show the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy that Peter would deny Him three times before the cock crowed the morning's arrival. Where did this happen? John records it as the courtyard of Anna's house, whereas the other evangelists place it in the court of Caiaphas' house. Evidence of contradiction? Hardly. Jewish families, especially the rich and powerful, lived in familial compounds and it is quite likely that Annas lives only a few steps across a courtyard from his daughter and powerful son-in-law, Caiaphas.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; 49.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

The only other technical question that this passage presents is the identity of the “*other disciple*.” When we consider two facts of the Fourth Gospel, it will become fairly apparent that this is, again, the author. First, John nowhere names himself but on occasion alludes to himself, for instance, as “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*.” The second piece of evidence is the fact that, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and through the early scenes of the nascent Church, Peter is most often seen with John, or vice versa. There is, of course, no doctrinal significance to the identity of this unnamed disciple; but all markers point to it being John, the eyewitness author of the account.

The Main Event – Jesus before Pilate

Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover. (18:28)

The Jews are one step closer to their goal of pawning the execution of Jesus off on the Romans, and that step brings them to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Proceeding with an extrajudicial murder of this Galilean rabbi, the high priest scrupled to enter into the Governor’s residence lest they be defiled and thereby disqualified from eating the Passover. This scruple, however, did not derive from the Mosaic Law, in which there is nothing concerning a Jew being disqualified by virtue of defilement due to entering a Gentile residence. The stricture is found in the rabbinic commentary on the Law, the *Mishnah*, where we read simply, “The dwelling-places of the gentiles are unclean.”⁴⁸⁵ This was, however, a fully accepted principle in Second Temple Israel, to the point that even Peter’s stay at Cornelius’ house was very problematic to the other disciples in the early Church. But Peter was not going to Cornelius’ house to plot murder; the priests had only this intention concerning Jesus. Whitacre writes, “Whatever the solution to this puzzle, the irony of the opponents concern is evident. They wish to remain ritually pure even while seeking to kill someone by the agency of the Romans.”⁴⁸⁶ Schilder comments,

A superficial treatment could very easily work out various contrasts here between the extravagant sin which the Jews are willing to undertake, on the one hand, and the

⁴⁸⁵ Danby, Herbert *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1985); *Oholoth* 18.7.

⁴⁸⁶ Whitacre; 438.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

punctiliousness with which they keep their days 'clean,' on the other. Here is reason indeed for recalling Jesus' utterance about those who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.⁴⁸⁷

Luthardt adds, "when in the very act of committing the greatest sin against the promise of Israel, nevertheless [the priests] observed exactly the letter of that which was after all only a rabbinical ordinance."⁴⁸⁸ But remarkably the Roman prefect accommodated the Jews, and the ensuing narrative has Pilate peripatetically shifting scenes from outside with the Jewish priests to inside with Jesus. From the narrative of the Synoptic Gospels, and from the early hour at which Pilate received this embassy from Sanhedrin and their prison, it appears that prior discussions had already been made between the High Priest and the Roman governor. The last thing any procurator of Judea wanted on his watch was a religiously-fueled insurrection of the Jews at one of their high feasts; Pilate's lending of the Roman cohort the evening before is evidence of his care that, whatever this problem was, it not get out of hand. We are to understand John's perspective in this narrative, focusing as he does on the conversation between Pilate and Jesus, as bringing the emphasis to the confrontation between the divine power represented in Jesus and the power of the evil one, manifested in the representative of the fourth human kingdom of Daniel 2. "The writer presses on to describe the scenes in which the sovereignty of this world and the sovereignty which is not of this world are compared concretely in the contrast between Pilate and Jesus."⁴⁸⁹

As usual, John's presentation of the material verges on the poetic as he structures the entire narrative of Jesus' trial before the Romans from 18:28 to 19:16. Whitacre provides a useful outline of this section:

- A Outside (18:28-32) The Jews demand Jesus' death
 - B Inside (18:33-38a) Pilate questions Jesus about kingship
 - C Outside (18:38b-40) Pilate finds Jesus not guilty; Barabbas choice
 - D Inside (19:1-3) Soldiers scourge Jesus
 - C' Outside (19:4-8) Pilate finds Jesus not guilty; 'Behold the man!'
 - B' Inside (19:9-11) Pilate talks with Jesus about power
- A' Outside (19:12-16a) The Jews obtain Jesus' death⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁷ Schilder; 281-282.

⁴⁸⁸ Luthardt; 243.

⁴⁸⁹ Hoskyns; 515.

⁴⁹⁰ Whitacre; 435.

Pontius Pilate was the sixth procurator of the Roman province of Judea, appointed by the Emperor Tiberius in AD 26/27. Ten years later he was recalled to Rome by the Governor of Syria, the Roman overlord of Palestine, on account of Pilate's slaughter of a band of Samaritans he claims were inciting a rebellion in the region of Mt. Gerizim. While Pilate was on route to Rome, the emperor died, and there is no record of what his successor, Caligula, decided to do with the former Judean procurator. He did not return to Judea, of course, but that may as well have been due to his relatively long tenure there as any fault that Caligula found in him. What information we do have is not commendatory. "Philo accuses him of 'bribery, violence, robbery, cruelty, insult, continual executions without sentence of judgment, endless and unendurable atrocities.' And Josephus reports a series of arbitrary acts."⁴⁹¹ Certainly Pilate's initiation to the Jewish homeland and to Jerusalem did not bode well for his relations with the Jews, for Josephus records in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, that the new procurator, shortly after arriving in Palestine, ordered his legions to bring their standards and ensigns into the city, something no other Roman ruler since Pompey, had done.

But now Pilate, the procurator of Judea, removed the army from Cesarea to Jerusalem, to take their winter quarters there, in order to abolish the Jewish laws. So he introduced Caesar's effigies, which were upon the ensigns, and brought them into the city; whereas our law forbids us the very making of images; on which account the former procurators were wont to make their entry into the city with such ensigns as had not those ornaments. Pilate was the first who brought those images to Jerusalem, and set them up there; which was done without the knowledge of the people, because it was done in the night time; but as soon as they knew it, they came in multitudes to Cesarea, and interceded with Pilate many days that he would remove the images; and when he would not grant their requests, because it would tend to the injury of Caesar, while yet they persevered in their request, on the sixth day he ordered his soldiers to have their weapons privately, while he came and sat upon his judgment-seat, which seat was so prepared in the open place of the city, that it concealed the army that lay ready to oppress them; and when the Jews petitioned him again, he gave a signal to the soldiers to encompass them routed, and threatened that their punishment should be no less than immediate death, unless they would leave off disturbing him, and go their ways home. But they threw themselves upon the ground, and laid their necks bare, and said they would take their death very willingly, rather than the wisdom of their laws should be transgressed; upon which Pilate was deeply affected with

⁴⁹¹ Luthardt; 252.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

their firm resolution to keep their laws inviolable, and presently commanded the images to be carried back from Jerusalem to Caesarea.⁴⁹²

Thus Jesus is brought before a man who is not amenable to the Jewish religion, nor the least interested in Jewish religious questions and controversies. John's account is accurate to extra-biblical history. Pilate represents world power, and world power alone. "It would not be easy to find another man so well fitted to drive the Jewish nation to desperation. He had not the least appreciation for religious questions. Such was the judge before whom Jesus stood, and who had to represent over against him the Roman law and the Gentile world-power."⁴⁹³ But more than the representative of Rome, Pilate was the representative of Satan.

Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" They answered and said to him, "If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you." Then Pilate said to them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your law." Therefore the Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death," that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die. (18:29-32)

This testy exchange between the Jews and Pilate illustrates several features of Second Temple Israel that are well-attested by other authors. The animosity between the Jewish leaders and Pilate comes through loud and clear, but also the arrogance and insubordination of the Jews toward their Roman overlords. Pilate's question is both straightforward and legally appropriate: *What is the charge?* The response is incredible for its insolence, *If this man were not an evildoer we would not have brought him to you.* In other words, *Don't ask questions, just kill him.* Of course their response also betrays that they do not have a charge to bring against Jesus, at least not one that a Roman governor would care to hear, much less to execute the man for. "The Jews would gladly have been dispensed from all formal accusations, because they knew they could not offer anything that would hold. What they could bring forward would supply a Roman judge with no ground for a condemnation."⁴⁹⁴ Of course, the priest could count on the fact that Roman judges had no scruples toward killing peasant Jews, and this particular Roman governor was even somewhat notorious for it. They were counting on the fact that Pilate's concern

⁴⁹² Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* (Grand Rapids: Hendrickson Publishers; 1994); 18.3.1

⁴⁹³ Luthardt; 252.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*; 253.

for pacifying the Jews during a religious feast would overrule any twinges of conscience he might have against executing an innocent man. In the end, their calculus proved correct.

But Pilate's response also exposes the perfidy and injustice of the Jews. He was no respecter of their religion or their position within it, and readily took the opportunity to toy with them, knowing that he was being called in simply to perform an execution on their behalf. "Pilate's attitude brings out into the open the Jews' intention and their difficulty. They are out for an execution and nothing less will suffice."⁴⁹⁵ He is aware that their controversy with this peasant rabbi had entirely to do with their religion, and probably resented being dragged into it in the first place. His involvement was certainly due to the caution enjoined upon every Roman provincial ruler in this tumultuous and intensely religious part of the empire: it may merely be a religious issue, but insurrections in Judea were always tied to religious issues; that was the way with these people, the Jews. Such religiously-charged rebellions had occurred with annoying frequency in Judea; Pilate could not simply dismiss this case without hearing more of the charged. Referring to the earlier rebellion under Judas the Galilean, Schilder writes, "Hence it was no wonder that Roman authority, after those turbulent days, had kept an even sharper eye open for every religiously motivated agitation which in its effect might prove to be a threat to the government."⁴⁹⁶

The initial statement by the Jews, however, did not alert Pilate to any danger associated with their prisoner, and he summarily dismisses them, *Deal with him yourselves*. There is disagreement among the commentators as to the meaning of these words. Was Pilate granting the Jewish leaders the right to execute Jesus as penalty for violating their religious strictures? Or was he simply dismissing the emptiness of their accusations as being beneath him? There is general consensus that the Roman presence in any province meant the removal of the authority of capital punishment from the local government. But there is disagreement to what extent this limitation applied, and to what extent it was enforced. For instance, we know that the first martyr of the early Church, Stephen, was stoned to death without either trial or sentence. It is unlikely that the Roman authorities at

⁴⁹⁵ Morris; 765.

⁴⁹⁶ Schilder; 324.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

that time bothered to intervene and prosecute the executioners. Romans, again, were not paragons of human rights; the death now and then of a provincial was, to them, a good thing – it generally kept the peace, the *pax Romana*. Thus Hoskyns concludes that Pilate was indeed authorizing the priests to do what they wanted with Jesus, including killing Him. “But more probably *according to your law* is meant to imply that Pilate definitely authorizes the Jews to sentence the prisoner and to inflict punishment by stoning, this being the legal penalty for blasphemy, breaking the Sabbath, and other offences against the Jewish Law.”⁴⁹⁷

The Jews, however, have settled upon a different end: death by crucifixion. As noted above, there may have been several reasons for this desire: first, to mitigate against the opposition and perhaps violent response of the Jewish people, who had only recently hailed Jesus into the city as the Son of David, the messianic king. To execute this man for blasphemy would raise unanswerable questions, questions that Jesus Himself had already put to the Jews: *For what good work do you stone Me?* Nothing that Jesus had taught was contrary to the Law, and all that Jesus had done had captivated the masses and had drawn them toward His teaching. Blasphemy, to say the least, would be a hard sell and would be more likely to create a martyr out of Jesus more dangerous than the living man. Second, there was the fact that crucifixion – being hanged on a tree – would be seen by the Jewish people as a divine curse on Jesus, proving that He was indeed a blasphemer and a false Messiah, for had He been the true Christ, God would never permit such a death. N. T. Wright comments on the implication of Jesus’ crucifixion by the Roman authority,

Crucifixion was a powerful symbol throughout the Roman world. It was not just a means of liquidating undesirables; it did so with the maximum degradation and humiliation. It said, loud and clear: we are in charge here; you are our property; we can do what we like with you. It insisted, coldly and brutally, on the absolute sovereignty of Rome, and of Caesar. It told an implicit story, of the uselessness of rebel recalcitrance and the ruthlessness of imperial power. It said, in particular: this is what happens to rebel leaders. Crucifixion was a symbolic act with a clear and frightening message.⁴⁹⁸

Crucifixion was the epitome of the power of that fourth, horrific empire of Daniel’s visions; it was, in a manner of speaking, the worst man could do against man. It was the

⁴⁹⁷ Hoskyns; 518.

⁴⁹⁸ Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1996); 543

worst Satan could do against Jesus. Thus, “The prisoner must be crucified, not stoned. That is, he must die in public as guilty of sedition, not of blasphemy; and Pilate alone can effect this.”⁴⁹⁹ This is, of course, completely under the sovereign guidance of the will and plan of God, already predicted by Jesus Himself concerning the manner of His death. “Pilate must therefore execute the sentence, since to him had been entrusted the power of crucifixion, and the Jews, in insisting upon the crucifixion, are moved by a divine necessity of which they are totally unconscious.”⁵⁰⁰ Long before Jesus prophesied the form of His death, being *lifted up from the earth*, the psalmist described in vivid detail a death by crucifixion, even long before Roman crucifixion was even a thing.

*I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me.
My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws;
You have brought Me to the dust of death.* (Psalm 22:14-15)

Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered him, “Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” (18:33-36)

There is narrative missing from John’s account that is included in the Synoptics and assumed as prior knowledge by the fourth evangelist. Pilate is aware that the ‘charge’ brought by the Jews against Jesus is His claim to be the ‘king’ of the Jews. It is, of course, a false charge, for even if Jesus had admitted to His kingship, the nature of His kingdom was wholly other than what the Jews claimed or the Romans feared. Jesus will not deny that kingdom, but He will make it clear to the Roman procurator that His kingdom is not something that Caesar need be concerned about, at least not in the way Caesar was usually concerned about rival ‘kings.’ “And although the kingdom of heaven enjoins a law upon its citizens which has bearing upon the whole of human life, operating in and through all of it, its essential essence is something other than a politically organized world empire.”⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ *Idem.*

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*; 519.

⁵⁰¹ Schilder; 326.

Thus Pilate, uninterested in the intricacies of Jewish religious controversy, cuts to the chase by asking Jesus straight out: *Are you the King of the Jews?*

Jesus' response is similar to that of the Jews only moments earlier, verging on insolence in His disregard for Pilate's alleged power over Him, *Do you say this on your own initiative, or have you been coached?* But Jesus is not being insolent, for He is simply noting that, if there was any validity to the charge that Jesus was mounting an insurrection, claiming to be the King of the Jews, would not Pilate have already heard of this? Did not Pilate have his spies and soldiers throughout Palestine, where Jesus traveled and taught openly for three years? Jesus' response was a tacit exposure of the ludicrous nature of the priests' charges against Him: How could He have been fomenting such rebellion as to justify His death at the hands of the Romans, and the Roman governor himself know nothing about it? Schilder writes, "Thus Jesus suggests that if he had really been a king in the sense in which the Jews suggest it, Pilate, surely, would have heard of it long ago."⁵⁰²

Pilate again betrays his awareness that this whole charade is not about sedition, but about points of Jewish religious life for which he cared nothing: *Am I a Jew? Your own people and the leaders of your religion have handed you over to me.* One can sense Pilate's frustration rising, and from the perspective of John's narrative, can also sense that Pilate is falling into a trap that he will not be able to escape. He represents the great power of the world, and he is becoming increasingly powerless in this situation. Pressured by the Jews to give them this man's death or face a possible insurrection, he is faced with the undeniable innocence – and perhaps even an early glimpse of the essential power – of the Man before him, over whom he *thinks* he holds the power of life or death.

Jesus then answers Pilate's question in a manner that tacitly acknowledges the Roman governor's dilemma. He acknowledges Himself a king, though of a kingdom that "*is not of this world.*" In doing so, He speaks the truth, as He cannot do otherwise, and again reminds Pilate that if the Jewish charges were true, in the sense in which the Jews are trying to make them stick, then where are Jesus' soldiers? Why did the Jews not arrest His followers? How was it that Jesus, the would-be king and insurrectionist, was taken so easily and peacefully? Roman experience in Judea was entirely otherwise, and would

⁵⁰² Schilder; 325.

continue to be otherwise into the near future: the Jewish rebels did not surrender peaceably; they fought to the bitter end.

Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all. (18:37-38)

Jesus never admitted as much to the Jews as He does here to the Roman governor. He admits His kingship, and claims it as His right by birth – or, more intriguingly to Pilate – from the time that *I came into this world*. Jesus also claims His followers, *those who are of the truth and consequently hear His voice*. He has denied any notion of a political or worldly kingdom, and He has denied gathering an armed band of zealots bent on using military and political might to attempt to overthrow the world-empire of Rome. No, His kingdom and His soldiers are of a very different nature, and one that will ultimately succeed in overcoming all world empires, but not with carnal weapons. This statement by Jesus is the fulfilment of that marvelous prophecy in Daniel 2, quoted above (p. 216), and this is the *stone cut without hands* that would grow into a world-encompassing mountain, crushing both Rome and all subsequent empires under it. The essence of this kingdom, however, is not military might, but Truth. "He is the king of Truth, and He manifests His royal power not by force, but by the witness He bears to the Truth."⁵⁰³

Pilate is not moved, *What is Truth?* Some see in this statement an implicit Stoic philosophy; others, a basic lack of sensitivity on the part of the procurator to any matter higher than the mundane requirements of his office. The latter case is probably true, since Pilate immediately leaves Jesus and does not continue the conversation. What is clear is that he finds no ground for the execution of this man, regardless of what he may think of the man's 'kingdom' or of Truth. Luthardt writes, "for Pilate had already perceived with sufficient clearness from the hearing, that he had to do with a man who politically was harmless."⁵⁰⁴ In spite of the Roman governor's disdain for Jewish life, he will seek to set Jesus free, and thus immediately goes back outside and announced to the Jews that he finds no cause for execution in this case.

⁵⁰³ Hoskyns; 520-21.

⁵⁰⁴ Luthardt; 258.

But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" Then they all cried again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber. (18:39-40)

Apparently at some point in the course of the interrogation, Pilate had an epiphany – he came up with a plan to release Jesus, whom he had concluded was guilty of no crime, while also satisfying the Jewish thirst for blood. He offers them a choice, no doubt thinking that the crowd that had since gathered would prefer the rabbi Jesus to the violent robber, Barabbas. Why he thought this is subject to intense wonder: apparently Barabbas was more than just a robber, he was himself guilty of the crime of which Jesus had been falsely charged. Not that Barabbas claimed to be a king, but that he was an insurrectionist, a zealot, and a murderer.

Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them. But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them.

(Mark 15:6-11)

"The governor is trapped. Having failed to acknowledge the truth, he is in the power of the lie."⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁵ Newbigin; 247.

Week 13: Crucified, Dead, and Buried

Text Reading: John 19:1 - 42

*“By denying the kingship of Jesus
they place themselves in a position
where they have finally denied the kingship of God.”
(Lesslie Newbigin)*

The pathos of the crucifixion has gripped the imagination and the emotions of believers for millennia – the brutal treatment of the Lord, the injustice of the charges and the utter humiliation of His death. But it has rightly been pointed out by naysayers, that others have suffered even worse torture, indignities of a longer duration, and deaths even more heinous than that of crucifixion (mankind has ‘progressed’ from the Romans in the art of torture and the inflicting of unimaginable pain in death). What Jesus suffered was undoubtedly horrific, but it is not the horrible nature of His sufferings that render them redemptive – the fact that He was humiliated, beaten, and executed by men does not constitute His death as an atonement. The essence of Christ’s Passion, that which renders it an atonement, is its nature as *a curse*: Jesus the Son bore the curse that the Father had righteously placed on fallen mankind. John, especially, portrays the events of Jesus’ trial, torture, and death from the perspective of *a curse*, and not merely as a graphic record of ‘man’s inhumanity to man.’

The Passion of Jesus has been made into almost a stage production by the Church over the centuries – and in many cases it *has* been turned into a play. We focus on the physical suffering that Jesus endured, and too often that is the depth of our consideration. It is, however, not too bold to say that the physical suffering at the hands of the Jews and the Romans, represented the *least* of Jesus’ sorrows. Far, far worse was the unutterable treatment that Jesus experienced, *having been made sin*. Truly, the verse that ought to guide all reading of the Passion narratives is from one who did not witness the crucifixion but was later fundamentally changed by it and by the resurrection that ensued: “*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*”⁵⁰⁶ The crucifixion of Jesus was, at the base of it, a *son offering* even as much as it was

⁵⁰⁶ II Corinthians 5:21

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

the true offering of the Passover Lamb. It is only as we comprehend that Jesus' death was of this character that we can more fully appreciate His true suffering, the suffering that welled up in the "*My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?*" of the Synoptics (and, of course, the Psalms).

The writer of Hebrews wants to make this point clear both in terms of Jesus' sacrificial death and our understanding and appropriation of it.

We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. (Hebrews 13:10-15)

This is the language of the sin offering, the burnt offering for sin, from the Levitical system. The author of the letter to the Hebrews firmly places Jesus' death in this category of sacrifice and points out that this is why He must suffer *outside the gate*. Schilder comments both on the almost romantic way that the Church has memorialized the Passion and Crucifixion, and the reality of Jesus' death as a sin offering. "*Via dolorosa* – people pronounce that beautiful word...with a quivering voice. But the angels say: There is a stench here. No wonder, for the road leads *outside of the gate*."⁵⁰⁷ From the perspective of the Jews and the Romans (and the Herodians, though they are not mentioned in the Fourth Gospel), the death of Jesus of Nazareth was an extra-judicial murder. Each trial was a sham, a mockery of justice so blatant that even the Roman governor – the most powerful man in the whole scenario (except One) – sought to secure Jesus' release. But the real reason why the representative of the emperor was unsuccessful in his attempt was because underlying the whole event was the sublime and cosmic reality that this Man was being made sin, and as sin was being *cursed* by a righteous, holy God, His own eternal Father. "If the Mediator is really going to *redeem*, He must now endure the very same curse which would without Him have plunged the lost souls in an infinite duration of misery, and of the ministration of punishment. He must exhaust this immeasurable curse in a given point

⁵⁰⁷ Schilder, Klaas *Christ Crucified* (Ontario: Paideia Press; 1979); 32.

of time.”⁵⁰⁸ This reality was far more painful to Jesus than the physical blows and brutal execution He suffered at the hands of men. “Sin offerings are after all as ugly as death itself. They are instinct with the curse.”⁵⁰⁹

The writer of Hebrews, and of course the Holy Spirit who inspired him, reminds us to look past the visible pathos of Jesus’ sufferings, to understand His sacrifice as the ultimate sin offering, and to contemplate the Levitical prescription concerning ‘outside the gate’; in his own words, *the reproach*. This reproach was not merely that of Jesus’ human tormentors, though that was acute in itself. The point being made with reference to Jesus dying *outside the gate* is that He was made sin, and therefore He was made unclean. This is the real trauma of the Passion, and nothing any man has ever suffered can remotely compare to this.

*Then Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of meeting, shall take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the Holy Place, and shall leave them there. And he shall wash his body with water in a holy place, put on his garments, come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people. The fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar. And he who released the goat as the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. The bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be **carried outside the camp**. And they shall burn in the fire their skins, their flesh, and their offal. Then he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.* (Leviticus 16:23-28)

Jesus has already been cast outside the jurisdiction of the Mosaic Law – tried and condemned, struck in anger by a servant, without the due process of witnesses. As a Jewish malefactor (or so it was alleged) Jesus had no standing before Roman Law – he was, as Schilder terms it, ‘exlex,’ outside the law. But these facts merely illustrate the extrajudicial nature of both His trial and His condemnation and execution; there was nothing *just* about His treatment from any of His tormentors (indeed, the closest the whole matter comes to ‘justice’ is with Pilate). What lies at the heart of the entire event, however, is the fact that Jesus, being made sin, is being made unclean, and as unclean He must suffer *outside the gate*. “Now this stipulation of law centuries ago fixed in the minds of all, - and in reference to Christ – that that which was brought without the gates, without the

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid*; 118.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid*. 32.

camp, might no longer be regarded as clean. Because it is unclean it does not belong in the fellowship of the clean.”⁵¹⁰ This is what the writer to the Hebrews demands that we consider and meditate upon, not merely the physical abuse that Jesus endured, but even more the shame and indignity of being made unclean, being cast *outside the gate*. “Yes, indeed He is *made sin* for us. He is cut off and cast out.”⁵¹¹

So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they struck Him with their hands. Pilate then went out again, and said to them, “Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him.” (19:1-4)

The narrative that John presents of Jesus’ physical suffering is not as comprehensive as that of the Synoptics, but what the Fourth Gospel does contain is vividly outlined by the Song of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. Scourging was a common form of Roman punishment for non-Romans, and it was often used simply as a warning to others not to run afoul of the Roman authority. It did not, in and of itself, indicate guilt, as Pilate shortly afterward proclaims to the Jews, “*that you may know that I find no fault in Him.*” Indeed, it is likely – or at least it seems to be so in comparison with Luke’s account – that Pilate himself hoped the scourging would satisfy the bloodlust of the Jews and allow him to release this innocent and harmless (as far as Rome was concerned) man. “This was proposed as an alternative to crucifixion, not, be it noted, as an accompaniment of it.”⁵¹²

Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, said to them, “You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him” (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast). (Luke 23:13-17)

There is a certain irony in the abuse heaped upon Jesus by the Roman soldiers, and in the Roman governor’s uncertainty and confusion. Through their ignorance and spite, Jesus is proclaimed to be what He truly is, the King of Israel. That which the Jews will vociferously deny, the Romans affirm. “Mockery it certainly was, accompanied by cruel

⁵¹⁰ Schilder *Christ Crucified*; 30-31.

⁵¹¹ *Idem.*

⁵¹² Beasley-Murray; 334.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

despising and hate, but back of their enthronement of Jesus and mocking worship of him as king of the Jews stood the God who was the prime mover in the whole process, and who made their crude acknowledgment a profound reality.”⁵¹³ Again unwittingly, the Jews and the Romans were doing the will of God, fulfilling the ancient prophecy.

*But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.* (Isaiah 53:5)

Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, “Behold the Man!” Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” Pilate said to them, “You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.” (19:5-7)

This is the famous *Ecce Homo!* passage: Latin for *Behold! The Man!* There has been a lot of ink spilled by commentators attempting to divine the intent of Pilate in saying these words as he presented Jesus to the crowd. At this point we can be assured that another part of the Isaiah 53 prophecy has been fulfilled,

*For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground.
He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.
He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.* (Isaiah 53:2-3)

Again, harmonizing this passage with Luke’s narrative, we discern that Pilate is still attempting to gain the release of Jesus. “And when he thus leads him out, and thus presents him to the gaze of the people, he desires by this sad-looking form to awaken the sympathy of the Jews.”⁵¹⁴ Not the Jewish leaders, to be sure, but perhaps the crowd. It is almost as if Pilate is saying, with his *Behold! the Man!*, ‘How can this man be seditious? How can this pitiful, beaten rabbi be the enemy of the people and of Caesar that He is claimed to be? Or perhaps Pilate is continuing his mockery, not of Jesus, but of the Jews: ‘Here is your king, O Jews! And this is what your king looks like after we Romans are done with Him! We need not conclude that Pilate was himself becoming a believer – there

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*; 336.

⁵¹⁴ Luthardt; 266.

is no evidence of that at all – to recognize that he is vexed by this entire situation: vexed by the Jews who are trapping him, vexed by the nature of this obviously innocent Man on trial before him, vexed even by the dream his wife related to him that morning (*cp.* Mt. 27:19). By scourging Jesus and presenting Him as broken and beaten, Pilate hoped to put an end to the matter.

Ecce homo, behold, there is the man. Why does Pilate say this, you ask? One interpretation is that he wants to excite sympathy. He thinks that a public exhibition of the pathetic figure of the man will amount to pouring oil upon the waves. Others think less favorably of Pilate. These suppose that Pilate is making a public exhibition of Christ solely to assure the Jews that in any event they will never again be troubled by this man. A man who has been decorated in this fashion – such is Pilate’s terminology – and a man who is in a condition as pathetic as this man is will never in all his life succeed in making an impression. Now, what more do they want? Surely, this had better be the end of the matter.⁵¹⁵

Pilate fails, as fail he must. Rather than elicit sympathy for Jesus, his words merely incite the Jews to greater vehemence, *Crucify Him! Crucify Him!* Exasperated again, Pilate utters a nonsensical *Take Him yourselves and crucify Him*, something that he knows the Jews can neither do legally, nor will they do so according to their Law. Pilate’s retort “indicates both his anger and disgust at their unrelenting attitude toward Jesus and himself, and his own refusal to do what they asked, since he knows that Jesus is not guilty of their charges.”⁵¹⁶ But Pilate’s words do bring the Jewish leaders to a higher pitch in their accusations against Jesus; they are forced to the admission of their main charge against the Galilean rabbi, “*he makes himself out to be the Son of God,*” which, as blasphemy, is punishable by death according to our Law. The impact of this statement is not what the Jews had intended: Pilate becomes even more fearful of dealing with Jesus, and becomes even more resolute toward His release. Pilate has no Old Testament background with which to interpret the phrase ‘Son of God,’ but “The idea that gods could come down and appear in the likeness of men was common enough in the pagan society of his time.”⁵¹⁷ Luthardt adds, “To suppose him affected by the truth of the Israelitic monotheism, is to contradict his entire method of thought and feeling. On the contrary, it was a superstitious

⁵¹⁵ Schilder *Christ on Trial*; 539.

⁵¹⁶ Beasley-Murray; 337.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*; 338.

emotion, of which he was susceptible, just because he was unbelieving.”⁵¹⁸ Later the residents of Lystra would think and say the same of Paul and Barnabas (*cp.* Acts 14:11). Here, however, the back and forth between the Jews and Pilate and Jesus continues.

Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, “Where are You from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. (19:8-9)

Jesus has responded to Pilate during His interrogation by the Roman governor, but this time,

*He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)*

Pilate did not listen to Jesus when He spoke of truth; there was no reason to try to explain to Pilate where He had come from. This His disciples had come to understand; there was no time or hope for the Roman governor, and Jesus was not in the habit of casting His pearls before swine. “Since Pilate had already shown himself incapable of perceiving truth, and since he had no apprehension of the kingdom which is not of this world, it was impossible that any answer could be given to his question.”⁵¹⁹ Pilate is getting figurative slapped and mauled almost as much as Jesus has been physically. The Jews egging him on outside the Praetorium (and they have yet to play their ace of trump) and Jesus confounding him inside the palace. Does this petty Jewish rabbi not know who I am? No, Pilate, the question is rather the reverse: Do you not know who He is?

Then Pilate said to Him, “Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?” Jesus answered, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.” (19:10-11)

At this point Pilate is beginning to realize (if he hasn’t already) that he is in over his head. As a typical Roman, he reverts to what Rome knows: *power*. This Jewish rabbi is seemingly unconcerned that Pilate is attempting to secure His release; indeed, the man seems almost to have a desire to be crucified (if Pilate only knew). For some reason desperate to bring this man to freedom, Pilate is stymied not only by the Jews – as he

⁵¹⁸ Luthardt; 338-39.

⁵¹⁹ Hoskyns; 524.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

would expect – but also by the man he is trying to release. Stunned by the uncooperativeness of his prisoner, the Roman governor plays his best card: *I can free you or I can crucify you! That is the power I hold in my hand!* To which Jesus calmly states: *You really have no power in your hands. The power you think you have has been given to you by a greater power.* Implied in this statement is the fact that Jesus not only represents that greater power: He is that greater power. Once again Jesus turns the tables: the defendant becomes the prosecutor; the prosecutor becomes the defendant. “Jesus shows little concern as to what may become of him through Pilate’s judgment, but Pilate is bidden to ponder his own situation and its responsibility.”⁵²⁰ Schilder adds, “This concluding word which Christ speaks is the great torch, the great light of righteousness which shines in this dark night of sin.”⁵²¹

From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, “If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.” When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, “Behold your King!” But they cried out, “Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar!” (19:12-15)

Pilate is no believer, but he is now aware that he is dealing with something more than what the Jews have presented to him. This Jesus speaks as no prisoner ever spoke before a Roman tribunal, and possesses power that Pilate can neither comprehend nor deny. Pilate, therefore, *sought to release Him*. But the Jews would have none of it. “Friend of Caesar” was a designation meted out sparingly by the Roman Emperor, and very sparingly by the current emperor, Tiberius, a paranoid and jealous man at the best of times (and as he was nearing his death at this time, they were not the best of times). “Friend of Caesar,” however, was not a title for life; it could be lost more easily than gained. Some commentators surmise that Pilate had won this honor at the behest of his personal friend, Sejanus, who was for a number of years Tiberius’ factotum in Rome while the emperor lived primarily on the island of Capri. Sejanus made a bid for supreme power and Tiberius caught wind of it and had his former lieutenant executed, along with many others associated with Sejanus. If Pilate had any association with Sejanus, his position was

⁵²⁰ Beasley-Murray; 340.

⁵²¹ Schilder *Christ on Trial*; 543.

already weakened by these events. To fail in preventing insurrection in a Roman province; to fail to execute anyone who pretended to royal authority over against that of Tiberius, would tip the scales inexorably against Pilate: he would be recalled; he would be executed.

Schilder writes, “The Jews are in effect saying this: If you release this man who not only bears the name of our God but also that of your imperial god you are by such conduct indicating that you are no longer a real friend of the emperor, but are indifferent to the Caesar of all Romans. Figure it out for yourself: consequences are sure to follow.”⁵²² What is left unsaid, left for Pilate to figure out (and he takes little time to do so), is the unspoken by real threat that the Jewish religious leaders will be prompt to notify Pilate’s higher-ups – the overall proconsul in Syria, for starters; Tiberius himself, if necessary – of the Judean governor’s perfidy. “Pilate, in other words, is formally threatened. Pilate succumbs to the threat.”⁵²³ Jesus may be the son of a god for all Pilate knows, but Tiberius is a real flesh and blood emperor, and a very testy one at that. “He fears the disfavour and the anger of his emperor more than the anger of the unknown gods.”⁵²⁴

What the Jews say at the end of this passage, however, is stunning. In declaring that they “*Have no king but Caesar*” they are finally disavowing all hope of the Messianic King promised throughout the ages. “The implications of this statement are to be weighed. In the context of the trial of Jesus, of the Man who proclaimed to the nation the kingdom of God, and manifested it in his deeds, and called on Israel to repent and believe, it is nothing less than the abandonment of the messianic hope of Israel.”⁵²⁵ The Jews’ statement is parallel to that recorded in the Synoptics: “*His blood be upon our own heads and that of our children*” (cp. Mt. 27:25). “By denying the kingship of Jesus they place themselves in a position where they have finally denied the kingship of God.”⁵²⁶ Hoskyns adds,

The rejection of Jesus by the Jews has now reached its inevitable conclusion. They have denied the sovereignty of God, and abdicated their right to be His chosen people. By

⁵²² Schilder *Christ on Trial*; 544.

⁵²³ *Idem*.

⁵²⁴ Luthardt; 272-73.

⁵²⁵ Beasley-Murray; 343.

⁵²⁶ Newbigin; 251.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

undertaking the execution of the Messiah in defence [sic] of the majesty of Caesar, the mystery of iniquity is consummated, and the blasphemy of the Jews is complete.⁵²⁷

Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led Him away. And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center. (19:16-18)

Emphasizing as he does the trial of Jesus, especially that part of the trial that was before the Roman power, John moves fairly quickly and summarily through the actual execution of Jesus. This brief statement of Jesus' crucifixion, in accord with the longer narratives in the Synoptics, merely concludes the salient point in John's narrative – in spite of all efforts by Pilate to the contrary, Jesus is crucified. He is 'lifted up' and 'hanged on a tree.' Innocent of both blasphemy and of sedition, He is nonetheless – by the will of the Father – made a curse on behalf of Israel, and on behalf of the world. "In the death by crucifixion the curse achieves its confirmation."⁵²⁸

*He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation?
For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken...
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,
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be
satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
For He shall bear their iniquities.* (Isaiah 53:8, 10-11)

Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was:

JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, "I am the King of the Jews." Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." (19:19-22)

Pilate get the last laugh, such as it is. Finally, the Roman governor digs in his heels and will not acquiesce to the last demand of the Jews, to change the inscription he has had made to accompany Jesus and to hang above Him on the cross. "The deep disdain which he felt towards the Jews, with all their king-and-messiah problems, moved him to seek out a subtly ironic and poignant superscription."⁵²⁹ Placard denoting the crime for which the

⁵²⁷ Hoskyns; 525.

⁵²⁸ Schilder *Christ Crucified*; 111.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*; 192.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

person is being punished were commonly hung around the criminal's neck and either left there or nailed to the cross itself, announcing to all passersby the nature of Roman justice against this or that offense. Jesus' 'offense': He was the King of the Jews. Not, He says He is the King of the Jews; rather, He *is* the King of the Jews. We need not see in this any movement on Pilate's part toward accepting Jesus' claim. This inscription, taken in the context of the back-and-forth with the Jewish leaders, is Pilate's last dig, and it clearly pains the priests. *Do not write, 'King of the Jews,' but rather that He claimed to be the 'King of the Jews.'* But Pilate is at last immovable: *What I have written, I have written.* But he went one step further than was required by the procedure of crucifixion: he had the inscription written in three languages. In doing so, Pilate effecting brought the crucifixion of Jesus to the international level. Hebrew, of course, was the language of the inhabitants of the land – that they might see and 'pay homage' to their king. Latin was the language of the Romans and of law – perhaps included so that the court recorders would get the information correct in their chronicles. But Greek, the language of philosophy, rounds out the three and proclaims Jesus' kingship effectively to the whole known world. Schilder writes,

Jesus is called the king of the Jews, but the name is written out in the language of the world. He is called the king of a sect, but the language in which the mockery is couched is ecumenical language. The superscription is written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Those were the three languages in which the entire world of the time might be able to read the placard. It was written in Hebrew for all the Jews going to the feast. All the guest of the temple had to read how pathetic was the case of the king of the Jews. It had to be written in Greek, for that was the language of culture, of the world then civilized. And it had to be set down in Latin, for that was the language of Pilate's king, it was the language of law and jurisprudence. Hebrew, Greek, and Latin: the language of the land, the language of the world, and the language of jurisprudence.⁵³⁰

This superscription is a form of defeat for the Jewish priests, but they have largely won the battle – or so they consider. Pilate has unwittingly testified of the truth. "Thus did Pilate *tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is King*" (Ps. 96:10)."⁵³¹

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*; 194.

⁵³¹ Hoskyns; 528.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says:

*"They divided My garments among them,
And for My clothing they cast lots."*

Therefore the soldiers did these things.

(19:23-24)

John is careful to record the Passion of Jesus in strict accordance with the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus' suffering fulfilled. He is not exhaustive in this – the Synoptics provide the balance – but reference to these ancient prophecies does form the framework of his narrative, as it should. Paul takes the same approach in his letter to the Corinthian church,

*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins **according to the Scriptures**, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day **according to the Scriptures**, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.*

(I Corinthians 15:3-5)

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

(19:25-27)

This enigmatic passage longs to have some allegorical meaning assigned to it. And the early 'fathers' of the Church did not fail to acquiesce to this temptation. The beloved disciple, otherwise known as the author himself, is seen to be representative of the Church and, of course, Mary is the mother of the Church. "*Behold thy mother!* And the mother of thy fellow-Apostles. Accordingly all the faithful (as S. Bernard teaches) should betake themselves to her with full confidence and love. She is the Eve of the faithful, the mother of all living, to whom the wise and Saints of every age betake themselves."⁵³² There is no warrant for this interpretation, based as it is on the presupposition of the importance of Mary, the 'perpetual virgin,' to the founding and growth of the Church.

The question may, however, be asked as to why Jesus did not entrust the care of Mary to His half-brothers, her other sons by Joseph (it is presumed by most scholars that Joseph himself was dead at this point). On the one hand, the fact that Jesus bequeathed His

⁵³² Lapidé; 606.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

earthly mother to John (who may have been a cousin to Jesus), seems to indicate that the others – called Jesus' brothers in the gospels – were not the sons of Mary. This, of course, is maintained by those who hold to the perpetual virginity of Mary. On the other hand, this act on Jesus' part may have been motivated by the fact that His half-brothers were, at the time, unbelievers. Another possible solution is that John, evidently unmarried, was better suited to the care of Mary than the others, who presumably were married. All is conjecture, however, and the perpetual virginity of Mary is solidly refuted by other passages from the gospels. It is perhaps safest, then, to interpret Jesus' act – and John's recording of it – as a reminder that *"having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end."* This circle clearly included Mary, beloved of God and beloved of Jesus.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. (19:28-30)

Again, *"that the Scripture might be fulfilled,"* in this case, Psalm 22,

*My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws;
You have brought Me to the dust of death. (Psalm 22:15)*

However, in addition to fulfilling this (and others, *cp.* Ps. 69:21) Old Testament prophecies, Jesus' comment and His consequent drinking from the sponge are very important observations in light of what immediately happens afterward. The pathology of crucifixion, so accurately described in Psalm 22, would not allow for the victim to request a drink or even articulate his thirst, immediately before expiring. A long, slow, cruel death involves the slow and excruciating hemorrhaging of the muscle tissue throughout the torso, the progressive inability to lift oneself up in order for one's diaphragm to allow breath, and breathing, to speak. From the abstract of an essay titled "The History and Pathology of Crucifixion":

Death, usually after 6 hours - 4 days, was due to multifactorial pathology: after-effects of compulsory scourging and maiming, haemorrhage and dehydration causing hypovolaemic

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

shock and pain, but the most important factor was progressive asphyxia caused by impairment of respiratory movement⁵³³

Thus what we are seeing in this narrative is that Jesus was still in command of sufficient respiratory function to be able to speak (in the Synoptics, He cries out with a loud voice, something contrary to the pathology of crucifixion). "Jesus thus desires the refreshment of a drink, which serves not to shorten, but to prolong life."⁵³⁴ What this means is that, immediately following the drink, Jesus dies *but is not killed*. Medical scholars, both Christian and unbelieving, have postulated for generations as to the 'cause of death' of Jesus on the cross. John gives us the official cause of death: "*He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit.*" Simply put, Jesus *laid down His life*, it was not taken from Him even on the cross. "His death is not defeat but victory. It is his voluntary act to the end. The final action is that he bows his head and 'delivers' his spirit."⁵³⁵ Jesus laid down His life in full strength and in full realization of what He was doing: "*knowing that all things had already been accomplished.*" Schilder writes, "All that had definitely been given Him to do had been accomplished. In other words, He had in His historical life achieved everything that the Scriptures had indicated as his Messianic task."⁵³⁶ This entire reality is nothing less than the words recorded in the Synoptics: "*It is finished.*"

Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced." (19:31-37)

Scripture continues to be fulfilled even after Jesus dies. The circumstance of the day being the Preparation Day – and whether the next day was the Passover or the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the day would be a 'high' Sabbath, not the weekly Sabbath. Pilate is perhaps worn out, and yields without resistance to a request that ran

⁵³³ (PDF) [The history and pathology of crucifixion \(researchgate.net\)](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321111111) Accessed 17May2022.

⁵³⁴ Luthardt; 296.

⁵³⁵ Newbigin; 256.

⁵³⁶ Schilder; 450.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

contrary to the Roman purpose of crucifixion – to allow the victims to die as slowly as their bodily strength would allow, and then to leave the corpses as food for the vultures and a warning to passersby. The priests are still punctiliously following the letter of their Law, undimmed in their piety by the extrajudicial murder they had just committed.

If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.
(Deuteronomy 21:22-23)

But God is providentially ruling over all of this, and the day and the request serve to confirm the unexpected: Jesus is already dead. “But when they approach Jesus, they immediately see that He has already died. In His case the brutal instrument was no longer necessary. However, they had to have official evidence to show that He actually was dead; after all, it was just possible that a breath of life still stirred in Him. Hence, in order to put an end to all uncertainty, one of the soldiers takes a spear, and thrusts it into Jesus’ side.”⁵³⁷ John records the events as also fulfilling two additional Scriptures concerning Jesus’ bones – they could not be broken as it was forbidden of the Passover lamb – and His side. What happens next has given rise to flights of allegorical fancy: *and immediately there flowed blood and water*. Newbigin writes, “At the simplest level it is the evidence that Jesus really died, and that his death was the death of a human being of flesh and blood.”⁵³⁸ But scholars rarely leave any interpretation at the ‘simplest level.’

We must admit of one mystery: the fact that blood does not flow from a corpse. One explanation of this phenomenon, though not of the separate blood and water, has been offered with regard to the hemorrhaging common in crucifixion. Pockets of blood would form in the body and, if the spear had likely punctured one or more of these, the contents would flow out. This is a potential medical explanation of the phenomenon, but the Church has preferred allegorical interpretations to medical ones. Augustine, for instance and along with many other ancient fathers, sees in the blood the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, and in the water, the sacrament of Baptism. “It is not said that he ‘struck’ or ‘wounded,’ but that he ‘opened’ the side of Christ, that the door of life might thus, as it

⁵³⁷ Schilder; 547.

⁵³⁸ Newbigin; 257.

were, be opened, from whence the sacraments of the Church flowed forth, without which there is no entrance to true life.”⁵³⁹

To add to the mystery, for a mystery it is, the author does something he has not done up to this point in his narrative: he asserts the historical veracity of the testimony: *“And he who has seen has borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe.”* This statement might possibly be applied to the whole narrative as an assertion that Jesus did in deed perish on the cross. It may also be a statement intended to counter a nascent Docetism that was rising in the early Church – a belief that Jesus only *appeared* (Greek *doceō*) to be human – by testifying with exertion the reality of His human body as evidenced by the blood and water flowing from His side. John continues his enigmatic reference to blood and water in his first epistle, certainly not the clearest passage in that short letter.

This is He who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

(I John 5:6-8)

After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.

(19:38-42)

Secret disciples among the Pharisees. We met Nicodemus all the way back in Chapter 3; now we meet Joseph of Arimathea. It is evident that Joseph was both a wealthy and influential man – perhaps influential because wealthy – in that Pilate immediately accedes to his request, even though he was not a relative of the slain Jesus. It may be that Pilate grants Joseph's request – instead of the more common mass grave for executed criminals – due to his settled opinion that the Galilean rabbi was innocent of all charges. In

⁵³⁹ Quoted by Lapide; 611.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

any event, now that Jesus is dead, Joseph and Nicodemus are bold to step forward in order to care for the corpse. Newbigin says it all so very succinctly, “It is dangerous to follow a living prophet, but safe and pious to honor a dead one.”⁵⁴⁰

The closing passage of John’s crucifixion narrative once again follows the format of Isaiah 53,

*And they made His grave with the wicked –
But with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence,
Nor was any deceit in His mouth.* (Isaiah 53:9)

The rest of that marvelous prophecy must now await the third day.

⁵⁴⁰ Newbigin; 260.

Week 14: He is Risen!

Text Reading: John 20:1 - 31

*"The resurrection cannot be part of any history
unless it is the center and turning point."
(Lesslie Newbigin)*

The empty tomb is the most essential symbol of the Christian religion.⁵⁴¹ More than the manger, more than the Cross, the empty tomb signifies the historical reality of Christ's resurrection, His complete victory over sin, death, and Satan. Of course, Jesus could not have risen from the grave had He not been born in the manger, nor would He have been put in the tomb in the first place if not for the crucifixion. But a dead Messiah is not a savior, and *"if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins."*⁵⁴² There is no better commentary written with regard to the resurrection of Jesus Christ than the fifteenth chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. Chronologically, I Corinthians 5 predates the Synoptic Gospel accounts of the resurrection as well, of course, as that of the Fourth Gospel. It has been noted at several points that it was his encounter with the risen Jesus that converted Saul of Tarsus, believing as a good Pharisee did that the resurrection was the sign *par excellence* of the eschatological hope of Israel. The resurrection meant the end of the age had come; Jesus' resurrection confirmed Him to be the Messiah of promise, and for Paul that settled the entire redemptive calendar from the Old Testament. Thus the centrality that the resurrection takes in Paul's theology: Christianity is nothing without it.

Paul's summary of the resurrection of Jesus in I Corinthians 15 is also the *locus classicus* of the theology of the resurrection: what it all means in the great scheme of divine redemption. Paul spans the entire redemptive calendar yet future, beginning at the resurrection and moving to the consummation of the age, in a manner so succinct and yet so powerful, that there is no parallel in Scripture or any other human writing. It is highly

⁵⁴¹ By referring to the empty tomb as 'symbol,' nothing is detracted from the historical reality of the resurrection.

Rather, apart from the historical reality of the Jesus' victory over death and the grave, the empty tomb would cease to be a symbol at all. It is the historical content of the empty tomb that renders it the essential symbol of the Christian faith.

⁵⁴² I Corinthians 15:17

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

recommended that a brief detour be taken to I Corinthians 15 whenever one's Bible reading program finds itself in a gospel narrative of the resurrection of Jesus.

We have seen how John's literary framework has followed the famous prophecy of Isaiah 53; it will continue to do so in John 20 as the author recounts the events immediately surrounding the discovery of the empty tomb. It was, of course, critical to the lifelong Pharisee Saul that the historical markers of Christianity be in line with, and fulfillment of, the Old Testament prophecies. For this reason Paul begins his resurrection treatise in I Corinthians 15 thus,

*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins **according to the Scriptures**, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day **according to the Scriptures**, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.* (I Corinthians 15:3-8)

"The empty tomb is the first and fundamental witness from which the good news begins."⁵⁴³ Paul's brief narrative fits well with the gospel accounts with the differences being more of perspective than of content. What is evident in each account is that Jesus made Himself visible to numerous disciples after His resurrection, though we learn from the gospels that He did not spend any great amount of time with them during the short period between His resurrection and His ascension. It is significant that Jesus *did not* manifest Himself to the unbelieving Jews after His resurrection. From a purely pragmatic view, this seems like the loss of a great opportunity – an opportunity to prove to the unbelievers that He was indeed risen, just as He said He would be. It is John's narrative that will uncover the reason for this, as Jesus says to Thomas, "*Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.*"⁵⁴⁴ Indeed, Jesus had already explained this historical phenomenon back when He related the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man, with Abraham telling the rich man, "*If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.*"⁵⁴⁵ Luthardt writes, "Jesus has...now at last revealed himself to his disciples upon the basis of their belief, as

⁵⁴³ Newbigin; 262.

⁵⁴⁴ John 20:29

⁵⁴⁵ Luke 16:31

he, on the contrary, after his resurrection, revealed himself no more to the Jews because of their unbelief.”⁵⁴⁶

This reality points forward, as the entire economy of God’s ongoing redemption in Jesus Christ moves forever away from the visible into the realm of faith, “*the just shall live*



N. T. Wright (b. 1948)

by faith.”⁵⁴⁷ ‘Seeing is believing’ becomes ‘believing is seeing,’ as Jesus teaches ‘doubting’ Thomas in this passage in John’s Gospel. Luthardt correctly states, “From this time forward only those are blessed who believe without seeing, because they who desire to see will not come to belief.”⁵⁴⁸ This is not to say that the historical record is unimportant; it is vital. The eye-

witness accounts of the resurrection of Jesus formed the foundation of Paul’s message to the Corinthians, as well as to everyone else. The Christian faith cannot stand on the basis of a ‘resurrection legend’; it can only stand on the firm foundation of a resurrection fact. The history of the resurrection matters, though in itself it is not sufficient to cause faith. N. T. Wright has written perhaps the strongest contemporary defense of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Toward the end of the book, Wright admits that “Historical argument alone cannot force anyone to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead; but historical argument is remarkably good at clearing away the undergrowth behind which scepticisms of various sorts have been hiding.”⁵⁴⁹

One reason that the historical veracity of the resurrection of Jesus is important is, in fact, one of the primary objections to it over the ages: *people don’t rise from the dead*. Yes, that is the point! And because Jesus did rise from the dead – an event witnessed by many – it is an event that cannot but be momentous for the human race. Newbigin writes, “The resurrection cannot be part of any history unless it is the center and turning point.”⁵⁵⁰ The resurrection of Jesus is a very *personal* historical fact, unlike all other historical facts.

⁵⁴⁶ Luthardt; 313.

⁵⁴⁷ Romans 1:17 quoting Habakkuk 2:4

⁵⁴⁸ Luthardt; 344-45.

⁵⁴⁹ Wright, N. T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 2003); 718.

⁵⁵⁰ Newbigin; 264.

Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, or the abdication of Edward VIII call for no personal commitment; the resurrection of Jesus Christ demands one. "Saying that 'Jesus of Nazareth was bodily raised from the dead' is not only a self-involving statement; it is a self-committing statement, going beyond a reordering of one's private world into various levels of commitment to work out the implications."⁵⁵¹

That the tomb was empty is, by the way, a historical fact that no one in the immediately subsequent history cared to deny. The fact of Jesus' life and the nature of His death is attested by secular writers such as Josephus and Tacitus, "And no anti-Christian writer of the first two centuries seems to have denied that the tomb was empty."⁵⁵² To be sure, all sorts of theories were floated to explain the empty tomb: the *swoon* theory by which Jesus was not really dead, but had only swooned; the *theft* theory by which the bold (not!) disciples braved the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb to steal away with Jesus' corpse, maintaining the falsehood to their deaths. Such theories would not have arisen unless there was a general consensus that the tomb was empty; something had happened with Jesus' body. "The resurrection of Jesus from the dead happened, and theologians can only deny its historical character by defining 'history' in such a way as to exclude it."⁵⁵³ What is remarkable concerning the witness to the empty tomb is that the primary sources in all four gospels...were women.

Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." (20:1-2)

Let us assume for a moment the modern liberal theory that the gospels were written in the second century and reflect the fabricated legend of the already-established (by Paul, no doubt) Christian religion. In order to solidify this religion's dependence on a messiah-figure who was crucified by the Romans over a hundred years in the past, and borrowing from a few vague Old Testament prophecies that might indicate a resurrection, the legend develops that Jesus Himself was raised from the dead on the third day after His

⁵⁵¹ Wright *Resurrection*; 717.

⁵⁵² Newbigin; 262.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*; 264.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

crucifixion. Obviously we need witnesses, so all four gospel writers turn to a group of women, whose testimony at that time and throughout that region *was inadmissible in court*.

Matthew 28:1-4

Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.

Mark 16:1-5

Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away – for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

Luke 23:55-24:3

And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment. Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

From a critical perspective, the consistency of this evidence is startling: it is beyond incredible that men, writing one or two generations after the fact and attempting to establish a 'story' about a risen Jesus, would lay the foundation of their historicity on the testimony of a group of women. "Even if we suppose that Mark made up most of his material, and did so some time in the late 60s at the earliest, it will not do to have him, or anyone else at that stage, making up a would-be apologetic legend about an empty tomb *and having women be the ones who find it*. The point has been repeated over and over again in scholarship, but its full impact has not always been felt: women were simply not acceptable as legal witnesses."⁵⁵⁴ Indeed, critics of the Christian resurrection story in the 2nd Century laid hold of the fact that all four gospel witnesses relied first



Craig Blomberg (b. 1955)

⁵⁵⁴ Wright *Resurrection*; 607, italics original.

and foremost on the testimony of women, thus, in the eyes of the critics, invalidating the historical basis for the resurrection. Craig Blomberg surmises, “An inventor of fiction, trying to commend belief in Jesus’ resurrection, would be unlikely to have created women as the first witnesses, much less have focused almost exclusively on one who was formerly demon-possessed and who could therefore be considered out of her mind when she first reported such news.”⁵⁵⁵ The fact that the gospel writers corroborate one another on this remarkable testimony is the strongest proof (1) that these are indeed eyewitness accounts that these women probably still alive when the accounts were written, and (2) the historical fact of an empty tomb was not up for debate even among Christianity’s detractors in the first century.

Comment has been made regarding the fact that John only mentions Mary Magdalene whereas the other gospels mention several women – though the Synoptics are not consistent in the number of or names of the women who set out on the first day of the week to attend to the body of Jesus. It is beyond doubt that the Synoptics knew of a plurality of women and, though John only mentions the one Mary, he, too, knows that there were more than one, for he records Mary’s words to Peter and himself, “*They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.*”⁵⁵⁶ There is no contradiction or discrepancy here, only the author’s liberty to focus on the woman who was apparently the driving force and spokesman for the rest.

Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again to their own homes. (20:3-10)

That John ran faster to the tomb, but Peter entered first, has been subjected to a great deal of imaginative allegory by Christian preachers in the early Church. Some surmised that John ran faster as one who loved the Lord more, but did not enter the tomb out of deference to Peter, his elder and the first Pope. Lapidus records, “Toletus (1532-96)

⁵⁵⁵ Blomberg, Craig *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 2001); 259-60.

⁵⁵⁶ John 20:2

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

says that by John are signified all Christians, but by Peter the Pontiffs, Vicars of Christ. Peter then entered the tomb first as the highest in dignity, as the Vicar of Christ; but John came last, because it is possible that he who is first in rank, is behind others in desert and holiness.”⁵⁵⁷ A less exciting and imaginative explanation is that John records his own arrival, but hesitancy, followed by Peter’s boldness to enter the tomb, *because this is just what happened*. Such a theologically-charged allegory as the one outlined by Toletus would have required a bit more clarity on John’s part. But what he was concerned with was showing the details of what actually happened, and wrote (naturally) as the eyewitness he was.

What Peter, followed by John, saw in the tomb was an empty ledge with Jesus’ grave clothes still lying there, apparently in the same position as was the body of Jesus, with the linen wrapping used for Jesus’ head lying by itself. In other words, *the body had not been stolen*, for no grave-robbers would have bothered to strip the ointment-laden grave clothes off of the corpse before making off with it. “It was at once certain upon the basis of these observations that Jesus had not been stolen.”⁵⁵⁸ When Jesus called Lazarus from the grave, he came forth still bound in his grave clothes, and Jesus commanded that he be released – a somewhat time-consuming process that reversed the time-consuming process of wrapping the body for burial. Jesus, however, came forth unbound – both literally by the cloths and figuratively by death. “There were no traces of haste. The deserted tomb bore the marks of perfect calm. The grave-clothes had been carefully removed, which would be a work of time and difficulty, and laid in two separate places. It was clear therefore the body had not been stolen by enemies; it was scarcely less clear that it had not been taken away by friends.”⁵⁵⁹

There is another possible explanation for the arrangement of the grave clothes: that Jesus rose *through them* in the same manner as He would appear through locked doors in the same narrative, by virtue of the same resurrection body that He now possessed. The situation of the angels that Mary would see in the tomb a little while afterward seems also to indicate that the grave clothes may well have been laid out in the same configuration as

⁵⁵⁷ Lape; 619.

⁵⁵⁸ Luthardt; 318.

⁵⁵⁹ Westcott; 290.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

was the body of Jesus when He was laid in the tomb three night prior. Speaking of the grave clothes, Wright comments, “Their positioning, carefully described in verse 7, suggests that they had not been unwrapped, but that the body had somehow passed through them, much as, later on, it would appear and disappear through locked doors.”⁵⁶⁰

In further support of this theory is the fact that the sight moved the beloved disciple to belief – something that might have happened had the grave clothes been neatly folded on the ledge, but even more assuredly so if they were in the same position that they were in when they had wrapped the dead body of the Lord. John has not yet seen the risen Lord, yet he records that the evidence left in the tomb was sufficient for him to believe that the Lord had indeed risen, just as He said He would. In a manner of speaking, then, John becomes the first believing disciple, and the first to believe without having seen, being thus doubly blessed. “But the beloved disciple, the one who is closest to the Lord and who most fully shares his purpose, though he has not seen the risen Jesus, yet having seen the traces – so to speak – of his resurrection, becomes the first believer.”⁵⁶¹

It is a comment on the ongoing despair and depression of the small band of Jesus’ followers that “*as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.*” The reference here to ‘the Scripture’ is quite general, and both encompasses the entire flow of Old Testament Messianic prophecy, as well as specific prophecies such as Psalm 16, a passage that Peter will quote in his first sermon on Pentecost in just a few weeks time.

*Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope.
For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.
You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.* (Psalm 16:9-11)

But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where

⁵⁶⁰ Wright *Resurrection*; 689.

⁵⁶¹ Newbigin; 263.

You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher). (20:11-16)

It is likely that John mentions only Mary Magdalene at the start of his resurrection narrative in preparation for this encounter of Mary, first with the two angels and then with her risen Lord. At this point we can assume that Mary alone returned to the tomb in an effort to find Jesus’ body so that she could fulfill her loving duty in preparing it fully for burial. She does not yet understand; she does not yet believe. But again it is remarkable that the first person to see the risen Jesus is a woman and not, as any self-respecting second-century legend writer would have it, one of the disciples. “The Lord appeared first neither to the Beloved Disciple, who already believed, nor to Peter, but to the woman who had stood by the Cross and discovered the empty tomb, and who announced her discovery to the two disciples.”⁵⁶²

Mary’s grief at Jesus’ death is intensified by the absence of His body and the mystery surrounding that fact. The preparation of Jesus’ body for burial after the crucifixion, was of necessity incomplete and hurried, as it was the Day of Preparation and all work had to cease at sundown (essentially, 6:00 pm). Morris notes that the incomplete nature of Jesus’ burial preparation may have further contributed to Mary’s emotional state. “The depth of her grief is perhaps due to the emphasis the Jews of the day placed on correct and seemly burial. They regarded with abhorrence any disrespect paid to a corpse.”⁵⁶³ But in spite of all reasonable justification for her grief, when she encounters the angels seated in the tomb – and she does not realize, of course, that they are angels – their first question to her is quite incredible, “Woman, why do you weep?” John does not record that Mary perceived anything odd about two men sitting on the ledge where Jesus’ body had been only a few hours before, nor the strange nature of their greeting, considering that they *were* sitting in the grave where Mary’s dear rabbi had been lain. He is dead, and now His body is missing, and they ask, *Why are you weeping?*

All of this is lost on Mary, at least for now, as she is prevented perhaps by her deep sorrow and consternation from perceiving rightly what she is perceiving sensibly. She sees the two angels; one wonders if they had been there all along, and Peter and John were

⁵⁶² Hoskyns; 542.

⁵⁶³ Morris; 837.

unable to perceive them? But Mary cannot perceive why they are there, or who they are. Wright notes that “Rowan Williams has suggested, following Westcott, that the angels at either end of the grave slab function like the cherubim at either end of the mercy-seat of the ark; the true god, John may be suggesting, is to be found in the gap.”⁵⁶⁴ An interesting thought, but John gives no corroborating support. It may be, however, that the two angels were indeed there the whole time, guarding the inert body of Jesus until He took up life again on the third day. If this is so, it is another remarkable example of a woman’s testimony taking front and center in John’s narrative of Jesus’ resurrection.

It is beyond conjecture, however, that Mary is the first to see the risen Jesus. She is aware of a third man in the scene and mistakes him for the gardener. He repeats the angels’ question and adds, “*Whom do you seek?*” which is, interestingly, the same question He posed to the guards who came to arrest Him in the garden. Mary does not perceive that this is Jesus, and scholars have surmised many reasons for this lack of recognition. Luthardt summarily dismisses the most ridiculous of these,

The reason that she did not recognize Jesus was not that his features had been disfigured by death, or by the pain of death, or that he had, as was alleged, borrowed the gardener’s clothes; nor was it that her eyes had wept so much, that they could not see aright; nor did the hastiness of her glance at him prevent her from recognizing Jesus. There can be no mention of a disfiguring of the features in the case of the one who had risen, and he got his clothes where the angels got theirs. We need only remember that the Risen One is only recognized when he desires to be recognized.⁵⁶⁵

My sheep hear My voice; Jesus speaks her name and she immediately knows that this third man – presumably a gardener – is none other than the Lord Himself. *Rabboni!* A term of endearment, perhaps. Some commentators indicate that the term was only ever used by Jewish writers with reference to God Himself, and rarely to a man. Morris comments, “In the older Jewish literature it appears to be used but seldom with reference to men and never as a mode of address. As a mode of address it is confined to addressing God in prayer.”⁵⁶⁶ John, however, does not freight the word so much, and offers the simple translation, “*Teacher.*” Clearly Mary is greatly moved by the revelation of her

⁵⁶⁴ Wright; 668.

⁵⁶⁵ Luthardt; 323. *Cp.* the narrative of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:16-31.

⁵⁶⁶ Morris; 839.

beloved Teacher now alive from the dead: “In this *Rabbouni!* is her whole soul.”⁵⁶⁷ However, while her expression indicates her deep love and devotion, it also indicates the limited nature of her faith. She, the first to physically *see* Jesus after His resurrection, still viewed Him in His former role as Teacher. Blomberg points out that the title Mary uses to address Jesus contributes to the historicity of the Gospel, as it is unlikely that anyone writing in the second century would have used *Rabboni* instead of the then-common, *Kurios* - Lord! “Even here, Mary does not use an exalted Christological title for Jesus, which again supports historicity.”⁵⁶⁸ As will be immediately seen, Mary also wishes to resume the former intimacy she had as His disciple, one who had been forgiven much and who, therefore, loved much.

Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her. (20:17-18)

This is without doubt a very enigmatic passage. Why does Jesus forbid Mary from clinging to Him? The theory that His was an incorporeal body – not ‘real’ in the sense of not physical – is quickly disproven in this very narrative by Jesus’ command to Thomas to “Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side.”⁵⁶⁹ No, Jesus’ body was entirely physical, though no doubt of a different nature than before His death and resurrection. So why did He forbid Mary from clinging to Him, and what does He mean when He says, “for I have not yet ascended to the Father”? Others theorize that He ascended to the Father immediately afterward and then returned to visit with the disciples off and on for the next few weeks. But none of the gospel narratives will bear this theory; it is quite evident that the historians of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension knew of only one ascension, when Jesus was taken up from them into the clouds (*cp.* Acts 1:9-11). The issue is not that Jesus did not want to be touched, and certainly not that He was ‘untouchable’ in His resurrection body. It seems that the purpose of His statement was to emphasize that, even though He is now risen from the dead, things are not going back to the way they were before His crucifixion. “Part of the thought appears to be that Jesus was

⁵⁶⁷ Luthardt; 324.

⁵⁶⁸ Blomberg; 264.

⁵⁶⁹ John 20:27

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

not simply returning to the old life. Mary was reacting as though he were. As He had not yet ascended He could appear to her, but she must not read into this a simply return to the former state of affairs.”⁵⁷⁰ Newbigin adds, “But once again – for the last time in the Gospel – the words ‘Not yet’ have to be spoken. Mary is the first of the disciples to meet and recognize the risen Lord, but she has not yet understood what the new relationship is to be. It will not be the old relationship of teacher and disciple.”⁵⁷¹

But Jesus does entrust Mary with a task, an embassy to His other disciples. It cannot be stressed enough how remarkable this is, the role of women in the resurrection narrative. This is not to read into the Scriptures an egalitarian ethos that does not belong there, but rather to recognize the incredible devotion to the true history of the events by the writers, refusing to alter or tone down what was to become a ‘stumbling block’ to many in terms of accepting the testimony of the resurrection. Women are the first to discover the empty tomb, and their testimony is at least believed by Peter and John. Mary is the first to see the risen Lord, and consequently is given another message to deliver to His disciples: “*but go to My bothers, and say...*” This embassy in itself is a reiteration of the previous *do not cling to Me*, for Jesus’ appearances to His disciples will no longer be day by day and for long periods. Now they will see Him only sporadically, and only for a very short time before He does ascend to *My Father and your Father*. They are still to wait for the *Parakletos* whom Jesus promised to send after He had returned to His Father. Jesus’ time between the resurrection and the ascension will serve the purpose of providing eyewitness reality to the fact that He is risen, but will not contain the lengthy teaching or parables to which His disciples had grown accustomed over the previous three years. Now is not the time for Jesus to teach them the things that they were not ready to understand or bear; that time must await the arrival of the *Parakletos* still.

This, it must be noted, is the first time Jesus has referred to the disciples as His ‘brothers.’ By virtue of His resurrection, they are now sons of His Father and therefore His brothers. Mary is to tell them of His soon-to-be accomplished return “*to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.*” Note how Jesus includes with Himself the disciples relationship to Israel’s God as ‘Father,’ while at the same time maintaining the uniqueness

⁵⁷⁰ Morris; 841.

⁵⁷¹ Newbigin; 265.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

of His relationship to the Father. Consistent with His ministry prior to the crucifixion, Jesus here cannot refer to the Father with any other pronoun but 'My,' and cannot deny the singular relation between Himself and the Father even as He adds the disciples fully to the family. Hoskyns writes, "Yet the distinction between Jesus and His disciples is carefully preserved. He does not say *Our Father and our God*, since what Jesus is by nature, His disciples are by grace."⁵⁷²

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. (20:19-20)

Even the empty tomb did not materially alter the disciples' fear; even John, who had believed that Jesus was risen, was there behind locked doors because of the Jews. This was by no means an irrational fear, as it was customary in all sedition cases to round up and punish all known associates of the ringleader. "That Jesus' closest followers could be in real danger from the same authorities who had just crucified their leader can scarcely be doubted."⁵⁷³ The disciples did not understand that they were under the protection of the Father in answer to Jesus' prayer before His death; and they did not understand the full significance of the empty tomb as yet. Even after Pentecost believers have met behind locked doors and in the catacombs for fear of persecution by the hostile authorities; we need not pass judgment on the disciples in this case. Jesus does not; He simply appears in their midst.

Again, I Corinthians 15 provides excellent commentary on what we read in John 20 concerning Jesus' appearing in the room without having opened the doors to enter. He immediately displays His physicality – showing the disciples both His feet and His hands. But it is equally clear that His physical body has undergone some dramatic change with respect to otherwise physical obstacles. Luthardt writes, "But, in spite of the shut doors, Jesus came in to his disciples, as a testimony that his corporeality had undergone that

⁵⁷² Hoskyns; 543.

⁵⁷³ Blomberg; 265.

change which the walking on the sea in that night, 6:16-21, had foreshadowed.”⁵⁷⁴ Jesus’ appearance in this manner is the manifestation of what Paul writes in I Corinthians 15,

*But someone will say, “How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?” Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain – perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. **So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.** There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*

(I Corinthians 15:35-45)

Jesus greeting is a common one among the Jews, *shalom alechem* – Peace be unto you. But never had this common greeting had more meaning; never had ‘peace’ been more real because fully and finally secured through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. “All that the prophets had poured into *shalom* as the epitome of the blessings of the kingdom of God had essentially been realized in the redemptive deeds of the incarnate Son of God, ‘lifted up’ for the salvation of the world.”⁵⁷⁵ What Jesus brings as He appears in the room is peace with God, which is true peace indeed.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

(Romans 5:1-2)

The next part of the narrative is particularly unique to John’s Gospel, and has caused not a little consternation among scholars for the past two thousand years. In just a few verses Jesus will give the Holy Spirit to the disciples (but did that not happen a few weeks later at Pentecost) and grant them the authority to forgive sins on earth (the ‘keys of the kingdom’ of so much ecclesiastical controversy).

⁵⁷⁴ Luthardt; 331.

⁵⁷⁵ Beasley-Murray; 378-79.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (20:21-23)

The first part of this passage describes John's truncated version of what is known as the Great Commission from Matthew 28,

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

John 20:21 is also the point from which we may biblically refer to these men as 'apostles,' for that is the verb used by Jesus to refer both to His being sent by the Father (as the *Apostle and High Priest of our confession*) and His sending of His disciples to continue the work He has begun and to preach the gospel that He has secured through His death and resurrection. Authority is bound up in the term 'apostle,' which bridges the gap between this commission and the terms of the one in Matthew 28. *All authority* has been given to Jesus by virtue of His obedient sacrifice and victorious death. Now that authority will stand behind these new 'apostles,' these new 'sent ones.' There is, however, a noticeable step down in the authority of the sender, resulting in a necessary limitation on the authority and dignity of the one(s) sent. Though the Son of God is no less essentially divine than the Father, the Father is portrayed throughout as the ultimate authority under whom the Son hears, speaks, and does all that He hears, speaks, and does. Thus Jesus' dignity is that of One who has been sent by the highest authority. The disciples are now sent by the Sent One, and therefore their dignity is proportionally less than Jesus' dignity. "As he was the Father's apostle, so are they to be Christ's apostles."⁵⁷⁶ This step down in dignity shows us that the 'office' of Apostle was never intended to continue in the Church, for from the point of this small group of disciples being sent by Jesus, all future 'sent ones' could only be sent by them and by the Church founded and developed by them. The mission of these disciples, now made apostles, is to take that peace that Jesus has secured and spread it abroad through the preaching of the Gospel. "But the gift of peace is not for them alone. On the contrary he has chosen and appointed them to be the bearers of *shalom*

⁵⁷⁶ Luthardt; 333. Luthardt; 333.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

into the life of the world. Forty times in this Gospel Jesus is described as the one sent by the Father; now he sends them to continue and to complete his mission."⁵⁷⁷ Westcott points out the theological, ecclesiological importance of this commission: "The apostles were commissioned to carry on Christ's work, and not to begin a new one. Their office was an application of His office according to the needs of men."⁵⁷⁸

The next thing Jesus does is what causes so much difficulty among commentators and readers of John's gospel: "*He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'*" Before discussing this passage in light of the Pentecost outpouring of the Holy Spirit, there are two things that are of immediate exegetical importance. The first is the unmistakable allusion of the text with the creation of man in Genesis Chapter 2,

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)

That this connection was intended by the author is all but confirmed by the fact that the verb, *breathed*, is the same Greek verb in John 20:22 as it is in the Septuagint version of Genesis 2:7. Thus Jesus is enacting, perhaps in symbolic form, the New Creation that has come through His resurrection. "Jesus' public career is to be understood as the completion of the original creation, with the resurrection as the start of the new."⁵⁷⁹ But the terminology John uses here in Chapter 20 is nothing less than what Paul writes, again in I Corinthians 15, making the connection between the original creation of Adam and the resurrected Jesus Christ explicit,

And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (I Corinthians 15:45)

Luthardt therefore comments, "As the breath of life proceeds from God, so here proceeds the breath of a new life from Christ. For the new life has become a new reality in him, the one raised and glorified."⁵⁸⁰ We need not see a conflict between John's account of Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit into His disciples here and the outpouring of the Holy

⁵⁷⁷ Newbigin; 268.

⁵⁷⁸ Westcott; 294.

⁵⁷⁹ Wright *Resurrection*; 440.

⁵⁸⁰ Luthardt; 333.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Spirit on the Church at Pentecost. In this instance, the giving of the Holy Spirit is a personal action of the Son of God in commissioning His disciples to continue His work of ministry and as such is comparable to the giving of the Holy Spirit by the Father at Jesus' baptism. This 'receiving' of the Holy Spirit by the newly-minted apostles did not take the place of the Pentecostal equipping that they would receive; rather it served as the divine authorization of their new office, their new mission. It is significant that they did not take up that mission until after Pentecost, indicating that this event on the first Sunday of Jesus' resurrection was to be viewed more in connection with the authority of these apostles than with the overall mission and life of the Church. "It is the earnest and pledge of the Pentecostal impartation, and therefore an anticipation of it."⁵⁸¹ A foretaste of what Jesus had promised to them upon His return to the Father is now given to them in connection with their commission.

What follows is Jesus' granting to the disciples 'the power of the keys,' the authority to bind and loose, to forgive sins and to retain them. This passage is parallel with two such passages in Matthew, though both of the latter occur *before* Jesus' death and resurrection. The first is on the occasion of Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ,

Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:17-19)

And the second is within the context of discipline in the Church,

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:15-18)

John's usage of this same terminology, but in different context, is not to be seen as contradictory any more than the two different contexts within the one gospel of Matthew

⁵⁸¹ Luthardt; 335-36.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

are contradictory. The issue here is authority in the Church, and Jesus' commissioning of the disciples to be His apostles is as valid a place for Him to repeat this statement about 'the keys' as was Peter's original confession. An exposition on how the 'keys' have been interpreted within the history of ecclesiastical doctrine and practice would take us too far afield from this study in John's Gospel. Tying the various passages together, however, we can offer a preliminary statement that 'the keys of the kingdom' are founded upon the confession of Jesus as the Son of God, Messiah and Lord, and are predicated wholly upon the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit within the Church. Just as Jesus never did or said anything but what He received from the Father, so also the Church must never do or say anything but what she receives from her Lord through the Holy Spirit.

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (20:24-29)

The famous 'Doubting Thomas' passage. "After eight days" literally means, 'on the eighth day' and, by Jewish reckoning of the days of the week, was inclusive. Thus this second appearance of Jesus among His disciples was on the following Sunday. This fact – Jesus' appearances to His disciples on Sundays – coupled with Sunday being the day of the resurrection, motivated the early Church to move the day of worship from the Jewish Sabbath, Saturday, to the first day of the week. This became known, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as 'the Lord's Day.' We learn here that one of the disciples (other than, of course, Judas Iscariot) was missing on the first day of the resurrection. Thomas is now with his fellow disciples, but in spite of their testimony – their eyewitness testimony – he refuses to believe that Jesus is risen. The purpose of this passage, not very complimentary of Thomas, is fully summarized in Jesus' final statement on the matter. Thomas sees, and now he believes. But "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*"

This is the movement of faith that began in this narrative with John himself, the Beloved Disciple, believing that Jesus had indeed risen from the grave, though he had not

yet seen his risen Lord. This movement of faith that does not trust to sight is reinforced by what passes as no less than a mild rebuke of Thomas, *“Because you have seen, you believe?”* and fits in with the overall transitoriness of Jesus’ presence with His own during this time between the resurrection and the ascension, *“Do not cling to Me...”* The time for ‘visible faith’ – believing in what one’s eyes witness to one’s mind and soul – is quickly coming to an end, after which the overarching paradigm of the entire redemptive history will again prevail, *“But My righteous ones will live by faith,”* and *“For we walk by faith and not by sight.”*⁵⁸² Luthardt writes, *“From this time forward only those are blessed who believe without seeing, because they who desire to see will not come to belief.”*⁵⁸³

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)

“Verses 30-31 bring John 20 to a close, and most readers have sensed they could form an appropriate ending to the Gospel overall. Here is Johannine theology pure and simple, in an unequivocal statement of a central purpose of the book: to foster faith in Jesus as the Messiah and divine Son.”⁵⁸⁴ What appears to be the closing statement to his gospel complements the opening statement to John’s first epistle,

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us – that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (I John 1:1-4)

The goal of both the gospel and the epistle is *faith*, though not so much the noun as the verb, *believe*. “Though the noun ‘faith’ itself never occurs in John, the cognate verb ‘believe’ occurs more in this gospel than in Matthew, Mark and Luke put together.”⁵⁸⁵ Looking back on the previous twenty chapters, it may be said that ‘believing’ to John flows along two concurrent streams. The first is believing that Jesus is the promised Messiah,

⁵⁸² Habakkuk 2:4 and II Corinthians 5:7

⁵⁸³ Luthardt; 344-45.

⁵⁸⁴ Blomberg; 271.

⁵⁸⁵ Wright, *Resurrection*; 669.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

the second that He is the Son of God. These concepts are taken for granted by believers today, but they were hardly so among the Jews of Second Temple Israel.⁵⁸⁶ In Jesus these two eschatological strands come together, as Peter will announce on that momentous Pentecost soon to come, *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified.”*⁵⁸⁷

The fulfilment of the Old Testament in the full revelation of the Father, in the one who proceeded from God himself, who stands in an absolute divine fellowship founded in the heavenly sphere, who bears the fulness of the gospel in himself: such are the contents of belief on Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. He is the Messiah...but only because he is the Son of God.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁶ Morris; 856.

⁵⁸⁷ Acts 2:36

⁵⁸⁸ Luthardt; 347.

Week 15: Epilogue or Postscript?

Text Reading: John 21:1 - 25

*“They knew that it was He;
but He was no longer such as He had previously been,
not even such as He had been in the first appearances.”
(Christoph Ernst Luthardt)*

The last two verses of the previous chapter have a definite air of finality to them, yet there is Chapter 21. Fortunately, from a textual perspective, there can be no doubt that this last chapter has been appended to the Fourth Gospel from the very earliest circulation. Wright notes that “no manuscript gives any hint that there was ever a copy of the gospel circulating without it.”⁵⁸⁹ Even Luthardt, who views Chapter 21 as an appendix added to the body of the gospel which ended at 20:30-31, acknowledges the antiquity of this last chapter, “From the fact that this appendix is found in all the manuscripts, it is clear that it must have been added to the gospel at a time in which it had not passed beyond the bounds of its first circle.”⁵⁹⁰ Equally fortunate is the fact that the language in Chapter 21 is Johannine through and through, with a number of common phrases between this ‘appendix’ and the rest of the gospel. Newbigin comments that “there is no evidence that the Gospel of John was ever in circulation without this chapter; the style and matter are very Johannine and the chapter is explicitly linked to the previous chapter by verse 14.”⁵⁹¹

Thus scholarship is remarkably united at this point on the authenticity of John 21, and there is even a predominant vein of thought assigning the last chapter to the same authorship as the previous twenty. Blomberg comments, “Thus it is not nearly as unusual today as it was a half-century ago to find scholarly support for John 21 as an integral part of the overall Gospel, composed by the same hand that was responsible for the majority of chapters 1-20.”⁵⁹² But heaven forbid that we should take our lead from ‘scholars’; for no doubt in a half-century hence there will be once again doubt as to this or that aspect of the Fourth Gospel, for it seems that is what scholars do. Nonetheless, it is incumbent upon the reader to consider the nature of Chapter 21 in light of the seemingly final words spoken at

⁵⁸⁹ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*; 663.

⁵⁹⁰ Luthardt; 351.

⁵⁹¹ Newbigin; 274.

⁵⁹² Blomberg; 272.

the end of Chapter 20. It is not likely that Chapter 21 forms an Appendix – the antiquity of the chapter, and the pervasive literary consistency with previous twenty chapters seems definitely to preclude this option. Thus the chapter must serve either as an Epilogue or a Postscript.

The difference between the two has to do with the relationship of the material to that which precedes it. An epilogue is closely tied to the previous material, summing it up in the opposite manner as a prologue foreshadows the content of the book. An epilogue ‘ties up loose ends,’ as it were. That the Fourth Gospel has a Prologue would seem to justify an Epilogue, but this is not a literary necessity. A postscript, however, contains material that often does not connect with the previous content and is added almost as an afterthought. John 21 has characteristics of both. For instance, the narrative of the dialogue between Jesus and Peter most certainly connects to the narrative of Peter’s denial – both Jesus’ prediction of it and the actual event – recorded earlier in the gospel. But the narrative of the great catch of fish and that of the alleged immortality (at least until the Lord’s return) of the Beloved Disciple, bear the character of a postscript – items the author considered important enough to include, though outside and after the main body of the letter.

Indeed, one of these issues may have given rise to the writing and inclusion of Chapter 21 in the first place: the alleged longevity of the Beloved Disciple until the return of Jesus Christ. Apart from the central message of the gospel itself, John felt the need to clear up what perhaps had become a major issue in the church of his later days. If the gospel was written in the latter part of the first century, as is widely thought among conservative scholars, then John was advanced in years and probably nearing his own departure. While it is evident from other passages of the New Testament that the earliest disciples considered the Second Coming or Parousia of Jesus to be imminent, this expectation had apparently tied itself quite inextricably with the long life of the last Apostle, the one whom Jesus loved. Knowing as he probably did of his own immanent death, this Apostle considered it of the utmost importance to the security and stability of the Church to dispel the unwarranted hypothesis that he would live until the Lord’s return. Wright notes that “the beloved disciple’s death does not constitute a problem; it

does not mean that a key saying of Jesus has failed to come true. The writer does not deny or downplay the 'second coming'; he merely insists that the beloved disciple's death does not mean that something has gone wrong with the providential timetable."⁵⁹³

Thus we have in John 21 items of continuity with the main body of the gospel, and items of discontinuity, both very important for the early readers of the book and still significant for readers of all later generations.

After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. (21:1-3)

This introductory passage seems out of place with what had gone before – Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit upon the disciples in the locked room on the evening of the resurrection. Many commentators have noted what seems to be an almost immediate apostasy of the disciples – especially their ringleader, Peter – away from the mission that lies ahead and back to the worldly occupation of the past. It is noteworthy that this is not the assessment that Jesus makes, at least not in any words recorded here. Jesus comes to His disciples again, and offers no words of rebuke regarding their fishing expedition. He merely illustrates once again that *"apart from Me you can do nothing"*; not even fish, apparently. The fact that Peter suggests a fishing expedition can be explained in non-judgmental terms.

The disciples – or at seven of them, at least – have returned to Galilee, a fact that harmonizes with the Synoptic Gospels where most of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus occur in Galilee. Not only had Jesus instructed His disciples to go before Him to Galilee, that region of the country was far safer for the little band than was Jerusalem at that time. In the first week or so, Jesus had only appeared to them twice – three times, perhaps, if the encounter on the road to Emmaus is counted. In other words, their Lord was making it quite apparent that the circumstance were not returning *status quo ante bellum*. Yet they had not been fully commissioned to continue Jesus' work, as the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. This was somewhat of the calm before the storm, and it

⁵⁹³ Wright; 676.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

should not surprise us that the disciples were at loose ends. What is more natural in such a situation than to go back to what one does best? Indeed, it may very well have been the case that the disciples needed either food or money, or both.

It should be noted that of the seven recorded by John (two remained unnamed), only three of them were fishermen. That number would probably rise to five if the unnamed disciples were Andrew and Philip (and we are assuming here that Philip was also a fisherman, as he was of the same city as Peter and Andrew). The point is that the disciples were still largely together, though we are not told where the other four men were at this time. We see Peter, in spite of his betrayal of Jesus on that hated night, still *primus inter pares* – first among equals and the leader of the band. He suggest fishing, and the others fall in line. But the venture is fruitless; after a whole night at sea, they have nothing to show for it. The stage is set in very Johannine fashion for another ‘provision’ miracle by Jesus.

But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, “Children, have you any food?” They answered Him, “No.” And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. (21:4-6)

The disciples obviously do not recognize Jesus, and some scholars have surmised the reason to be the distance they were from the shore (about a hundred yards) or even their being blurry eyed after a long night’s labor. Such speculation is childish; it will become apparent that Jesus’ resurrected body was both recognizable and unrecognizable at the same time. What will clue them in – or at least one of them – is not cleared vision, but a miracle that powerfully reminds them of other miraculous provisions made by their Lord.

It is likely that the fishing boat – probably a fairly large rig and not the little skiff depicted in so much art – was suited for the nets to be cast off of one side predominantly – thus allowing the other side of the boat for holding and sorting the fish. In this case, the net-side was to port, and Jesus – just a stranger standing on the beach – instructs them to cast to starboard. Perhaps something in the tone of the voice convinced the fisherman not only not to argue, but to immediately do what the stranger commanded. Of course, the result is a haul of fish so great that they were barely able to bring it up into the boat. He

who commands the wind and the waves and walks on the water, commands the fish of the sea as well. And it has become common experience for the disciples that Jesus never did anything by halves – the abundant wine at the wedding, the leftover bread and fish in the wilderness. Thus the identity of the stranger is immediately apparent to the Beloved Disciples – the one who believed on seeing the empty tomb and the abandoned grave clothes. The miracle this time, however, is not intended to feed the multitudes – there was no multitude present. We will shortly read that it was not even to feed the disciples; Jesus had already taken care of that. “It is unquestionable that the occurrence is intended to have a symbolical signification.”⁵⁹⁴ The symbolism is left unstated, but the reader’s mind goes naturally to the first time Jesus encountered these men working at their nets, “*Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.*”⁵⁹⁵ Luke’s account of a similar miracle at the beginning of their time with Jesus no doubt came to John’s mind, if not to the other disciples, and also no doubt to John’s readers.

When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” But Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.” And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.”

(Luke 5:4-10)

Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.” (21:7-10)

Peter’s response this time is similar to his response the first time. Impetuous but sincere, Peter clothes himself for modesty and plunges into the water, presumably to swim to Jesus (we are not told, though he does end up on the shore). We are also not told whether Peter was able to out swim the boat or that the boat arrived before him. It is a

⁵⁹⁴ Luthardt; 360.

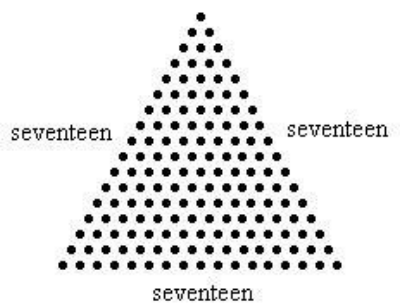
⁵⁹⁵ Matthew 4:19

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

somewhat humorous picture, quite in character with Peter, and seems to have no further theological significance than to once again provide an eyewitness account of the event.

When the disciples arrive at shore, they find that for all the similarities with Jesus' earlier miracles, this one has a very significant difference: He has already prepared a meal for them. He bids them to bring some of the fish they had caught, but He has is already preparing breakfast of fish and bread over a charcoal fire. It is not clear whether Jesus adds some of the disciples' catch to what He had already placed on the fire, but it would not be surprising to discover that He had already prepared a full meal for them. The text, however, is indeterminate on this point. What is not indeterminate, however, is that in this instance Jesus does not first have water brought that He might make wine, nor does He borrow the loaves and fishes of either His disciples or a young boy. Now He provides, almost *ex nihilo*, for His own.

Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, "Come and eat breakfast." Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?"—knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. (20:11-14)



Bible commentators cannot pass up an actual number without seeking to find the deeper significance of that number. In this case we are told that 153 fish were caught, so 'clearly' the number 153 must have meaning. One avenue of misdirection has been to notice – as undoubtedly these Galilean fishermen did – that 153 is the sum of the first seventeen natural numbers, and that an equilateral triangle can be formed with 153 dots by placing 17 dots on each of the sides and spacing the remain equidistant from each other. Thus 153 is a 'triangular number,' which must, of course, have reference to the Trinity. This is unlikely to have been on John's mind when he recorded the vent.

Another imaginative interpretation is to fix upon the apparent fact that Greek naturalists of the ancient world believed there to be exactly 153 species of fish in the oceans. Thus – again, these Galilean fishermen being very scientific at their occupation –

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

the massive haul of exactly 153 fish, meaning one fish from every specie, can only symbolize the evangelistic harvest of ‘fish’ *“from every tongue, tribe, and nation.”* But this is no more likely an interpretation than the triangular number theory. “It seems probable that he says this for no more profound reason than that was the actual number that was caught.”⁵⁹⁶

It is noteworthy that the narrative reports that the disciples dared not ask Jesus who He was. The explanation is given that *“They knew it was the Lord,”* but it is obvious that this knowledge was not so clear and sure that the question, ‘Who are You?’ was inappropriate. It would make no sense to say that they dared not ask Him this question, if His appearance was so clearly that of the Jesus they knew before the Cross that the question itself would be nonsensical. “They knew that it was he; but he was no longer such as he had previously had been, not even such as he had been in the first appearances.”⁵⁹⁷ This again is a tacit commentary on Jesus’ resurrection ‘spiritual’ body. It is evidently the same body that was killed on the cross and laid in the tomb. Yet it is also evidently different from that body. One thinks of Paul’s enigmatic statement in II Corinthians 5,

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. (II Corinthians 5:16)

John records that this was the third time that Jesus appeared to His disciples since the resurrection. It was, in fact, the *fourth* recorded appearance by John, but he evidently does not count the appearance in the garden to Mary. This is similar to Paul’s reckoning of the post-resurrection appearances recorded in I Corinthians 15. Perhaps as a nod to the ‘accepted’ forms of witness these authors enumerate only those appearances of Jesus to His band. Or perhaps the emphasis here is on those who had been (and would be) commissioned as Jesus’ apostles to carry on His mission to the world. John’s passing over the meeting between Jesus and Mary does not detract from the fact that he, along with the Synoptic writers, records the first post-resurrection appearance of the Lord as to a woman.

⁵⁹⁶ Morris; 866.

⁵⁹⁷ Luthardt; 366.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep." (21:15-17)

This is the restoration passage that is much preached upon in terms of 'love,' and what that means. This is because the words translated 'love' in the passage are actually two different Greek words: one which Peter uses consistently, and another that Jesus uses twice before shifting to the one that Peter has been using. These words are the famous *agape* and *phileō*, frequently differentiated with dogmatic certainty as meaning 'divine love' and 'brotherly love' respectively. Suffice it to say that a survey of the biblical usage of these two words will not support such a hard-and-fast conclusion regarding the type of love portrayed by each. Furthermore, it is highly likely that the conversation between Jesus and Peter took place not in Greek, but in Aramaic, a language with far less nuance than Greek. Still, John chose to record the conversation using two different words, and that not only for 'love' but also for 'know.' This could really only be either for literary style – mixing things up to make it easier to read – or for another, more theological reason. Modern conservative scholarship tends toward the first conclusion, but perhaps a bit too hastily. There does, in fact, seem to be a progression in the conversation. Here is a summary of the conversation with the Greek words transliterated.

	Jesus' Question	Peter's Response	Jesus' Command	The Object
21:15	<i>agapas me?</i>	<i>su oidas...philō se</i>	<i>boske</i>	<i>ta arnia mou</i>
21:16	<i>agapas me?</i>	<i>su oidas...philō se</i>	<i>poimaine</i>	<i>ta probata mou</i>
21:17	<i>phileis me?</i>	<i>su ginōskeis...philōe se</i>	<i>boske</i>	<i>ta probata mou</i>

The point of this table is to show the subtle shifts in word usage, which really cannot be done in the English since some of the words are translated by the same English word. For instance, Jesus ask twice if Peter loves Him, using the Greek verb *agape*. As noted above, this verb is often too dogmatically interpreted as the kind of love that only God has. But Paul tells Timothy that Demos 'loved the world' and departed from following

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

Christ: *agape* is used there. It does, however, appear that John uses the *agape* frequently enough with reference to the divine love (i.e., John 3:16 and 13:1) that we may recognize a shift in Jesus' emphasis with His third repetition of the same query, "*Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me...?*" This seems especially to be the case when we realize that, in the third iteration, Jesus does adopt the verb that Peter has been using all along. It is also significant that Peter at no point answers Jesus in the terms in which the question has been posed: the disciple consistently uses *phileō* when the question put to him is *agape*. While a case cannot be made that the one term always means 'divine love' and the other merely 'affectionate love,' we must not overlook the shift between the terms.

Another shift takes place in Peter's response, this time with the word translated 'know.' In answer to the first two queries, Peter responds that Jesus *knows*, using the Greek *oida*, whereas in the third response he shifts to *ginōskō*. Again, no firm rule can be laid down to differentiate meaning between these two words, but the shift itself is significant. In the third response, Peter proclaims that Jesus *knows all things* – using the same verb, *oida*, that he has used to answer Jesus' previous two questions. He then repeats his earlier response, *you know that I love You*, but this time uses *ginōskō*. There may be nothing to this, but there does seem to be a revelation both of Jesus' intent and Peter's response.

Peter had boasted that he would stand by Jesus even if all the other disciples fell away. He then proceeded to deny even knowing Jesus, and that he did three times. Hence three times Jesus asks what is essentially the same question, *Do you love Me?* In the first instance Jesus uses a comparative: *Do you love Me more than these?* and the 'more than these' most likely refers to the love of the other disciples toward Jesus: *Do you really love Me more than the others do?* This would be a direct challenge to Peter's earlier boast, as well as a vivid reminder (though it is doubtful that Peter needed one) of Peter's contemptable behavior the night of Jesus' arrest and trial. Peter is really pleading with his Lord, whom he knows is fully cognizant of every man's thoughts, that he really does love Jesus. But he seems incapable – or perhaps sufficiently chastened – of using the same term that Jesus does in His question. The natural progression here is from a higher love – that which Jesus asks – and a lower, but still very potent love – that which Peter asserts.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

But the focus has too often stayed on the *agape/phileō* paradigm and has missed the real core of Peter's response: *You know...* In each case Peter does not boast; rather he relies on Jesus' knowledge of Peter's own heart, *Lord, you know that I love you*. In this assertion Peter has found true contrition, in that he has come to learn the deceitfulness of his own heart and to trust entirely on the knowledge of Jesus. Peter does not doubt his love for Jesus, but he does not trust it, either. What he does trust is the fact that his Lord knows his heart, and it seems that this is, in a manner of speaking, rewarded in the third query as Jesus adopts Peter's own term. But Peter's prideful boasting must be conquered, and Jesus does not settle immediately with His chief disciple. He humbles Peter to the point of grief – asking the same question three times, even if mixed with the apparent grace of dropping from the 'higher' *agape* to the 'lower' *phileō*.

Jesus asks twice with *agapas me* ('lovest thou me'), while Peter answers merely *philō* ('I love'); this difference of words is certainly not undesigned, and thing of no moment; it is a descending. Instead of the love, the reverence, which is more a matter of the will, he puts the love, which is more a matter of passion. In this lies silently the prayer that Jesus also may not ask after the higher *agapan*, the designation of love as it is due towards that which is divine, but only after the humanly easier *philein*. And even the second time Peter repeats this prayer in spite of the *boske ta arnia mou* ('feed my lambs'). Not till the third time does Jesus yield to the one who was before so presumptuous. But Peter humbles himself willingly.⁵⁹⁸

There is much at stake here, though not nearly as much as the Roman Catholic Church has gleaned from this dialogue. Peter was given that on account of his confession of Jesus as "*the Christ, the Son of the living God*."⁵⁹⁹ By virtue of that confession, Jesus promised to build His Church on the 'rock' of Peter, a pronouncement that Catholics extol and Protestants abhor. The historical facts are these: Peter was most certainly the leader of the early apostolic band, though not of the Jerusalem Church. He was *primus inter pares*, 'first among equals.' Jesus not only informed Peter of the sifting that His big-mouthed disciple would undergo at Satan's hands, He also reassured Peter that He has already prayed for him, and that on Peter's return he was to '*strengthen his brothers*.' One cannot fail to see the importance of Peter in the tiny circle from which Jesus would build His

⁵⁹⁸ Luthardt; 369.

⁵⁹⁹ Matthew 16:16

Church. That the situation has to be reset is noted by Jesus' address: He does not call His disciple 'Peter,' the name He gave to him after his confession, but rather 'Simon, son of Jonah,' the name he had *before* that confession. Morris notes, "His actions showed that Peter had not wanted a crucified Lord. But Jesus was crucified. How did Peter's devotion stand in the light of this?"⁶⁰⁰

So, in this restoration of Peter, do we have here in John 21 the making of the first Pope? Certainly, as one would expect, Cornelius a Lapide thinks so, "When Christ was about to go away into heaven, He here appoints Peter His vicar upon earth, and creates him Chief Pontiff, that the one church might be ruled by one shepherd."⁶⁰¹ This view hinges on the meaning of Jesus' command that Peter '*feed*' and '*shepherd*' His lambs/sheep. While there can be no doubt that Jesus is laying this responsibility on Peter, can it be asserted that He is laying it *exclusively* or *primarily* on Peter? If we hear Peter himself, many years later when he wrote his first epistle, we can see that he never considered himself 'Chief Pontiff' or Pope. He was a 'fellow elder' with those to whom he wrote, those who were second- and third-generation believers and not numbered among the original Apostles. We cannot doubt that Peter's heart reminisced about this difficult conversation with Jesus by the Sea of Tiberius when he wrote these words,

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

(I Peter 5:1-4)

Peter is not singled out from the other disciples because Jesus intended to anoint him 'vicar' in His absence. He singled Peter out because Peter had singled himself out from among his fellows when he boasted of his unwavering loyalty. "The conversation between Jesus and Peter is basically about penitence, not primacy; its aim is not to establish or reinforce a particular status, but to effect reconciliation. Giving Peter a fresh task signals the reestablishment of trust, following Peter's own profession of love."⁶⁰²

⁶⁰⁰ Morris; 871.

⁶⁰¹ Lapide; 654.

⁶⁰² Wright; 678.

The Theology of the Gospel of John – Part III

If there is any significance in the shift back and forth between Jesus speaking of *'His lambs'* and *'His sheep'* it may be in the distinction in the shepherd's task between caring for individual sheep (*'My lambs'*) from that duty the shepherd has to the entire flock (*'My sheep'*). Luthardt writes, "*Arnia* are the lambs, each one of which needed careful attention. *Probata* are the sheep, which makes up the herd, and which need common leading."⁶⁰³ Again, dogmatism is impossible here, and even more so than with the two words translated 'love.' That there is a dual characteristic of the shepherding office, no pastor would deny. This is a biblical truth, though it may not be one taught in this particular passage of the Bible.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me." (21:18-19)

Clement of Rome, writing in the late first century, bore witness of Peter's death as a martyr.

Peter, through unjust envy, endured not one or two but many labours, and at last, having delivered his testimony, departed unto the place of glory due to him. Through envy Paul, too, showed by example the prize that is given to patience: seven times was he cast into chains; he was banished; he was stoned; having become a herald, both in the East and in the West, he obtained the noble renown due to his faith; and having preached righteousness to the whole world, and having come to the extremity of the West, and having borne witness before rulers, he departed at length out of the world, and went to the holy place, having become the greatest example of patience.⁶⁰⁴

Early testimony in the Church had Peter meeting his death in Rome, which is conceivable as it was the practice of the Romans to execute the leaders of proscribed groups or rebellious tribes in the Roman coliseum. But it is unlikely that the legend reported by the 3rd Century historian Eusebius, that Peter was crucified upside down because he did not consider himself worthy to die the same death as his Lord, is most likely spurious. Romans were not given to granting last requests for crucifixion victims, and being crucified upside down would likely have hastened death, which was not the

⁶⁰³ Luthardt; 370.

⁶⁰⁴ I Clement 5:4-7; [First Clement: Clement of Rome \(earlychristianwritings.com\)](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com) accessed 31 May 2022.

goal of crucifixion in general. That Peter was crucified as a Christian during the reign of the Emperor Nero is fairly well attested, though the earliest reference is in Clement, some thirty years later, and then by Tertullian, over a hundred and fifty years after the fact.

All this to say that John 21:18 is somewhat indefinite in terms of the manner of death that Peter was to suffer, though it seems fairly clear that his death was not to be of 'natural causes.' The phrase '*stretch out your hands*' can refer to crucifixion, though followed by '*and someone else will gird you*' would indicate that the meaning is not crucifixion, in which the victim was stripped before being nailed to the cross. Hoskyns is perhaps reading later testimony into the Johannine passage: "It can hardly be doubted that the Evangelist intends his readers to understand that Peter was, like his Master, to suffer death by crucifixion."⁶⁰⁵

Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me." Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?" (21:20-23)

Thus far Epilogue, now Postscript. When he wrote the Fourth Gospel, John was well advanced in years – perhaps in his eighties – and possibly aware of his impending departure. In recounting Peter's restoration, which was a necessary epilogue to the narrative, he also recalls the legend circulating among the churches that Jesus had predicted John's continued life until the Second Coming. Though he suffered mightily for his faith, John apparently was the only disciple to die of old age – or at least that is what Eusebius tells us from his 'front row' seat in the early 3rd Century. Still, the hypothesis is quite plausible of an aging and possibly ailing John, knowing that his departure could cause great disturbance in the flock on account of this misinterpretation of Jesus' words, therefore writing a brief correction, as it were: 'the rumors of my immortality are greatly exaggerated.' The emphasis of Jesus' words are not on the length of the life of the Beloved Disciple, but on each and every disciple looking to his or her own discipleship and not that of another: "*What is that to you? You follow Me*" is the Lord's response to every believer's query in regard to the divine providence concerning another.

⁶⁰⁵ Hoskyns; 557.

This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen. (21:24-25)

Many scholars consider these last two verses to be added by a disciple of John, writing a final attestation, perhaps after the apostle's death. Morris considers, "The last two verses look like a conclusion written by someone other than the author of the preceding."⁶⁰⁶ Had John's death been announced in these verses, then it would be rather obvious that another had penned them, but on the face of it there does not seem to be any reason for this theory. Throughout the gospel the author has referred to himself, we conclude, in the third person – most frequently as *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. That the author is referred to here in the third person is entirely in keeping with this pattern and another writer is not necessary. The final verse is a rough parallel to the closing verses of the previous chapter, with a little hyperbole thrown in to reinforce the fact that Jesus did and taught many, many things during His walk on this earth. Scholars have since attempted to fill the earth with their volumes concerning Jesus and His work, some of which have been of great value to the Church; most of which, however, have not. In the end, therefore, the Church must have recourse to that which was written for her instruction by '*men moved by the Holy Spirit who spoke from God.*'

Finis

⁶⁰⁶ Morris; 879.