

Chapter One

“An Approach to the Gospel of John”

In another booklet I have provided notes for those who have listened to several broadcasts that present a brief summary survey of the Gospel of John during our survey of the New Testament. The booklet you are now reading is the first of six booklets in which I am summarizing one hundred and thirty broadcasts that teach the Gospel of John verse by verse.

The Apostle John is the author of this Gospel. As I read this Gospel, I know the purpose for which John has written and, therefore, my purpose as I read, because John clearly tells us why he wrote this fourth Gospel: “And truly, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” (20:30,31)

A “sign” is a miracle that proves something, or what we might call “a miraculous evidence”. According to John, when Jesus Christ was here He performed many “signs”. In the very last verse of his Gospel, John writes that he did not record all the signs Jesus performed because, if he had, the world would not be able to hold the books that would have to be written.

MINI BIBLE COLLEGE

BOOKLET TWENTY-THREE

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

VERSE BY VERSE

(Chapters 1-3)

John is telling us that his Gospel is a written account of certain miracles Jesus performed. He is selectively sharing his record of these miracles because he wants us to believe that Jesus is the Christ the Messiah, the Son of God. He is absolutely convinced that when we believe we will have the quality of life God wants every human being to have. He calls that quality of life "eternal life".

Another thing I like about the writing of John is that he writes to us in a beautiful "sign language". This fourth Gospel is an example of what Paul meant when he wrote that, "The Jew requires a sign." (I Corinthians 1:22) This Gospel is an illustration of what we might call the spiritual and biblical "sign language" of the Jew.

When John wrote the Revelation, in the very first verse he tells us how that Revelation was given to him: "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants, things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John."

"Signified" is an interesting word. John is telling us that the literary form of the revelation he received from God on the Isle of Patmos was spiritual "sign language". Paul adds more insight into this word when he writes of Hebrew history: "All these things happened to them for examples, and they are written as an admonition for you and me upon whom the ends of the world are come." (I Corinthians 10:11)

The Greek word Paul used that is translated, as "examples" is

the word "tupos". This word means "type" as in the type set by a printer. Paul is telling us that the historical literature of the Bible is filled with examples and warnings that are allegories. If you look up the word "allegory" in the dictionary, you will find that an allegory is "A story in which people, places and things have a deeper meaning that instructs us morally or spiritually."

The Apostle Paul also writes about the fact that Abraham had two sons. That is not myth; that is history. But after telling us Abraham had two sons, he writes: "Now this is an allegory." (Galatians 4:22-24) He therefore, sets this precedent: in the Scripture, historical truth can be applied allegorically. This means that the people, places and things in that passage of Scripture - like the two sons of Abraham - have a deeper meaning that can instruct us spiritually.

That is what I mean when I say that the Apostle John writes the fourth Gospel, as he wrote the Book of Revelation, in an inspired, allegorical Jewish sign language. The Revelation is a message that is addressed to the people of God in sign, or coded language. If we want to understand that message, we must have the keys that break that code. There is a sense in which this is also true in the Gospel of John.

This Gospel is written on two levels. A child can understand the simple words used by John. On this first level John's Gospel is the simplest of the four Gospels. However, when we realize that

John is writing in this sign language we should frequently look for a deeper meaning in the Gospel of John. There is often that allegorical meaning where the people, places and things have another meaning that can instruct us spiritually. That deeper level of meaning makes this the most profound of the four Gospels, but to understand that deeper meaning we need to have “keys” that interpret the code.

It is when we read the Gospel of John with the keys that give us insight into that deeper level of truth that we appreciate the Gospel of John. Before we look at this magnificent Gospel, verse by verse, I want to share with you some keys that will help break the code of that second beautiful level of truth in this fourth Gospel.

The first key I want to share with you is the Holy Spirit. We simply cannot discern spiritual truth unless or until the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives (I Corinthians 2:9-16; John 16:13). The Apostle Paul tells us why when he teaches writes that, “Spiritual truth is spirituality discerned.” The unspiritual or natural man cannot understand spiritual truth and, as a result of that reality, the unspiritual man will call the great spiritual truths of the Spirit, foolishness, according to Paul. Therefore, the first Key we must have, if we are to break the code of this profound fourth Gospel, is that we simply must have the Holy Spirit as our Teacher.

A second key that will break the code of this fourth Gospel is to realize that ninety percent of the content of the Gospel of John is not found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. That is why

Matthew, Mark and Luke are called “Synoptic Gospels”. The content of those Gospels is synonymous. But ninety percent of what we find in the Gospel of John is not found in those synonymous Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. This means we would not know about ninety percent of the events and people we read about in the Gospel of John if John had not written this fourth Gospel.

A third key to the fourth Gospel is to realize that this is the only book of the Bible that is addressed to the unbeliever. The Apostle Paul wrote that, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” That passage is telling us the purpose for which the whole Bible was written. The purpose of the entire Bible is that the man or woman of God might be perfect, or complete, thoroughly equipped for all the good works his heavenly Father wants him or her to do (II Timothy 3:16, 17).

This means there is only one message in the Bible for the unbeliever and that is to repent and believe the Gospel. When that unbeliever repents and is born again, then God has sixty-six holy little books - including the Gospel of John - that will instruct, equip, and perfect them for every good work God wants them to do.

As we will see, there is much rich devotional truth in the Gospel of John that is very profitable for the believer. However, this book is clearly addressed to the unbeliever that the unbeliever might

believe. That makes the Gospel of John a unique book in the canon of Scripture. This evangelistic purpose of the Gospel of John is another key to our understanding this great Gospel.

The Argument of the Gospel of John

Still another key we must consider as we approach the Gospel of John is to realize that John presents a systematic argument all the way through his Gospel. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are unique biographies of Jesus. They have their distinct objectives, and they do present systematic arguments as they profile the life of Jesus, but they do not have arguments that are as systematic and obvious as the argument John presents in his Gospel.

That argument is stated in those verses at the end of chapter twenty, where the author of this Gospel told us why he was recording these miracles Jesus performed: that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and receive eternal life because we believe (20:30,31). Find that argument, that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, systematically presented all the way through the Gospel of John, and you will have discovered another key to understanding and appreciating this Gospel.

Three Questions

There is another key to this Gospel implied in John's statement of purpose. There are three questions you will find answered all the way through this Gospel. In every chapter of this Gospel, John will answer these three questions. Question number one: "Who is Jesus?" All the way through this Gospel John is telling us Who Jesus is.

A second question John answers is this question: "What is faith?" What does it mean to believe these things about Jesus? John will not only challenge us to believe, but he will tell us what it means to believe. He will tell us what faith is, and in many wonderful ways, he will show us what faith looks like as well as tell us what faith is.

Then, a third question John will consistently answer in chapter after chapter of this Gospel is: "What is life?" What is this eternal life you are telling us about, John? You will find this third question answered in every chapter of this great Gospel.

As you read the Gospel of John, these three questions - and especially their answers - are a very important key that will show you the personal and devotional application of the message that comes to us wrapped in the beautiful sign language of John. Read the Gospel of John seeking the answers to these three questions: Who is Jesus? What is faith? What is life?

The Spiritual Art Gallery

We read that some Greeks approached the Apostle Philip and said to him, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” (12:21) Their request represents another vital key to understanding and appreciating this most profound of the four Gospels: read the Gospel of John to see Jesus.

As an introduction to the Gospel of John, this is a final key I want to share with you: consider the Gospel of John as if it were a “spiritual art gallery” with each chapter a different “room” in that gallery. On the “walls” (in the verses) of each of these rooms (chapters), there are beautiful “portraits” of Jesus. As I have read through the Gospel of John using this perspective as a key to my understanding this Gospel, some of the beautiful word portraits of Jesus I have found in this Gospel are:

In Chapter One: He is the Word, the Word made flesh, the Creator, the Life that was Light, the True Light that lights every man who comes into the world, the One Who gives the power to become sons of God, the Lamb of God Who has come to take away the sins of the world, the Anointed One, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph, the King of Israel, the Son of Man, and He is the rabbi Who lived what He taught.

In Chapter Two: He is the Giver of joy, the One Who loves His Father's house, the Cleanser of His Father's house, the Living Proof of all His claims about Himself, the Committed One Who only

commits Himself to those who commit themselves to Him, and He is the One Who can turn our water into wine.

In Chapter Three: He is the Teacher come from God, the Miracle-working Teacher, the Heavenly Man, the Lifted Up One, God's only begotten Son, God's only Solution, God's only Savior, the absolute criteria for Salvation, and He is the Bridegroom.

In Chapter Four: He is a Jew without prejudice, He is a weary Man, the Gift of God, the Giver of Living Water, a Counselor Who is very directive in the way He counsels people, a Prophet, the Messiah, a Man Who told a woman everything she ever did, the Lord of the harvest, the Savior of the world, and He is the Giver of Life.

In Chapter Five: Jesus is the Great Physician Who cannot ignore a great multitude of weak people. He is a Man, Who deliberately breaks the legalistic interpretation of the Law of Moses so He can enter into a dialogue about legalism. He is a man Who claimed equality with God. He is the Judge of all the earth. He is the Resurrection. He is the Key to all the Scriptures.

In Chapter Six: He is the Bread of Life and the Man Who does meaningful work.

In Chapter Seven: He is a Teacher Who claims that His teaching is the teaching of God. He is also such a dynamic speaker that soldiers forget why they came to arrest Him. When they return without their Prisoner, their only explanation is that “No man ever spoke like that Man!” (7:44-46) He is also the Source of life's two

greatest experiences: being born again yourself and being the vehicle through which rivers of Living Water flow out to others. (7:37-39)

In Chapter Eight: He is the Friend of sinners, the Light of the world, the Man with direction in His life, the Man who always pleased the Father, the Truth that made men free indeed, and He is the Eternal One Who was before Abraham.

In Chapter Nine: He is the Man, Who must work the works of His Father, and He is the Lord, Who accepts worship from a man whom He has healed. He is the Light that gives sight to the spiritually blind, and reveals spiritual blindness in those who do not believe they are blind.

In Chapter Ten: He is the Good Shepherd of the sheep, the Door of the sheepfold, the sovereign Shepherd.

In Chapter Eleven: He is the Resurrection and the Life, and the Solver of life's two most unsolvable problems, sickness and death.

In Chapter Twelve: He is a kernel of wheat that falls into the ground and dies that it might glorify God by bringing forth a great harvest of fruit. He is a Glorified Christ, He is a worshipped Christ, and He is a popular Christ.

In Chapter Thirteen: He is the humble servant Jesus Who assumes the role of a slave and washes the feet of His apostles. He is the departing Christ, Who issues a new commandment that creates a new community.

In Chapter Fourteen: He is the coming Christ and He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. You could also say He is the dogmatic Christ because He not only tells us He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, but He tells us that no man can come to the Father except by Him. He is also a Christ, Who is preparing a place where He will take His followers to be with Him forever. He is a comforting Christ Who promises to send a Person and a Peace to His followers so that their hearts should not be troubled.

In Chapter Fifteen: He is a Vine looking for branches. He is a Life-giving Christ. He is a condemning Christ, a hated Christ and a choosing Christ.

In Chapter Sixteen: He is the Christ, Who promises to send the Holy Spirit to comfort and enable His disciples. He is a deserted Christ, but He is a victorious Christ.

In Chapter Seventeen: He is the Great High Priest, Who intercedes for the apostles and those who will believe through the apostles.

In Chapter Eighteen: He is the faithful Witness Who was born into this world to bear witness to the truth. He is the betrayed Christ, the innocent Christ and the unpopular Christ.

In Chapter Nineteen: He is the crucified Christ and the buried Christ.

In Chapter Twenty: He is the risen Christ.

In Chapter Twenty-one: He is the commissioning Christ.

Based on John's stated purpose for writing this book (20:30,31), we should expect to find a great many answers to this question all the way through this Gospel: "Who is Jesus?" As we begin our study of the Gospel of John together, I have an assignment and a challenge for you: read through the Gospel of John and find word portraits of Jesus for every chapter in this Gospel.

Then prayerfully meditate through the Gospel of John, reflecting on the portraits of Jesus Christ you found in this Gospel. Memorize at least one portrait of Jesus for each chapter of this Gospel. In the Gospel of John you will find many, many answers to the question "Who is Jesus?" As you find your answers to this question, you will have "a spiritual art gallery" of Jesus Christ showing you Jesus in many wonderful and beautiful ways.

When Mother Teresa was asked the question, "What does Jesus mean to you?" her answer was very much like the spiritual art gallery in the Gospel of John. She quickly recited from the top of her heart, dozens and dozens of beautiful word pictures of what Jesus meant to her, not only found in the Gospel of John. She profiled her personal Christ while quoting verses from Genesis to the Book of Revelation.

I wonder, what is your vision of Christ? Who is Jesus to you? What does He mean to you? While meditating through the Gospel of John, answering the question "Who is Jesus?" you will discover that

it is possible to know the One Who has saved you, and discover all that He wants to be to you.

As you read this Gospel, observe how that second question, "What is faith?" is also answered in many beautiful ways. John tells us what he means by "believe". In the very first chapter of this Gospel, as we read about the first time six of the apostles met Jesus, we discover some practical answers to the question "What is faith?" Two of these men are disciples of John the Baptist and are instructed by John to follow Jesus.

They are literally following Jesus down a road when Jesus turns to them and asks, "What do you want?" They reply, in so many words, " Rabbi, where do you live?" He responds with, "Come and see." We read, "They came and saw where He lived, and they lived with Him." The story goes on to tell us they lived for Him and every one of them died for Him because of what they saw when they made the commitment to come and see where and how Jesus lived.

According to this demonstration of what it means to believe, faith means to come and see; to live with Him; to be asking Him the question, "Where life actually happens, does what You are teaching really work?" When we personally apply the values and teachings of Jesus, that is when we discover what faith really is, according to the Apostle John. All the way through this Gospel there will be beautiful examples of what it means to believe.

Based on John's stated purposes for writing, we will also find that third question answered in the Gospel of John: "What is life?" What is this eternal life of which John is writing? What is this quality of life God meant for us to have, which we do not have until we believe in Jesus Christ? We will also find John's beautiful answers to this third question all the way through his Gospel. For example, eternal life is like one drink that can quench our thirst for the rest of our lives, and like bread that can satisfy our hunger for the rest of our lives (4:1-42; 6:48-51).

I now invite you to study with me, verse by verse, through the twenty-one chapters of this fourth Gospel. As we study this Gospel together, let this be one of the keys that breaks the code of the magnificent message of this profound biography of Jesus: As you read this Gospel, look for the answers to these three questions: Who is Jesus? What is faith, and what is life?

Chapter Two

“The Living Word”

(John 1:1-18)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him; and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it (1:4,5). That was the true Light, which gives light to every man coming into the world.

“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 power to become the sons of God, even 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.

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. ... No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has fully declared Him.”

In my approach to this Gospel, by way of introduction, I shared some keys to the unique message of the Gospel of John. In this chapter, I want to begin our study of this Gospel, verse by verse.

I was taught that when you preach a sermon you should do three things: First you should tell people what you are going to tell them. Then you should tell them, and then you should tell them what you have told them.

That instruction describes the way the Gospel of John is organized. The first eighteen verses of this Gospel are a prologue in which the Apostle John tells us what He is going to tell us. Then, beginning with verse nineteen of Chapter One, through verse twenty-nine of Chapter Twenty, John tells us. Then, in verses thirty and thirty-one of that same chapter, he tells us what he has told us. Those key verses of this Gospel also tell us why John has told us what he has told us.

There is a sense in which all that John is going to tell us in the twenty-one chapters of his Gospel is presented to us, in capsule form, in his prologue. When John tells us what He is going to tell us, He writes that the Word was with God in the beginning, and that Word was God. John is describing Jesus Christ when he refers to this “Word” that was in the beginning with God, and was God.

As I observed in my introduction, this fourth Gospel is all about Jesus Christ. We should therefore read the Gospel of John looking for Christ. In the first verse of this Gospel, when he refers to

Jesus Christ as the “Word” John is presenting his first portrait of Jesus.

What does John mean when He refers to Jesus Christ as the “Word?” A word is a vehicle of expression. If I have a thought in my mind and I want to communicate that thought to your mind, the vehicle that carries that thought from my mind to your mind is a word.

The thought John is conveying here is that, in the beginning - as the creation account in the Book of Genesis also tells us - God already was, and in both these inspired descriptions of the beginning, God was not alone. In Genesis, the relative pronouns that refer to God are plural, and according to John, in the beginning the Word was with God. When Jesus prays for His apostles, He asks the Father to give Him back the glory He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5). God had thought, or truth in His mind that He wanted to convey to man. Jesus Christ was the Vehicle of expression, or Word Who carried that thought from the mind of God to our minds.

John’s prologue ends with a great summary statement about Jesus: "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." (1:18)

In verses fourteen and eighteen, John tells us this Word became flesh and lived among us so we could see and hear the thoughts of God, which Jesus fully revealed to us. Later in this Gospel, John will quote Jesus saying, "I am the Truth" and "I was

born to bear witness to the truth.” (14:6; 18:37) Jesus Christ was the Truth God wants to share with you and me.

The Bible tells us in many places that no man has ever really seen God. Men have experienced manifestations and revelations of God, and some of them were awesome and spectacular. But those expressions or revelations of God were not all the God there was to see. No human being could see God in all His fullness. The Old Testament clearly tells us nobody could do that and survive the experience (Exodus 33:20). No man has ever seen God in this total sense. According to John, the closest you and I will ever come to seeing a total revelation of God is what we see when we see Jesus. That is another reason this “spiritual art gallery” is my favorite of the four Gospels.

“The only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father” means that our Lord Jesus Christ was and is in intimate fellowship with the Father. To be in someone's bosom, meant to be seated at their right hand at a dinner, or in other words, in the most intimate place of fellowship. The essence of the meaning of this verse is that this Son (Word), Who was and is in intimate fellowship with God the Father, has fully revealed God.

The Greek word, which is translated as the words "fully declared," is the word "exegeted". When you study Greek in seminary, your first year is a study of the grammar, vocabulary, and basics of the Greek language. If you take four years of Greek, after

the first year, the other three years are called, "exegesis". To “exegete” a verse of Scripture means to bring out of those verses all the truth that is in those verses. (ex = out of, gesis = truth or knowledge). John is telling us that all the truth a human mind is capable of comprehending about God was exegeted by Jesus Christ.

As I observed when we were surveying the lives of people like Abraham, Moses, and David in the Old Testament, when God wants to communicate a great concept like faith, He wraps that concept in a person. John is telling us that Jesus was the Person in Whom Almighty God wrapped all the truth He wanted to communicate to this world. Jesus was that Person by everything He was, and by everything He did. Jesus also fulfilled that role by everything He said. In the Gospels, anytime we read: "He opened His mouth and taught them" we should realize that Jesus Christ was the greatest revelation God has given to this world.

That is what John means when he tells us that Jesus Christ was and is the Word of God. Jesus Christ was and is the living Word of God Who was with God in the beginning and was God. He was the Word Who became flesh, came into this world, and exegeted God for us all. The greatest revelation of God is not the Bible. The greatest revelation God has ever given this world is Jesus Christ.

Science and sophisticated technology are confronting us these days with challenging ethical issues, like genetic engineering, human cloning, abortion, and euthanasia. No matter what the issues may be,

we should always begin with Jesus and ask ourselves, “Did Jesus address this issue, at least in principle?” What we believe should always begin with Jesus. The Truth Jesus was, and the truth Jesus taught must be the foundation and the heart of what we believe if we are to be found worthy of identifying ourselves as the disciples of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Was God

There is a sense in which the primary theme and thrust of the fourth Gospel is expressed in the last five words of verse one, where we read, "And the Word was God." The Word of which John writes not only was in the beginning, and was with God. This Word was God! The argument of the Gospel of John is that when the Word that was God became flesh and exegeted God for us, that Word was Jesus Christ! All the way through his Gospel, John's objective is to tell us that Jesus was not only godly. He was God! This will be the special emphasis of the claims of Jesus in His hostile dialog with the religious leaders that John records in chapters Five through Eight.

This profound truth John is sharing with us is summarized in the word “incarnation.” John is telling us that Almighty God became flesh. The Latin word “carne” is the word for flesh. Incarnation, therefore, means “in flesh.” John is telling us that Almighty God became flesh. The Gospel of Christmas is the Good News that God became flesh to save us all.

I am so determined to convey the meaning of this concept of incarnation that I want you to challenge you to use your imagination for a few minutes. Imagine that you consistently find ants in your kitchen and all over your house. Suppose you decide to solve your ant problem. You discover that the ants are coming from an anthill in the corner of your yard. There is a stream of ants moving perpetually from that anthill into your house. The ants are getting food from your house and then going back to the anthill where they store and eat your food.

If you could communicate with the ants in that anthill, you could work out a solution with them. Perhaps you would be willing to leave them a food supply near their anthill if they would agree to stay out of your house. By observing these ants, you know they communicate with each other, but your problem is that you cannot communicate with these ants.

Imagine that you really wanted to communicate with those ants, and you loved them enough, to actually put aside your existence as a human being and became an ant. You then went down into the anthill long enough to say to the ants, “I may look like an ant, but I am actually the man who lives in that house. I am willing to sacrifice a 2 kilogram bag of sugar, which I will leave here in the corner of the yard, if you will stay out of my house.”

Although in some ways this is a ridiculous illustration, I believe it demonstrates in a small way the meaning of this beautiful

biblical concept of “incarnation”. Think of the challenge God faced when He decided to declare the miracle and message of salvation to human beings. The Good News announced by this fourth Gospel is that God did have enough love for man to become human flesh so He could bring salvation and eternal life to you and me.

In Summary

In his prologue, as John tells us what He is going to tell us, He writes that Jesus was the Word and, as the Word, He was with God in the beginning before the world was created and He was God. He became flesh and dwelt among us so that we would not only read words about God from a sacred page, He wanted us to see what God looks like, lived out in a human life. The Greek word that is translated as “dwelt” is a word that means He “pitched His tent” among us. When God became man, He revealed what God actually is and showed us all the truth we are able to comprehend about God (1:1, 14, 18).

John also tells us in his prologue: “He was in the world and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came to His own (meaning the Jewish people) and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He the power (authority) to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on His name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (1:12,13)

As this beloved Apostle tells us what He is going to tell us, He is essentially putting it this way: “When the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, He presented Himself to certain people in this world. He presented Himself to His own people, the Jewish people. Most of the Jewish people did not receive Him, especially their religious leaders. However, those who did receive Him properly were born again.”

The word “receive” in verse twelve is a word that actually means to believe. When Jesus was here in the flesh, He did not tell people to bow their heads, and ask Him to come into their hearts, because He was here in the flesh. The proposition was not that they receive Him in that way. That will come later. The word “receive” in this verse is a synonym for “believe”. We read that “He was in the world and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.” The poet tells us, “He was crucified on a cross of wood and He made the hill on which it stood.” The Jewish people were not the only ones who rejected Him. An American Negro spiritual Christmas Carol song cries: “We did not know it was You, Lord! We did not know Who You were!”

But the good news is this: some did receive Him, like the twelve apostles. Many people do not realize that the twelve apostles were all Jews. Some Jews did believe and to those who believed “He gave the power (this is the Greek word “authority”) to become the sons of God, even to those who believed on His name.”

In other words, when He met with people, most of them did not believe Him when He told them Who He was. But some did, and when they believed, He gave them the power to become what God always intended they should be: children of God. And they had an experience. That experience was like being born all over again.

They had all been born physically. They had been born of blood, of the will of the flesh and the will of men. They had all experienced a natural, physical birth. But when they received from Jesus the power to become sons of God, they had a birth that was not a physical birth. They experienced a birth that was spiritual. John tells us they were "born of God" or "born from above". In the third chapter of this Gospel, Jesus will call this being "born again".

As you read this Gospel, make the observation that, after He tells us what He is going to tell us here in his prologue, He will then present interviews Jesus had with people who were born again because they responded properly to Jesus. Some of the first people Jesus interviews become His apostles. Then there will be others like a rabbi named Nicodemus, who is told by Jesus that he must be born again.

In Chapter Four, Jesus will interview a woman at a well in Samaria. Jesus describes the new birth experience for her in very different language. He talks to her about a drink of living water that will quench her thirst for the rest of her life. He will interview a man at a pool in Chapter Five. He will interview and heal a blind man in

Chapter Nine. His life intersects with different people all the way through this Gospel. But, what are these interviews and these people telling us?

John tells us right up front what they tell us. When Jesus met with people and they did not believe, nothing happened. But when they believed, He gave them the power to become the sons of God and they experienced something. According to John, they were born of God. In all the chapters that follow John's prologue, and in all the interviews recorded in those chapters, that is precisely what John is showing us and telling us.

As I have already observed, when John comes to the end of his Gospel, He tells us what He has told us by giving us his stated purpose for writing this Gospel. Essentially, at the end of Chapter Twenty, John writes: "I have not told you about all of His signs, but I am telling you about these signs Jesus performed, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because if you believe what I have told you about Jesus, you will be born of God and you will have eternal life.

Chapter Three

“The Witness”

(John 1:1-11)

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through Him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. John bore witness of Him, and cried, saying, ‘This is He of whom I spoke, “He that comes after me is before me: for He was before me. And of His fullness have all we received grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”’ (1:17)

In the first chapters of this booklet, I have focused primarily on three verses from the prologue to the Gospel of John: verses one, fourteen, and eighteen of Chapter One. Between those three verses, in verses six through eight, and fifteen through seventeen, we are being introduced to another man whose name is John. This is John the Baptist. Jesus said something about this John that is the greatest compliment any human being has ever been given: There is no man born of woman greater than John and there is no prophet greater than John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11; Luke 7:28).

According to Jesus, John the Baptist was the greatest of all the prophets and he was simply the greatest man who ever lived. Now that should make us stop and take a look at this man sent from

God whose name was John.

The author of this Gospel makes it very clear that this John was not the Light, but he was sent to bear witness to that Light. In this prologue, observe how many times the verb “was” is used in reference to Jesus Christ. We read over and over again in these first eighteen verses of John’s Gospel: “He was, He was, He was.” When writing about Jesus, the apostle writes, “He was”, but observe, when we are introduced to this man John the Baptist, how consistently we read: “He was not, he was not, he was not.”

Also observe that when Jesus, the Living Word, becomes flesh how often He says, “I am, I am, I am.” One of the wonderful ways to study the life of Christ in the Gospel of John is to trace the “I am's” of Jesus Christ through this Gospel. While we consistently here Jesus say, “I am”, observe how often we hear John say the opposite. This is what we hear John the Baptist consistently saying: “This is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask Him, ‘Who are you?’ And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’ And they asked Him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you that prophet?’ He answered, ‘No.’ Then they said to Him, ‘Who are you that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What do you have to say about yourself?’ He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah.’ And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.” (John

1:19-24)

When these religious authorities are commissioned to interview John the Baptist and they ask him questions like: "Are you the Christ? Are you Elijah? Are you that prophet? Who are you? What do you say about yourself?" As he replies, "No" and "I am not" to all their questions, observe how consistently he is making the statement, "I am not."

We meet this man again in Chapter Three. John's disciples come to Him and essentially say, "Rabbi, everybody is going to hear that Man you said was greater than you. Nobody is coming to hear you preach anymore." He essentially responds, "I told you I was not. I told you that He is, and I am not, and that He must increase but I must decrease. He is the Bridegroom and those people are the bride. I am only a very good friend at the wedding, who rejoices to see the Bridegroom married to His bride (3:28-30).

The secret to the greatness of this man is simply this: he accepted the limits of His limitations and he accepted the responsibility for his ability. He accepted the responsibility for being who God designed him to be, and he also knew who he was not to be. When that commission pressed him for an answer to their question, he told them he was a voice crying in the wilderness. That was who, what, and where he was assigned by God to be. He knew it would be foolish to try to be more than that, and he believed life was too precious to be anything less than who God had willed him to be.

One of the questions the religious leaders asked John the Baptist was, "What do you say about yourself?" The dictionary definition of the word "self" is: "The uniqueness, the individuality of any given person that makes Him distinct from every other living person."

The Scripture teaches consistently that when God made John the Baptist, and when God made you and me, He threw the mold away. Every time God makes a human being He throws the mold away. There is nobody like you, there never has been and there never shall be. You and I are designed by God to be unique individuals. Every human being is designed by God to be unique. There are sixty billion plus fingers in this world today and every one of them has all unique fingerprints. This is a witness to the unique design God has for every human being. What we call DNA today goes far beyond fingerprints in confirmation of this great miracle.

According to the Scripture, one of the first byproducts of our salvation, is what Paul calls, "The good, acceptable, and perfect will of God" for our lives (Romans 12:1,2). In other words, when we are born again, we discover our uniqueness, and our individuality in Christ. Before we are born again, we tend to imitate, copy, conform, or allow ourselves to be dominated until we are like everybody else. In many ways, we are like Esau in the Old Testament. "We sell our birthrights for a bowl of soup." (Genesis 25:29-34)

The Scripture refers to this unique person God intends you to be as your “self”. When Jesus said, "What would it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose himself," or, “What would a man give in exchange for himself", He was talking about the “self” we are designed by God to be, that will make us distinct from all other living persons (Mark 8:36,37).

There is a good, acceptable, and perfect will of God for you and me. We do not discover this unique individuality until we come to Christ. But, one of the first byproducts of coming to Christ is that we are able to recover the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God for our lives. Those like John the Baptist, who have discovered God's perfect plan, will accept the limits of their limitations and the responsibility to be who, what, and where God wills them to be.

The example of John the Baptist is presented on the pages of Scripture to challenge us to believe that the same God Who had a purpose for the life of John the Baptist has a purpose for our lives. Do you know who God wants you to be? Do you believe God has a plan for what and where He wants you to be in this world? That is the way we should apply to our own personal lives what the Scripture is telling us about the greatest man and the greatest prophet who ever lived.

The Record of John

In the first chapter of this Gospel, in verse 19, we read: "This is the record of John." Then in verse 32: "And John bare record." In verse 34, John is quoted as saying, "I saw, and bare record." Precisely, what is the record of John? The record of John the Baptist is consistent with the theme of this Gospel. Remember, there is a systematic argument all the way through this Gospel. That argument is part of the stated purpose of the Gospel - which is to convince us, that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, that we might be born again and have eternal life.

If we drop down to verse 26 we find John responding to another question: “Why do you baptize?” He responds: “I baptize with water: but there stands One among you, Whom you know not. He it is, Who, coming after me, is preferred before me, Whose shoe laces I am not worthy to unloose.”

Then, in verse twenty-nine we read: “The next day John sees Jesus coming to Him, and says, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of Whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man Who is preferred before me: for He was before me.’ And I knew Him not: but that He should be manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

“And John bare record, saying, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the Same said unto

me, 'Upon Whom you shall see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He Who baptizes with the Holy Ghost.' And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."

When he was sent to baptize, the One Who sent Him to baptize said, "One day you are going to be baptizing people. When you baptize a certain Man, the Spirit is going to come upon Him like a dove and remain upon Him. When that happens, you will know that Man is the Son of God!" John bears record that when he was baptizing Jesus of Nazareth, he saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove and abide upon Jesus. So, John says, "I saw and bare record that this (Jesus of Nazareth) is the Son of God."

John the Baptist introduced Jesus with the words: "Behold, the Lamb of God, Who has come to take away the sin of the world." (1:29) As the last and greatest of the prophets, John the Baptist fulfilled the meaning of the millions of lambs that had been sacrificed in obedience to the Law of God as commanded in the Books of Exodus and Leviticus. The heart and soul of all those sacrifices was represented by the basic Jewish worship form of the Passover (Exodus 12; Luke 22:15,16).

The introduction of Jesus by John the Baptist connects the death of Jesus Christ on the cross with all those animal sacrifices that were at the heart of the worship liturgy of the Jews. This beautiful worship protocol was put in place when God gave Moses the instructions for the Tent of Worship. Many chapters of the Book of

Exodus read like an architect's book of specifications because God wanted the liturgy that showed a sinful people how to approach a holy God to be very simple and clearly understood. The Temple of Solomon was a permanent, lavish worship center in which the same liturgy patterns that were prescribed for and practiced in the little tent of worship were continued for centuries.

People who are not familiar with the Old Testament have suggested to me that when the Romans crucified Jesus, His followers invented the idea that He was the Lamb of God. However, John the Baptist presents that concept at the very beginning of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The apostles join the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist when they connect the death of Jesus with the Passover Lamb and the infinite number of animals that were sacrificed in the Temple of Solomon and in the Tabernacle in the Wilderness (Isaiah 53; I Peter 1:18,19; 2:23, 24; II Corinthians 5:21).

The Witness

Before we leave the life of John the Baptist, there is another important concept we can learn from him - the concept of being a witness. Jesus said, "Beginning at Jerusalem and then in Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth, you are to be My witnesses." (Acts 1:8)

What is a witness? A witness is a person who has experienced or observed something, and feels a responsibility to

share what he or she has experienced or observed. Although being a witness is something we are, more than something we do, our responsibility to be a witness involves more than who and what we are. Being a witness involves speaking out regarding what you have observed and experienced.

Imagine that you were ordered by a court to be a witness. You are put on the witness stand and are asked questions about what you had experienced or observed. I wonder if the court would approve if you refused to say anything, and explained: "I am simply going to let my life be my witness. Do you think that would be acceptable to that court? You would actually be ordered to speak, or be regarded as disrespectful of the court and disobedient to its authority. A witness does speak about that which he has observed or experienced.

As his powerful sermons place him in a dungeon, and when he showed great courage in confronting the sin of a wicked King for which he was decapitated, John indeed showed us that a witness speaks out. By his example, he shows us another dimension of what it means to be a witness. The Greek word the New Testament authors use for this word "witness" is a word that in its root meaning is actually the word "martyr". According to this faithful witness, as witnesses we are not to hunger and thirst for happiness or survival, but for the righteousness that makes us a witness to the glory of God.

Chapter Four

“Grace and Truth”

In the prologue to this Gospel we read: "And of his fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (1:17)

What does that mean? Grace is the Greek word, "charis". When grace is working in our lives, it is "charisma" or "charismata". The grace of God is defined as the favor and blessing of God that we do not deserve. We do not deserve anything from God, so any good thing that God gives us is grace.

But, in addition to being the unmerited favor of God, grace is also the power of God. Grace is the dynamic of God. "Grace is the work of God within us, without us." Grace is that miraculous new birth God works in us without any help from us except that we believe. "The will of God will never take us where the grace of God cannot keep us" is another attempt to profile the meaning of this concept of the grace of God.

It is as if we are saying to God, "I cannot." And God says, "I know that, but I can. So if you will align your life with Me in the right way, you can receive from Me the dynamic to be and to do. So you see, it is not a matter of who or what you are, or what you can or cannot do. It is a matter of Who I am and of what I can do. So, align

yourself with Me, and then come and prove that I can equip you and empower you to be all I want you to be and do all I want you to do. Follow Me and I will prove to you that this is true.”

When many people think about becoming a follower of Christ and see what that involves in terms of a total and absolute change in lifestyle on their part, say, “I could never do that. I could never live like that.” Of course, they are absolutely right. You cannot live like that; you cannot do that; no human beings can, unless the grace of God is given to them. If the grace of God is given to them, then they can. That is what is meant in verses 15 through 17 when it says, “Of his fullness we have received grace for grace.” One good translation reads, “... one blessing on top of another.” The sense of the words “Grace for grace” is “Grace on top of grace.”

This is very good news: “The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus.” God gave His people marvelous truth through Moses. But when God gave us His greatest Revelation of truth through the Eternal Word that became flesh, He also gave us the supernatural grace to apply that truth to our lives. This is undoubtedly a reference to the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon and indwelt the followers of Christ. The results of that awesome event are described this way in the Book of Acts: “Great grace was upon them all.” (Acts 4:33)

The Jewish believers, who experienced Pentecost, already had the Scriptures. They had been given the Law of God through

Moses. For centuries they had enjoyed truth that showed them how to live, but they did not have the dynamic to apply that truth to their lives. That is why the lives of the Old Testament believers were often warnings for us to heed rather than examples for us to follow (I Corinthians 10:11).

The authors of the New Testament, like the Apostle Paul, write that the Law is merely a straight edge placed next to our crookedness, to show us how crooked we are (Romans 3:19,20). James writes that the Word of God is like a mirror we should look into every morning, to see our imperfections (James 1:22-25). But when we see the crookedness, when we see the imperfections, where do we find the power to straighten out the crookedness, or to make the adjustments we need every morning when we look into the mirror of the Word of God? In other words, where do we find the grace to straighten out our lives?

That is what John is telling us about in this prologue when he writes that we can receive grace piled on top of grace. This is very good news: “The Law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus.”

Come and See

When John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God, we read that there were two men with him who were his disciples. Andrew was one of them. We are not told who the other disciple

was. Scholars believe the other disciple was John, the author of this Gospel. They believe this for two reasons.

When we read that, “Andrew first found his brother, Simon,” the Greek words actually say that Andrew was the first to find his brother. John also had a brother and these two sets of brothers were partners in the fishing business. “Andrew was the first to find his brother Simon (who then becomes known as Peter), and introduce him to Jesus,” is the essential meaning of these Greek words.

The second reason scholars believe the other disciple was John, is that the author of this Gospel consistently keeps a low profile as he writes this Gospel, referring to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” It is typical of his writing style to withhold the information that he was that other disciple of John the Baptist, who became one of the apostles of Jesus.

When John the Baptist instructed these two disciples to follow Jesus, we read: "Jesus turned and saw these men following Him, and He said to them, ‘What do you want?’ They said unto Him, ‘Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where do You live?’ He said unto them, ‘Come and see.’” We read that “They came and saw where He lived, and they lived with Him. ” (1: 35-39)

As I pointed out in my introduction to this Gospel, there is often a deeper meaning in the Gospel of John. What is really happening here as these disciples of John the Baptist now begin to

follow Jesus and He asks the question that leads to an invitation to come and see where and how He lives? The question, “What do you want?” is a profound question. God has made us creatures of choice. The free will of man is very important to God. God will not violate the freedom He has given man to make choices. Because we are creatures of choice we can have it our way.

The Psalms give us the great promise that God will give us the desires of our hearts (Psalm 37:4). Many devout believers wisely claim that verse as one of the great promises God has given us in His Word - and that is a great promise. However, at the same time, that verse is also a very great challenge. That verse also raises this question: “What are the desires of our hearts? Do we want to live an immoral life style? Well, if that is what we want, it is our choice to make and it is our life to live. We must pay the consequences, but we can live our lives any way we choose to live our lives.

The poet said, "Soon or late, every man must sit down to a banquet of consequences." Those words are very true. Jesus used the argument from consequences frequently in His teaching (Matthew 7:13-27). Life is “a banquet of consequences” and every one of us will surely eat our banquet of consequences sooner or later. That makes this an extremely important question: What do you want? What are the desires of your heart?

The question these men asked Jesus was an intensely practical question. The question was actually "Where do you live it,

Teacher? What I mean is, does what you teach work where life really happens every day? I have often thought that every pastor should have those words engraved, framed, and placed on the wall in his study: "Pastor, where do you live?" The most important sermon we preach is the life we live in this world every day.

The question Jesus asked these men is a question we should continuously focus as we get into God's Word and God's Word gets into us: "What do you want?" That was a provoking question and a profound question. The right answers to that question will dynamically impact the quality of life we live as we follow our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

These men were so practical. They were businessmen. I believe they were interested in the practical applications of the teaching of Jesus. When they met Him and asked Him that question, they were essentially saying to Him "Look, Rabbi, we do not want chalkboard theology. We do not want something that looks good on a chalkboard, or in a book about theology. What we want to know is, where we live every day, does what you teach work?"

Jesus was as practical as they were because He responded to their question with this invitation: "Come and see." Then we read those beautiful words: "They came and saw where He lived, and they lived with Him." As I said in the introduction, the record goes on to tell us they all lived for Him. In fact, according to Scripture and traditional church history, every one of them died for Him because of

what they saw when they made the commitment to come and see where and how He lived.

As I have observed, John not only tells us we should believe, he explains to us what it means to believe. We have a great example of that here. Faith is making the commitment to come and see, to come and walk with Jesus, to ask Him to show us how to live, and to ask Him to give us the grace to live that way.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever really come to the risen, living Christ and said to Him, "I want You to be my Lord, and I want to follow You. I want to receive from You the grace to follow You. I want to come and see how all the truth You brought into this world, and the grace to apply it, works out in real life situations where I live my life every day. I want to prove that it works there." Jesus extends this invitation to everybody: "Come and see."

We should ask and find the answers to those other two questions as we move through the Gospel of John: Who is Jesus, and what is Life? This is what life is: life is that quality of life that results once people make the commitment to acknowledge the reality that Jesus is the Lamb of God and then come and make the commitment to follow Him so that He might show them in their real life situations how true it is that grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ.

I challenge you to continue this study of the Gospel of John with me. As we move through this magnificent Gospel together,

chapter-by-chapter and verse-by-verse, we will discover Who Jesus is, what faith is, and what life is.

Chapter Five

“Born Again: What, Why and How?”

“And the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine.' Jesus then said to her, 'Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever He says to you, do it.'

“Now there were set there six water pots of stone, according to the manner of the purification of the Jews, containing 80 to 120 liters each. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the water pots with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, 'Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.' And they took it.

“When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom, and he said to him, 'Every man at the beginning sets out

the good wine; and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now.'

“This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on him.”

John has told us in his stated purpose for writing the Gospel of John that he is going to tell us about signs, or miracles Jesus performed because John believes that if he puts together a record of these signs, and we examine that record, the record will convince us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. John wants us to believe that, because, according to John, if we do believe that, we will have eternal life. It is interesting that, having told us what he is going to tell us, and having stated his purpose for writing this Gospel, when John begins to tell us about these signs, the first sign John tells us about is that Jesus went to a wedding reception and when they ran out of wine, He turned water into wine.

In the Scripture, wine is a symbol of joy. I am convinced that in addition to being a literal miracle, this story is also a beautiful allegory. As I have already observed, when I say this story is an allegory I am not implying that this is not a true story. An allegory is a story in which people, places and things have a deeper meaning, which is morally or spirituality instructive.

This story is an allegory that applies the objective of this Gospel. John told us he was going to tell us that when people responded properly to Jesus, they were born from above, or born of

the Spirit. This beautiful miracle of Jesus is an allegory of that miracle of being born from above or of God. This story of a great miracle presents an allegory of regeneration.

The first step in being born again is pictured in the words of Mary when she comes to Jesus and says, "They have no wine." Allegorically, this is like saying they have no happiness or they have no real joy. The suffering of God's people at this time explains why they have no joy. They have been conquered by Rome and they are under the iron fist of Roman occupation.

This miracle could be saying to us today that the first step in being born again is confessing that we are not born again. Read the biblical descriptions of a born again person: "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new and all these things are of God (or this is something God does)." (II Corinthians 5:17)

When you consider the fruit of the Spirit, or the abundant life that is to be experienced by someone who has been born again, do you say, "That is not describing me?" (Galatians 5:22,23; John 10:10) Allegorically speaking, that is as if you are confessing: "I have no wine." According to this allegory, that is the first step you must take if you are to be born again. Confess that you have no wine, no real joy, or in other words that you have not been born again.

We find the second step in this allegory of the new birth when Jesus tells the servants to fill those large 80 liter vessels with water. In the Scripture, water is a symbol of the Scripture itself (Ephesians 5:26).

The Word of God is the agent God uses when He works this miracle in our lives. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote: "Faith comes by hearing the Word of God." (Romans 10:17) Peter writes that the new birth is like physical birth. In physical birth you have a seed, an egg, conception, the development of prenatal life, the crisis of birth, and then growth and development. Peter writes that in spiritual birth, the seed, or the sperm (which is the word Peter uses), is the Word of God (I Peter 1:23). I am convinced that the allegorical symbol of filling the vessels with water pictures step two in the process of being born again: once you have confessed that you are not born again, if you want to be born from above, fill your vessel, mind and life, with the Word of God.

This is why I have been burdened to put together a Mini Bible College. I have discovered that when people get into the Word, and the Word gets into people, when they fill their "vessels" with the Word of God, they are very often born again, because faith comes by hearing the Word, and inspired Scripture is the seed that conceives the new birth. Therefore, if you want to be born again, fill your vessel, fill your mind, fill your heart, and fill your life with the Word

of God. That is step number two in the process of being born again that is taught allegorically in this miracle.

The third step in this new birth allegory is pictured for us when Mary turns to the servants and says, “Whatever He tells you to do, do it.” By application, the next step in the process of being born again is: while you are filling your vessel with the water of the Word, “Whatever He tells you to do, do it!”

When you read the Scripture, you will discover that the principle that makes the Scripture come alive is not familiarity with the Scripture. The vital factor, that makes the Word of God a life-giving power when you read it, is what you do about what you know. Most of us do not need to hear more; we need to hear better. According to the Parable of the Sower, when we obey the Word that has been sown in our lives, we will bear much fruit (Luke 8:15).

Therefore, as you are filling your mind and heart with the Word of God, if you hear the voice of God telling you to do something, always do it. It may be that while you are filling your vessel with the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will convict you of something you are doing, and He will say, “Stop doing it.” When that happens, always obey Him.

The fourth step in this allegory of the new birth is: when you have completed steps one, two and three, draw out the water that has been miraculously turned into wine, and serve it. As in the Feeding of the Five Thousand, you should ask the question, “When did this

miracle take place?” “Precisely, when did that water become wine?” I am convinced that the miracle took place when the servants had the faith to serve the water that He told them had become wine.

The message of this part of the allegory is: when the living Christ has turned your water into wine, share that miracle with others. Your experience of the new birth should make a difference in your relationships with people. If you really have been born again, is your wife going to know it? Is your husband going to know it? Are your parents going to know it? Will it be obvious to your children? Are the people you work with going to know it?

Of course they are, because your experience of the new birth is not only going to change you, it will profoundly change your relationships. As the water became wine when it was shared, it is as we share this new life in our relationships that our experience of this miracle is perfected. This beautiful miracle of water becoming wine is an allegory of what John told us he was going to tell us, which was that people were born again when they responded properly to Jesus and to the Word of Jesus.

The story of this beautiful miracle could also be an allegory of revival. Once you have been born again, there will be times when you will think you need to be born again, again. The reality is, you do not need another new birth experience. You simply need a renewal, or a revival of your new birth. As Jesus tells Peter in the Upper Room Discourse, when you have experienced the “bath” of

regeneration and your feet get dirty walking through this world, you do not need another "bath". You need to have your feet washed. (John 13:10)

In the story of this beautiful miracle of Jesus there is a formula you can use when you find yourself needing a revival: Step one: confess that you have no wine (Psalm 51:12). Simply confess to God: "I no longer have the joy I know I should have. I have lost my joy. I have no wine." Then step two is: fill your vessel with the Word of God. Go somewhere and have a retreat. Fill your heart and mind with the Word of God.

Step three is: while you are doing that, listen for the voice of God because He will focus something and say, "Do it," or He will put His finger on something and say, "Do not do it." Always do what He tells you to do. You will experience a spiritual renewal. Then step four is: ask God to use your personal revival to make you a blessing to all the people who intersect your life. When you have taken the four steps that are allegorically profiled in this miracle, you will discover that your life in Christ has been renewed.

The immediate impact of this miracle was that, for the first time, the disciples believed in Jesus. When they asked Him where He lived and He invited them to come and see where He lived, that was the beginning of their faith journeys. However, John clearly tells us that they first believed when they saw the water turned into wine. According to this Gospel, they experienced a continuous

revelation of what faith is as they followed Jesus. We discover another faith metaphor in John, Chapter Two. At the end of the chapter, we read that while Jesus was in Jerusalem, many people believed in Him when they saw the miracles He performed. But, Jesus did not commit Himself to them because He knew what was in men. He had no need for anyone to tell Him what was in men (2:23-25).

This is another interesting answer to the question, "What is faith?" These verses are telling us what faith is by telling us what faith is not. Everyone who professes faith is not an authentic believer. These people believed because they saw miracles. Who does not believe when they see miracles? But does an authentic disciple of Jesus only believe because they have seen a miracle?

According to this negative metaphor, faith is a two-way street. Faith is a believer making a commitment to Christ and Christ making a commitment to that believer. "Follow me and (then) I will make you." (Matthew 4:19) That is the way faith in Christ works. You make the commitment to follow Him; He makes the commitment to make something of your life. Apparently, in this case, these people believed, but their belief was merely intellectual assent and not a commitment of their heart. Jesus made no commitment to them because they had made no commitment to Jesus (John 20:29; Romans 10:9).

In this chapter, John also records the fact that Jesus cleansed the Temple. The cleansing of the Temple is also recorded in the Synoptic Gospels. The other Gospels place the cleansing of the Temple at the end of His ministry. John places this event at the beginning of His three years of public ministry. The only way to harmonize this apparent contradiction is to say there must have been two cleansings of the Temple. Another observation is that John is not primarily concerned with historical accuracy, as Luke was. He is trying to convince us of his basic and central argument about Jesus, that He was the Christ, the Son of God.

The significance of the Temple cleansing in the Gospel of John is that this event involved the most important sign John shares with us that proves Jesus is the Christ. When Jesus claimed that He was God and that He was the Messiah, the religious leaders were continuously saying to Jesus, "What sign are you going to show us?" On one occasion when they asked for a sign, Jesus responded: "An evil and an adulterous generation looks for a sign. I am not going to give you any sign except this one: destroy this temple (meaning His body) and in three days I will raise it up again." (Matthew 12:39-41)

John tells us that when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered the Old Testament Scriptures that prophesied His resurrection, like Psalm Sixteen, from which Peter preached his sermon on the day of Pentecost. They also remembered this statement they heard Jesus make (John 2:19-22). In the context of

cleansing the Temple, Jesus gives us this very important sign, which, in the opinion of the Apostle John, should convince us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

In summary, who is Jesus in the second chapter of the Gospel of John? In Chapter Two, Jesus is the One, Who can turn your water into wine. You can come to Jesus with your problems and Jesus can take your problems, which are like water, and turn them into wine. You can come to Jesus with all of your weaknesses. When you invite Jesus into your life Jesus will turn the water of your weakness into the wine of real joy.

There are many applications of this miracle. You can also apply this story to preaching or teaching the Word of God. One of my favorite professors, Dr. J. Vernon McGee, shared with us young ministerial students in 1952, that as he preached to four thousand people every Sunday: "Sometimes, I have a message I believe God has given me. But frankly, it is pretty weak stuff. It is just water. But God says to me, 'Give it out, McGee,' and I give it out. Somewhere between the pulpit and the pew, He touches it, and that water becomes wine. I do not know how He does it, but He does it!"

Dr. McGee was saying to us aspiring young preachers, "When God gives you a message, give it out. You may think it is only water, but preach it! Give it out! As you give out that water, somewhere between the pulpit and the pew, God will touch it and that water will become wine." Since 1952, I have found that to be

true. In John, Chapter Two, Jesus is the One who can turn your many different kinds of water into wine.

What is faith in Chapter Two? Faith is following these steps for the new birth or for revival: Be honest with God and confess that you have no wine. Confess that you have not been born again or that you are not experiencing the joy of the Spirit, and you need a revival. Then, fill your vessel with the Word of God. Spend much time in the Word of God. Whatever God says to you while you are reading the Scripture, do it! Then share the results of your personal spiritual revival with other people. Share the Scripture and your newly found joy in the context of your relationships with all the people, who, in the providence of God intersect your life.

And what is life in the second chapter of the Gospel of John? Life is being born again. John will tell us in many beautiful ways in many of these chapters that life is being born again. In this chapter, life is the experience of having your water turned into wine. Life is all that results from entering into a faith partnership with Jesus Christ, where you have made a commitment to Him and He has made a commitment to you. Knowing that Jesus Christ has committed everything He is and has to you, should give you a superb quality of life. Life is also having your own personal temple cleansed when sin has made that necessary.

Chapter Six

“You Must Be Born Again”

Chapter Three is the most familiar chapter in the Gospel of John. This is the chapter that records an interview Jesus had with a Rabbi named Nicodemus. As we study this chapter together, read this chapter in the context of what John told us he was going to tell us. In his prologue, John essentially wrote: "This is what I am going to tell you. When people believed in Jesus, they were born again." In Chapter Two, allegorically, through the miracle of the water being turned into wine, John told us how Jesus allegorized the new birth when He performed His first miracle.

In chapters Three, Four and Five, John is going to give us examples of individual people who were born again. The first one is Rabbi Nicodemus. The original language implies that he was the famous or highly esteemed teacher at that time in Jerusalem (3:10). Tradition tells us Nicodemus was the brother of Josephus, the Jewish historian.

Although we do not read in Chapter Three that Nicodemus was born again, we read about him again in the Gospel of John. About half the way through the Gospel of John, we read that Nicodemus defended Jesus before the Sanhedrin and, near the end of the Gospel of John we read that Nicodemus courageously participated in the burial of Jesus (7:50; 19:39). Tradition takes over

at that point and tells us that Nicodemus was indeed born again and joyfully suffered the loss of everything he had for Christ.

He came to Jesus at night and remarkably opened the conversation with Jesus by calling Jesus, "Rabbi." This is remarkable. We should remember that, humanly speaking, Jesus is a Carpenter with a bad address because He is from Nazareth, yet here is the outstanding teacher in Israel, calling Jesus "Rabbi" and saying "We know that you are a teacher come from God because nobody can do the works that you do unless God be with him." It is remarkable that Nicodemus came to Jesus. We put a lot of emphasis on the fact that he came by night. He may have come by night because he worked hard all day, or he may have come by night because he did not want anybody to know he came to see Jesus.

The important explanation as to why Nicodemus came to Jesus is that Nicodemus came to Jesus because he was impressed with the things he saw Jesus do. That is obviously why he wanted to hear what Jesus had to say. We are deceiving ourselves if we think it is any other way than that today. People only want to hear what we have to say when they are impressed with what they see us do.

Remember, Jesus put great emphasis on performance rather than profession. Here you see the fruit of that philosophy. Somebody has said, "What we really believe, we do. All the rest is just religious talk." It was only because the great rabbi was impressed with what he saw Jesus do that he wanted to hear the

religious talk of Jesus. It is only when people are impressed with what they see us do that they will be interested in our religious talk.

That is the way the intriguing dialogue begins. When Nicodemus makes his declaration that affirms Jesus, then Jesus has the door opened for Him to share His religious talk: "Verily, verily, (truly, truly,) I say to you, unless a man is born again, Nicodemus, he will never see the kingdom of God. Unless a man is born of the Spirit and of water, he will never enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is (only) flesh. So, marvel not that I say to you, 'you must be born again.'"

These words make the third chapter of John the "new birth" chapter of the Bible. Born again! What does it really mean? As we approach the subject of the new birth, first of all, we should ask this question: "What is the purpose of the new birth?" Make the observation that Jesus does not teach the new birth as an end in itself. The new birth is a means to an end, according to Jesus. Jesus not only says, "You must be born again." He tells us why we must be born again.

We must be born again because we cannot see the kingdom of God and we cannot enter into the kingdom of God unless or until we are born again. You see, the primary truth here is the kingdom of God, not the new birth. The kingdom of God is the end; the new birth is a means to the end of the kingdom of God.

According to Jesus, we must also be born again, because that which is born of the flesh is (merely) flesh. When the Bible uses the word “flesh” it means, “human nature, unaided by God”. Our physical birth only made us physical creatures. We might say Jesus was essentially teaching that being born physically made us sophisticated animals. If we want to be a spiritual creature, we must have a spiritual birth.

What is the kingdom of God? We learned the answer to that question when we surveyed the Old Testament and the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). The kingdom of God is the realm over which God rules. The truth is simply this: God is a King and He has a realm over which He reigns. If God reigns over you, then you are part of His kingdom. If you are His loyal subject, and He is your King of kings and Lord of lords, then you have seen His kingdom and you have entered into His kingdom.

Many believe the kingdom of God is heaven after you die. Their interpretation of the words of Jesus in His interview with Nicodemus is, "You will never go to heaven when you die unless or until you are born again." I am persuaded that is not what Jesus meant when He spoke these familiar words.

Essentially, Jesus said to Nicodemus: "You will never see the reality that God wants to be your King unless or until you are born again, and you will never enter into that kind of relationship with God unless or until you are born again. But, when you are born

again, you will see God as your King and you will enter into that kind of relationship with God - not when you die - but right now!" According to Jesus, the first by-product of the new birth is that we will confess as Thomas did, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)

The Apostle Paul was teaching this same truth when he declared that no man can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:3). In the New Testament, believers see and enter the kingdom of God when they call Jesus Lord as well as Savior. We will see and we will enter into that kingdom relationship with Jesus when we are born again. A first by-product of the miracle that we have been born again will be that He is, in fact and in reality, our Lord and our King.

I once scheduled a retreat with the elders of the church of which I was the pastor. I gave them an assignment. I asked them to meditate on two questions and then answer them for me in writing. The first question I asked was: Based on the teaching of Jesus in the second half of Matthew Chapter Six, what should your priorities be? The second question was: Based on how you are spending your time, your money, your energy, your affections, and all of the things that make up the essence of your life, what are your actual and literal priorities?

As they answered those two questions, I encouraged them to be honest - and they were very honest. I had started this church and most of them had been attending for many years. They had heard all

my teaching more than once. I was shocked when one of them said, "For the first time in my life I see that Jesus said He is to be my number-one priority. The kingdom of God is to be my first priority. That is clearly what Jesus taught here. I have never seen that before." Then, answering the second question, he said, "Based on how I am spending myself, to be totally honest, the most important thing in my life is me, my wife, my child, retirement and security - things like that. I wonder where Jesus actually fits into my priorities."

When they had all answered my questions in a similar way, I shared some verses from this third chapter of John with them. Then I said, "Jesus said, 'when you are born again, you are going to see that God is to be your King.' When you are born again, you are going to enter into a relationship with God, where in fact and in reality He is your King." This does not mean that He always has absolutely first place in your life, which would make you perfect, but it means that you have at least seen and you have entered into that kind of relationship with Him.

This was an evangelical church where everyone professed to be born again when he or she joined the church. I said to these elders, "Many of you have said here that you have never seen this kingdom truth before today and that you have never, in fact and in reality, entered into that kind of relationship with God and with Christ where He is King of kings and Lord of Lords in our lives.

Since seeing the kingdom of God and entering into the kingdom of God are the first evidences of being born again, do you have a right to say that you are born again?"

When Jesus shared His religious talk with Nicodemus, this member of the Sanhedrin asked Jesus a question twice. His question was, "How? How can a man be born again? When he is old, is he going to go back into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus seems to be a bit annoyed with this question. In essence, Jesus says, "Here you are, an extraordinary teacher in Israel. I have used a common, ordinary, earthly illustration, and you cannot understand it. What would you do if I told you something really spiritual, like this: nobody has ever gone up to heaven but Me. Nobody has ever come down from heaven but Me, and nobody is in heaven but Me?"

While Jesus is saying this, I believe He is looking Nicodemus right in the eye. Jesus is telling this distinguished rabbi that He Himself was in heaven while He was standing there before him. When Jesus made these statements, Nicodemus did not even ask "How?"

Then, to paraphrase and summarize, Jesus reminded Nicodemus of a story that is recorded in the Book of Numbers. The children of Israel were in the wilderness and they were complaining. Since God hates complaining (Numbers 14:26-31, Philippians 2:14), He sent snakes to bite the complainers. Then God sent out a message of mercy. He directed Moses to erect a serpent of brass on a pole at

the center of the camp. Then the message of mercy was proclaimed to all the snake bitten grippers: “If you can crawl or get somebody to carry you to the center of the camp, when you look at that serpent of brass, you will be healed of your snakebites!” (Numbers 21)

Some of them said, “Looking at a piece of brass cannot cure my snakebite.” So, they died of their snakebites. However, others said, “It does not really make any sense, but it is the only hope I have.” They had someone carry them, they were dragged, or they crawled to the center of the camp and they looked at that serpent of brass. They were healed of their snakebites when they looked at that serpent of brass.”

That is only one of many Old Testament miracles until we read the third chapter of this Gospel. At this point in His dialog with Nicodemus, Jesus makes the most dogmatic statement the authors of these four Gospels have recorded (3:14-21). To paraphrase and summarize, He tells this distinguished rabbi: “I must be lifted up (crucified) on a cross. I must be lifted up on a cross because I am God's only Son. As God's only Son, dying on that cross, I am God's only Solution to the problem of sin, and I am God's only Savior from sin. When I am lifted up on that cross, if people will look with faith to Me on that cross, just as those snake bitten complainers were healed of their snakebites, those who look, in faith, to Me on My cross, will be healed of their sin problem. They will be made whole. They will have eternal and everlasting life.”

According to John the Baptist, the God-Man, Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God Who came into the world to take away the sins of the world. Now we learn from Jesus that He was going to solve the sin problem by dying on a cross for all of us. Jesus makes that very clear when He tells Nicodemus: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” (3:16)

Essentially, that was the answer of Jesus to the “how” question of Nicodemus. There is a sense in which Jesus answered that how question in one word and that word was "believe". What does it mean to believe? As I have observed, in all the chapters of his Gospel John will tell us and show us what it means to believe. In this chapter we see faith illustrated and demonstrated as those people look at that serpent of brass and are cured of their snakebites.

In the same way, by a simple act of faith, you and I look to Jesus on His cross and say to God, "I believe Jesus is Your only Son; I believe He is your only Solution to the sin problem and that Jesus is Your only Savior. I am now trusting Your Son to be my own personal Savior.”

Jesus was telling Nicodemus, and you and me, that anyone who will believe can be born again. In so far as we have a part to play in being born again, our part in this great miracle is to believe. That is really very simple. Our part is to believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins.

God's part in the new birth is a dimension of the new birth that you and I will never understand. You did not have to understand obstetrics so you could bring yourself into this world. You were passive in the experience of your physical birth. You were born. Birth happened to you. Jesus taught that we must be born spiritually. He did not teach that we were to give spiritual birth to ourselves. We meet certain conditions; we do our part, which is to believe. Then, God will do His part. God will give us eternal and everlasting life through the experience of the new birth.

Jesus compared God's part in the new birth to the wind. We hear the sound of the wind, but we cannot see the wind. When there is a great hurricane, the weather experts are the first to agree that we cannot predict where the wind will blow next. Jesus presents that metaphor and then announces, "So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." We will never understand God's part in the new birth and we do not have to understand God's part to be born again. Our part has been made very simple. Jesus has reduced our part to one word: "Believe!"

These verses I have paraphrased and summarized become His most dogmatic statement when He tells Nicodemus that those who believe His claim about the meaning of His death on the cross are not condemned, but have eternal life. Those who do not believe are condemned, not because of their sin, but because they do not believe

what He has stated here about the meaning of his death on the cross (3:16-18). That is the most dogmatic statement Jesus ever made.

In addition to all that I have shared about this teaching of Jesus, Jesus was sending a message through this distinguished member of the Sanhedrin to these spiritual rulers of the Jewish people. The essence of that message was: "You must begin again. You must begin another way, and you must begin with Me!"

The Three Questions

Who is Jesus in John, Chapter Three? Jesus is God's only Son. Jesus is God's only Solution for the problem of sin. Jesus is God's only Savior from sin. God does not have any other Solution and He has no other Savior but His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. That is Who Jesus is in John Chapter Three.

What is faith in this chapter? Faith is "Look and live." There is a hymn that is based on this serpent of brass metaphor entitled, "Look and Live." Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one of the greatest preachers who ever preached the Gospel, was converted while that hymn was being sung. In simple faith, he saw the truth that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is simply to, "Look and live." That is also what faith is in John Chapter Three.

What is life in this chapter? Life is being born again. Life begins when we are born again, see the kingdom of God and enter into the kingdom of God. Life is seeing that God wants to be our

King. Life is entering into a relationship with God whereby He, in fact and in reality, is our King.

Dear friend, I end by asking you, have you ever looked to Jesus as the only solution to your sin problem? Have you believed not only with your head but also with your heart that He died for your sins? Have you been born again? Have you seen Him as King of your life? If not please read these first three chapters of the Gospel of John again and ask God to help you see and enter His kingdom.

If you have already entered His kingdom and are a follower of Christ, I challenge you to share the joy of your salvation with all who God brings to you. Like Mary told the servants, I challenge you to be obedient and do whatever He makes you know He wants you to do.