

Chapter One

“Life’s Most Unsolvable Problems”

(John 11:1-16)

MINI BIBLE COLLEGE

BOOKLET TWENTY-SIX

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

(Part 4)

VERSE BY VERSE

(Chapters 11-13)

This is the fourth in a series of six booklets that provide notes and commentary for those who are listening to our one hundred and thirty broadcasts, which present a verse-by-verse study of the Gospel of John. If you do not have the first three booklets in this study, I encourage you to write us and ask for them because they will give you a foundation that will help you to understand this booklet and this in depth study of the Gospel according to the Apostle John.

We will discover the eleventh chapter of John to be one of the most exciting chapters in the Gospel of John, and perhaps in the Word of God. This chapter will also give us some wonderful answers to our three key questions. As you read Chapter Eleven, look again for the answer to these questions: Who is Jesus? What is faith? What is life? The context for the profound content of this eleventh chapter is found beginning in verse forty of Chapter Ten where we read:

“Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. Here he stayed and many people came to Him. They said, ‘Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this Man was true.’ And in that place many believed in Jesus.

“Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus was now sick, was the same one who poured expensive perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair. These two sisters sent word to Jesus, ‘Lord, the one you love is sick.’ When He heard this, Jesus said, ‘This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.’ Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days.”

This wonderful chapter begins with a story about a man named Lazarus who had two sisters, Mary and Martha. They lived in Bethany, which is a little suburb of Jerusalem less than three kilometers from Jerusalem. When Jesus was in Jerusalem, it was His practice to stay with this family. When He was engaged in that hostile dialogue with the religious leaders in Jerusalem, it must have been extremely tiring. It seems to have been His regular practice to retreat to Bethany and stay with these three people whom He loved very much.

The way the tenth chapter ends places Jesus in the wilderness area beyond the Jordan River, where John the Baptist preached and baptized. When you visit the Holy Land today, you can drive south from Jerusalem for about four hours. Then your guide will point off into a vast wilderness toward the country of Jordan and say, "Out there is where John the Baptist had his extraordinary ministry." We are told that many from Jerusalem walked for four days out into that

wilderness to hear the preaching of this man Jesus said was the greatest of all the prophets (Matthew 11:11; Luke 7:28).

According to the last verses of this tenth chapter, Jesus was having a very fruitful ministry in that wilderness when He received the message that Lazarus was gravely ill. At this point in His ministry, Jesus was being opposed and rejected by the religious leaders in Jerusalem, but when He went out into this wilderness area, we read that more people came to hear Him than had come to hear John the Baptist. We read that these people said: “Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true. And in that place many believed on Jesus.” That is where Jesus is located as our story begins.

The story actually began in Bethany, where Lazarus was sick. The word "sick" in the message these sisters sent to Jesus means, "sick unto death". Luke introduced us to these two women in his Gospel. If you remember the way Luke introduces these ladies, Jesus was going to visit Bethany, and the home of these two sisters, perhaps, for the first time. The way Martha looked at it, Jesus Christ was coming to her house and the most important thing about His visit was that everything had to be right and proper.

But Mary was very different from Martha. Mary looked at the Master’s visit this way. "The eternal Word of God has become flesh and He is coming to my home. The important thing about His visit to my house is that I may sit at His feet and hear His Word, listening to everything He has to show and tell me about God." Mary

is in the living room attending the Bible study, and Martha is out in the kitchen making all the preparations. Martha comes bursting in on the Bible study and severely rebukes Jesus.

You never have to wonder what Martha is thinking. Her tone of voice seems to be one of impatience as she declares very plainly and frankly that she has been left to take care of all these preparations and arrangements in the kitchen, and that Mary is not helping her. She clearly wants the Lord to judge in this matter, and she believes He will be on her side.

However, Jesus does not take Martha's side. He loves Martha. The record clearly states that Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and their brother. I am persuaded that He looked at Martha with much love when He said to her: "Martha, Martha, you are bothered and troubled about so many things. Only one thing is really important, and that is the thing Mary has chosen. It can never be taken away from her." Jesus does not hesitate to side with Mary but, He speaks these words to Martha in a loving way.

These are the two women we meet again here in the eleventh chapter of John. When we meet them, they are facing life's two most unsolvable problems: sickness and death. Even with all our medical science and technical advances, sickness and death are still life's two most unsolvable problems. These two problems enter the lives of these two sisters when they discover that their brother Lazarus is sick unto death.

The urgent message they send to Jesus there in that wilderness is simply this: "Lord, the one You love is sick." They do not make any requests or demands. They simply place the information before Him. They want to make sure He knows. They obviously believe that if He knows, their unsolvable problems will be solved.

They had a quality of faith and trust in Jesus that adds to our list of answers to that question: "What is faith?" Their message instructs us in the way we should present our problems to Jesus. All we must do is follow the example of these sisters and make certain our Lord knows about our problem.

I have a devout older sister who led me to faith when I was eighteen years old. She and her pastor husband mentored me for more than four decades when I became a pastor. When there was a serious problem, she would often say, "Well, the Lord knows." She made that observation when my wife was critically ill. I remember saying to her, "So what? How is the fact that the Lord knows a comfort to me?"

She spelled it out for me when she said, "Well, you know that He is the very essence of love. He is omnipotent - He is all-powerful. If you know that He knows about your unsolvable problem, since He is perfect love and has all the power in heaven and on earth, then all you need to know is that He knows." That seems to be the spirit in which these two sisters sent their message to Jesus. We must follow their example and present our problems to Jesus.

When Jesus receives their message, His response is extraordinary, and presents us with a challenge as we answer the faith question while reading this Gospel.

Jesus said: "This sickness will not end in death." One translation reads: "The purpose of this sickness is not death." That is an intriguing response because it implies that the purpose of some sickness is death. Have you ever thought about this? The Bible clearly teaches that the eternal state is a greater value than our life span - the eternal is a greater value than the temporal. The eternal state is better than whatever years God gives us to live on earth.

Many of us know the Bible teaches in so many places and ways that the greatest spiritual blessings lie ahead of us in the eternal state. Yet, we do not give much thought to this issue: How does the Lord take us from this temporal into the eternal state? Most of the time He uses these unsolvable problems of sickness and death to take us into the eternal dimension of our existence.

That is what Jesus means when He responds to the message from Mary and Martha about Lazarus by saying in effect: "The purpose of this sickness is not death. It may result in death, but it will not end in death." He goes on and says, "No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

This shows that the purpose for this particular sickness goes beyond the method that is taking this man Jesus loves into the eternal state. That purpose is the glory of God - and that God's Son may be

glorified through the death and resurrection of this brother of Martha and Mary.

Do you remember that He said the same thing in Chapter Nine about why the man He healed had been born blind? He essentially said: "This man was not born blind because he or his parents sinned. The purpose of his blindness is that the works of God might be revealed through the healing of his blindness." Obviously, that is the same truth He is teaching here.

If we are so self-centered that we approach everything asking the question, "What is in this for me?" we may never take the Providence or the glory of God into our perspective. But, if we are God-centered and Christ-centered, when horrific problems come crashing into our lives we will discipline ourselves to ask this question: "God, how can these tragic circumstances, over which I have no control, glorify You and Your Son Who lives in me? Could this problem exalt Jesus Christ and hold forth the Word of life to those who are watching my response to this crisis in my life?"

An alternate reading of a verse in the Psalms asks this question: "When the foundations of your life are breaking up, what is the Righteous One doing?" (Psalm 11:3) If we will ask that question, we will often find purpose and meaning in our crises of sickness and suffering, including a bad medical report that our doctor tells us means we are going to die.

I am intrigued when I read: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days." (11:5, 6)

I have been a pastor since 1956. On occasion I have found it necessary to use this example to explain that even Jesus was not omni-present. He could not be in two places at the same time. If the Lord faced that problem, while I am ministering to one member of my flock I cannot at the same time be ministering to another. I wonder how many of us pastors would last long in our churches if, when we received word that a member of our church was sick unto death, we explained that because we loved them, we deliberately stayed where we were, and, therefore, did not get there to see that person before they died.

There had to be a purpose in His delay. This moving story reads like a miniature Book of Job. It is obvious that Jesus is permitting these sisters and their brother to experience the problems of sickness and death because He loves them with agape love. He knows their experience of these problems will bring glory to His Father God, and as the Son of God, He will also be glorified through the illness and death of Lazarus. However, we must sharpen our focus on the observation of John that He delayed His arrival because He loved these three people.

It is interesting that when the sisters sent the message, "Lord, the one You love is sick," for love they used the Greek word "phileo", which is like friendship, or the love expressed by the person

we call "a philanthropist". But when we read that, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus," the Greek word is "agape". This word Jesus used means that Jesus loved them in a way these three had probably never been loved before. That love was obviously driving the delay of Jesus, but what were His objectives for permitting these three people to experience sickness and death?

We will find the answer to that question as the narrative continues: "Then He said to His disciples, 'Let us go back to Judea.' 'But Rabbi,' they said, 'a short while ago the Jews tried to stone You, and yet You are going back there?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.'

"After He had said this, He went on to tell them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.' His disciples replied, 'Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.' Jesus had been speaking of his death, but His disciples thought He meant natural sleep. So then He told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.'

"Then Thomas (called Didymus, or The Twin) said to the rest of the disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with Him.'" Observe that when the apostles believe He has made the decision to place Himself in great danger, it is the one we call, "Doubting Thomas," who says, "Let us go, that we may die with Him!"

Jesus explains to these men that He is now about to go back to Judea (meaning Jerusalem and, of course, Bethany). They remind Him that it was only a short time ago (recorded in the eighth and tenth chapters of this Gospel), that the Jews had tried to stone Him.

So they asked Him, "Are You going back there?" The answer of Jesus in verse nine was, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? A man who walks by day walks in the light. And when he walks by night he stumbles, for he has no light." What He is saying is, "I know what I am doing. I am walking in the light. I am not just stumbling around in darkness."

When He told the disciples plainly that Lazarus was dead and added, that He was glad He was not there so that they would believe, was Jesus implying that these apostles did not yet believe in Him? The first time we read that His disciples believed was when He performed His first miracle at that wedding in Galilee. His apostles have been with Him and have now witnessed all the miracles John has recorded for us in the first ten chapters of this Gospel.

Remember that all the way through this great Gospel of John, we are finding answers to that question, "What is faith?" Here we have that faith question answered again. "So that you may believe, I am glad I was not there." As you read the Gospels, observe the many places where Jesus raises this question of the faith of His disciples (Matthew 8:26; 14:31; Mark 4:40; Luke 8:25). It is obvious that the objective of Jesus throughout this story is the faith of Martha, Mary, Lazarus, those who love this family and His disciples!

Even though it is not the interpretation, an interesting secondary application of these words of Jesus raises the question of the number of working hours we should consider reasonable in a week for the dedicated followers of Jesus. We often overlook the hard reality that before God commanded His people to rest on the seventh day He commanded them to labor for six days. In this passage, Jesus is saying there are twelve hours in a day. Does that mean that we should work seventy-two hours a week?

How many hours per week should a devout disciple of Jesus Christ labor in the vineyard of the Lord? Can you imagine the Apostle Paul responding to that question by telling us that we should work eight hours a day, five days per week, or for forty hours? Should this issue be determined by secular labor unions or the secular culture?

When His brothers suggested the scheduling of His ministry agenda, He was not at all influenced or impacted by their suggestions because He always did what pleased His Father (John 8:29). We should make the same observation here when the apostles suggest where and when He should or should not go. He knew what He was doing by going back to Judea at this precise moment.

In Summary

The author of this Gospel has now established the setting for this wonderful story. Before we consider the way Mary and Martha responded to the awesome reality that their Lord was not there in

time to prevent the death of their brother, and the great miracle that is going to follow, I want to make some applications to the way this story begins.

In Chapter Eleven, from what we have seen here at the beginning of this story, “Who is Jesus?” Jesus is a loving Lord, Who deliberately permits people He deeply loves to experience life's most unsolvable problems so glory will come to His Father God, that He Himself might be glorified, and that those He loves might believe.

Can you reflect on some of the experiences you have faced in the past few years, are facing now, or may face in the future in the context of the way this story begins? Is it possible that Jesus is a loving Lord Who loves you enough to permit you, or those you love to experience some unsolvable, difficult problems? Is it possible that He permits these problems to bring glory to Himself and His Father and grow your faith in Him and His love? That is Who Jesus is in the first part of this chapter.

In the opening verses of this chapter, “What is faith?” That question is answered by the way Mary and Martha send their message to Jesus, believing that if He knows that the one He loves is sick and dying, their loving Lord will solve their unsolvable problem. Faith is simply placing your problems before Him with the conviction that all you need to know is that He knows all about your problems. Faith is the conviction that He is all loving, He is omnipotent and He is committed to anything that will grow your faith.

Finally, based on the way this chapter begins, “What is life?” Life is any problem that grows us spiritually. Life is anything that draws you or me closer to our God and to our risen, living, Lord Jesus Christ. Since we are called to walk and live by faith, life is anything that may increase our faith in Him. Life is anything that makes us more complete in Him. Anything He permits to that end is contributing to our experience of eternal life.

Chapter Two

Response and Relationship

(John 11:17- 32)

As we read further into this chapter, we see that when Jesus finally arrives in Bethany, the priority issue is the response of Mary and Martha to the problem of their brother's sickness and death. The response He wants to receive from them concerns the way they relate to Him in their crisis, especially the hard to understand reality that He did not arrive in time to save their brother. Our relationship to our Lord is always the most critical factor in our response to problems that overwhelmed us.

I am convinced that He receives the correct relational response from Mary. The response of Mary reminds us that our first response should be to affirm our relationship with Christ and our

unshakable faith in His love for us. Martha responds the way most of us do when we are surprised by tragedy.

Beginning at verse seventeen we read: "On His arrival (in Bethany), Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

"When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him, but Mary stayed at home. 'Lord,' Martha said to Jesus, 'If You had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask.'

"Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha answered, 'I know 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 will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?'

"Yes, Lord,' she told him. 'I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.' And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. 'The Teacher is here,' she said, 'and is asking for you.' When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him.

"Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met Him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the

tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and said, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.'" (11:20-32)

When Jesus comes to Bethany He has His interview with Martha first because she initiates the interview. The important issue in this interview is her response to these unsolvable problems of sickness and death. And what is her response? Well, Martha is Martha. I love Martha. Jesus loved Martha. As soon as she hears that He is arriving, she goes out on the road to meet Him. But Mary stayed at home. When Martha gets face to face with Jesus, she says these words, "If You had been here, my brother would not have died." It is interesting that later Mary will say the exact same words.

We are not told about the expression on her face and we do not know the inflection in Martha's voice when she said these words. In other words, the Apostle John does not describe what we refer to today as her "body language". Experts in communication tell us that when we communicate, seven percent of our communication is the words we speak. Forty-four percent is conveyed by the inflection of the voice when our words are spoken. And forty-nine percent is communicated by our body language - the expression on our faces, our gestures and other ways that we show the meaning of the words we are using.

As we read this account of the interviews Jesus has with these two sisters, all we have is the words that were spoken. Even though we do not know about the inflection, expression, and the gestures, I

have the impression that when Martha said, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died," she was saying, "Where were You, Lord? If only You had been here, he would not have died!"

The Lord loves Martha, and so He continues the dialog with her. He says, "Your brother will rise again." Now He was not referencing the resurrection of believers that enables them to begin the eternal state. He was clearly speaking of what was about to happen. We should not be too hard on Martha. She certainly did not know He was talking about what was about to happen. In her place, would you have expected that miracle? Martha essentially answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. I know my Scriptures."

Then Jesus spoke some of the most dynamic words in the Gospel of John. They are another one of the "I Am" declarations of Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

I love Martha's honesty. She does not respond by saying, "I believe that." She may not have fully understood what Jesus was telling her. She responds by saying what she does believe, and what she does believe ties in with the basic theme of the Gospel of John. Essentially, she responds: "I believe you are the Christ (or the Messiah), the Son of God Who was to come into the world. That is what I believe."

Martha knows what she believes, and she believes what she knows. One of the most honest prayers in the Bible, which was prayed with tears, was: "I believe. Help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24) Jesus responded to that prayer because it was an honest prayer. We all have a level where our faith ends and our unbelief begins. The father who prayed that honest prayer was saying to Jesus, "Raise the level of my belief and lower the level of my unbelief." That may have been the spirit of the way Martha answered the question of Jesus: "Do you believe this?"

I am convinced that Jesus loved Martha's honesty. Martha describes her level of faith, and in so many words she tells Jesus, "Above that level I am not going to say I believe what You are telling me." There is nothing phony about Martha. Martha is such a real person.

If we will think about it, when we are talking to God, He knows exactly where our level of faith ends and our doubt begins. How foolish of us to relate to our risen, living Lord in a tragic crisis with anything less than the honesty of Martha. Jesus is deeply troubled by those He labeled as hypocrites, or those He implied who were wearing the "masks" that were worn by play actors in that culture. The Lord knows that whatever else she may be, Martha is not a hypocrite.

The "I Am" we hear from Jesus in His interview with Martha is the heart of the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of John. Life's most unsolvable problems have a solution and that solution is called

“resurrection”. The literal definition of resurrection is, “victory over death”. Jesus is saying, "I am the solution to these unsolvable problems, Martha. I am not only the victory over the problem of death; I am the solution to the life problem." He will make this same statement later when He essentially declares: "I am the life I came to bring into this world." (14:6)

In the first verses of this Gospel we read: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." In every chapter we are asking the question, "What is life?" We are asking that question because John is telling what life is. Again and again, in chapter after chapter, John is telling us that life is something Jesus is. Life is also frequently something Jesus does in us, for us, and through us. Life is always related to Jesus when the author of this Gospel tells us what eternal life is.

In His interview with Martha, He says: "Whoever believes in Me, will live, even if he dies." He is speaking here of the resurrection of the authentic disciple. The Apostle Paul provides more teaching on this subject. When believers die, they are not buried. They are sown or planted like a seed that will one day be resurrected. (1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5)

Jesus goes beyond that dynamic teaching in this great statement about resurrection life. Make this observation when He repeats this promise: "Whoever lives and believes in Me will never die." Jesus is actually presenting a covenant of resurrection between Himself and a believer. As in every covenant, Jesus promises to

keep His part of the covenant and we must keep our part of the covenant. The person who enters into this covenant of resurrection with Jesus must meet two conditions. Condition number one: He must believe in Christ. That is the obvious condition. But also observe this condition: He must also live in Christ.

Did you know that it is possible to live your life in Christ? Nearly two hundred times, the authors of the New Testament will use the expression, "In Christ" as they describe the authentic disciples of Jesus Christ.

Jesus demonstrated the meaning of these words beautifully with a metaphor He used in a garden. He was teaching these apostles how to be fruitful when He showed the apostles a vine with branches that were heavy with fruit. He then challenged them to be aligned with Him the way those branches were joined with the vine that was making them fruitful (John 15:1-16).

These two words, “In Christ” are found nearly two hundred times in the New Testament. This is one of the Apostle Paul’s favorite ways of describing the relationship between a believer and the risen, living Christ. He uses this expression ninety-seven times in his writings. These two words, and the metaphor of Jesus that explains what they mean, help us to understand the second part of that covenant Jesus presented to Martha. "Whoever believes and lives his life in union with Me will never die."

Martha does not appear to understand what Jesus was asking her when He challenged her with that question: "Do you believe this?"

Would you have understood the question? Perhaps if they would have had time for a Bible class, she might have understood it. I am persuaded, that if she had taken the time and made the effort to hear and understand what Jesus was saying to her, she would have believed her Lord.

This is another answer to that question, “What is faith?” As we learned in the sixth chapter, from the example of Peter, there are times when faith is following Jesus, even though we do not understand (6:67,68). The negative example of Martha, which teaches us what faith is not, makes the statement that faith should sometimes take the time and make the effort to understand what the Lord is saying to us when unexpected tragic circumstances suddenly invade our lives. The ultimate issue for you and me is this challenge: do we believe, and are we living our lives in Christ?

After we observe the honest response of Martha we then read that Martha: “... went back and called her sister Mary aside. ‘The Teacher is here and He is asking for you.’ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.” (11:28-29)

As you read the story of how these two sisters cope with the sickness and death their brother, make this observation: Mary does not go to Jesus until He sends for her. Martha, who is a “make-it-happen person”, decides when she will meet with Jesus. She meets Him on the road before He arrives at Bethany. That is Martha. Mary is not like Martha. Mary waits until the Lord sends for her. But as

soon as she gets the word that her Lord wants to meet with her, she quickly responds.

We then read: “When Mary reached the place where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell at His feet and said, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’” These are the very same words that were spoken by Martha. We do not get the facial expression, or the inflection of the words as she spoke them. But we are told something about her body language. She fell at his feet and then she said, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” (32)

In the New Testament, there are seven women named Mary. We have other glimpses into the life of this particular Mary. For example, as I have already observed, when Jesus first visited these two sisters, she is at His feet hearing His Word (Luke 10:38-42). In Chapter Twelve, we will find her at His feet worshipping Him. In this chapter, we find her at His feet accepting His will. She is saying: “If You had been here, my brother would not have died. But I want You to know, that I am worshipping You anyway. Whether I understand it or not, I have the faith to accept the hard reality that You have Your reasons for not being here in time to save my brother’s life.”

The Rescue

Do you see what is happening here? These two sisters are facing life’s two most unsolvable problems. What the Lord wants

from them is the right response to these problems. The right response to these problems begins with their relationship to Him. He receives that response from Mary. We learn that once that relationship is in place, He rescues these two sisters and their brother from the problems of sickness and death.

When we experience these two problems, the rescue does not happen in this life. Since dying is as much a part of life as being born, we must wait for this rescue until the resurrection of all believers when Jesus returns (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

In addition to sickness and death, there are times in your life and mine, when our Lord permits us to experience unsolvable problems. He knows that if we follow the beautiful example of Mary as we respond to these problems, glory will come to God, and our Lord and Savior will be glorified. The whole process will increase our capacity to believe, know, love, and serve God and our Lord and Savior.

He also knows that the honest, transparent faith modeled by Martha will lead us to an experience of the glory of God. He promised Martha that if she believed, she would see the glory of God. As we will now see, both Mary and Martha believe and see the glory of God!

When the Lord has received these two responses from Martha and Mary, we read: “When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ‘Where have you laid him,’ He asked. ‘Come

and see, Lord,’ they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, ‘See how He loved him!’ And they also asked the question, ‘Could not He, Who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’

“Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ‘Take away the stone,’ He said. ‘But, Lord,’ said Martha, the sister of the dead man, ‘By this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.’ Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone.

“Then Jesus looked up and said, ‘Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I know that you always hear Me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent Me.’ When He had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, ‘Take off the grave clothes and let him go.’ (11:33-44)

When I was a very young pastor, one Sunday I was nervous because, when I finished my sermon and concluded my worship service, I was to conduct my first funeral service. There was a old man in my congregation who had been a pastor and had conducted many funeral services. He was a Messianic, Jewish (a Jew who as come to know Jesus Christ as Messiah), charismatic believer who had fled Czechoslovakia to escape Hitler and the Holocaust. He was very well educated and an extraordinary human being. I had enjoyed

many hours of wonderful fellowship in Christ with him and he had helped me as a young pastor with those first years of ministry that can be very difficult.

After the morning worship service, as I greeted him at the door, I asked him, "Dr. Pearl, can you tell me anything about funerals that will help me?" I have a funeral this afternoon, and I have never conducted a funeral. He responded, "Jesus never conducted funerals. He only conducted resurrections!" Although his counsel did not help me very much that afternoon, what a wonderful truth he shared with me! Jesus only conducts resurrections, and that is our hope.

This chapter does describe Jesus going to a funeral. Before He turned that funeral into a resurrection, He showed us some things about how to attend a funeral. For example, the shortest verse in the Bible tells us that He wept. This word suggests that His body shook with sobs. He showed such visible signs of mourning that, referring to Lazarus, the people at that funeral said, "Behold, how He loved him!" Jesus showed us that when we are attending the funeral of someone we have deeply and dearly loved, and have lost we are not making the statement that our faith is weak if we visibly weep and mourn. We are making the statement that we loved that person very much and will miss them.

When David lost a child, in his grief he lamented: "I will go to him, but he will not return to me." (II Samuel 12:23) Our conviction that we will go to them is the reason we sorrow, not as those who have no hope, but the awesome reality that they will not

return to us in this life gives us a reason for legitimate mourning (I Thessalonians 4:13; Matthew 5:4). When Jesus taught, "Blessed are they that mourn," I believe He meant that to be applied in many ways. He meant that to be applied literally. We should never suppress or try to hide our grief. It is blessed to mourn. Jesus showed us that when we need to mourn, we should have a legitimate and blessed experience of mourning.

The Personal and Devotional Application

The heart of this chapter is the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus. Jesus not only makes, but demonstrates and validates one of His greatest "I Am" claims about Who He is. He raised Lazarus from the dead to show us that He Himself is the Victory over death, and the Life we are all seeking. He worked this great miracle to prove and validate His great claim that He was and is the resurrection and the life.

The personal application for you and me is that, if we live our lives in relationship to Him, and believing in Him, we will never really die. Our death will simply be a graduation, and our funeral a commencement service that celebrates our everlasting life in the eternal state. Our death is simply the Shepherd coming into our lives one last time, making us lie down in death, so He can give us the green pastures, the still waters, and the cup that runs over forever in the eternal dimension of our existence. (See Psalm 23)

To summarize what we have observed in the dynamics of this resurrection story to this point, we should ask our three questions again: Who is Jesus? He is Resurrection – the Victory over death - and He is Life. This means that in the face of death, He is the only Solution to the otherwise unsolvable problems of sickness and death.

What is faith? Faith is responding to these problems of sickness and death with the right relationship to Jesus Christ. Faith is modeled in the response of Mary. Faith is the unshakable conviction that if our Lord does not show up when we think He should and rescue us from our problems, He has His reasons. When we are aligned in relationship with our risen, living Lord, our thoughts and ways will be like His. We will then understand that He does not rescue us because He is intensely committed to the proposition that we are going to experience life more abundantly in this lifetime and in the eternal state.

Faith is also the honest response of Martha to the undeniable reality of the sickness and death of someone we loved very much. Her hardest reality was the hurt in her heart because the Lord she also loved very much did not show up in time to prevent the death of her brother. She knew He could have healed her brother and that made her pain almost too much to bear.

She models that honest faith that simply tells it like it is: “This is what I believe and beyond that I am not professing anything!” There is a verse in the letter of James that can be translated: “The prayers of an honest man explode with power!”

(5:16) Faith is sometimes agreeing with God about where the level of our faith ends and our doubt begins.

Faith is also living and believing in the Christ Who is the Resurrection and the Life. Be sure to make the observation that two separate steps of faith are being prescribed in this part of the resurrection chapter of the Bible. Step number one: believe in the risen, living Christ. Step number two: live your life every day in Christ.

And what is life according to this extraordinary chapter of the Gospel of John? Life is the hope and peace we experience because we know that if we were to die today or tonight, our death will merely be a graduation into that eternal dimension of life, which the Bible consistently tells us is the greatest dimension of our existence. Life is the assured conviction that because we live and believe in Christ, even though we physically die, we will live, and we will live forever with Him!

Chapter Three

“Roll Away the Stone of Unbelief”

(11: 33-57)

The verses that tell us what happened next give us the most eloquent faith metaphor in this resurrection chapter. Lazarus was buried in a cave and there was a large stone that had been rolled across the entrance of this cave that sealed what was the tomb this man Jesus loved. "Standing before this tomb of Lazarus, Jesus asked Martha the question, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" The moment of truth in this chapter is when Jesus gives the command: “Roll away the stone!” (39, 40)

As I pointed out in my introduction to this Gospel in booklet Twenty-three, there is always that deeper meaning in the Gospel of John. The deeper meaning here is for us to roll away the stone of unbelief when we find ourselves at the graveside of someone we deeply love. The Scriptures we usually read at a graveside service affirm our conviction that one day the glory of God will be revealed when that loved one is raised from the dead (I Corinthians 15:42-44; I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

I love the open-faced honesty and brutal frankness of Martha. At the point where they are about to roll away the stone, she says, "Behold, Lord, by this time there is a stench!" After Jesus had asked Martha the question that challenged her and those who were present to believe, He prayed an interesting prayer. In this prayer, He

explained to the Father that what He was saying was not intended for the ears of the Father but was for the benefit of those who were listening to the prayer (41, 42).

Jesus was emphatic when He taught that we should pray in private closets to be sure we are addressing our prayers to God and not to people (Matthew 6:5,6). Yet He is clearly stating here that His prayer was at least partly addressed to the people who were listening as He prayed. By His exemplary prayer, He is showing us that when we pray a public or corporate prayer, while we are addressing our prayer to God, we must be aware of the people who are hearing that prayer and joining their hearts with ours as we pray.

When the stone is rolled away, the phenomenal miracle recorded in this chapter is described when the command is given in a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth!" The dead man comes forth, his hands and feet bound with strips of linen. Then Jesus commands, "Loose him, and let him go!" (43)

Some scholars see here a deeper meaning that parallels the teaching we discovered in the eighth chapter of this Gospel (8:30-36). When some of the Jewish religious leaders believed, Jesus told those who professed to believe, "Continue in My word, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free." The personal application for us is that when we make the commitment to become a disciple of Jesus, as we continue in the Word of Jesus as His disciples indeed, we should expect to have an experience that will be like getting out of jail.

When Lazarus comes forth from the grave still bound with grave clothes, some believe this is a metaphor that teaches us it is possible for a believer to experience the resurrection power of the new birth for some time before being set free. Jesus does not want to see born again disciples trapped in the “grave clothes” they wore when they were spiritually dead and lived in bondage to sin.

I really relate to the deeper meaning of this example of a resurrected Lazarus bound in grave clothes. As I explained in my commentary on Chapter Eight, I followed Christ as a disciple for more than a decade before I experienced the freedom Jesus profiles here and in the eighth chapter. For me, personally, removing the “grave clothes” of the old life and being set free is a beautiful metaphor.

The Response of the Jews

We again see a divided Jewish response to miraculous events surrounding the ministry of Jesus. There is a favorable response on the part of some of the Jews who attended this funeral as they observe the witness of Mary: “Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in Him.” (45)

The Jews who came to visit Mary saw something almost as wonderful as the miracle of resurrection. When they saw Mary respond to the problem that Jesus did not rescue her brother from sickness and death, at His feet and accepting His will, they believed.

It is interesting that we do not read that those Jews who came to comfort Martha believed.

We also see a very hostile response from the Jewish religious authorities. The hostile response that has been expressed in the form of dialog ever since Jesus healed the man at the Pool of Bethesda, now reaches its zenith (46-57). A council is formed by the Pharisees to plot their strategy. Before they conclude that they must put Jesus to death, there is an extraordinary prophecy given by Caiaphas the High Priest.

He is primarily thinking that the wrath of Rome is going to fall on their nation if something is not done about the crowds that are gathering around the extraordinary ministry of Jesus. He declares that putting Jesus to death would be the politically correct and expedient move for them as religious leaders. (11:46-52)

The Apostle John then inserts his commentary into the record that, without realizing it, Caiaphas was giving a prophecy that Jesus was not only about to be sacrificed for the Jews who lived in Israel, but for Jews who were dispersed all over the world. The unintended prophecy was that the death of Jesus would not only result in the physical salvation (deliverance) of the Jews, but the spiritual salvation of those who believe. Remember, the apostles will not learn that the Gospel is also for Gentiles until we reach the tenth chapter of the Book of Acts in our reading of the New Testament.

In Summary

I could write much more about so many of the fifty-seven verses in this chapter, but the best way to summarize this chapter is to ask our three questions again. In the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of John: Who is Jesus? What is faith? And what is life?

Who is Jesus? He is Victory over death, and He is Life for those who believe and live their lives in Him. Those who establish a relationship with the risen, living Christ Who is eternal, have eternal life, now and forever!

What is faith? Faith is facing sickness and death believing in Him and living in Him. Faith is rolling away the stone of unbelief in the presence of death to see the glory of God through the miracle of victory over death. Faith is asking Christ to remove our "grave clothes" and to set us free when we believe. "Loose him, and let him go" is a great metaphor that profiles the meaning of faith.

What is life? According to this great resurrection chapter of the Gospel of John, life is a relationship with the risen, living Christ through which we know that, because we are in union with Him, we are going to live forever. Faith is understanding, that physical death is only a graduation from this life into the eternal dimension of our life in Christ.

In the Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation observe the emphasis that we were created to exist in two dimensions, not one. We are designed by our Creator to live on earth for a short while and for that He has given us a temporary earthly body. But we were also

created to live in heaven in the eternal state, and for that we are going to be given a spiritual body. The only way this earthly body we have been given can be equipped to live in the eternal state is for it to go through a metamorphosis, or a total change. Resurrection is the vehicle of that change. (1 Corinthians 15)

Resurrection is not only victory over death. God will use the miracle of our personal resurrection to give us that heavenly body which will equip us to live with Him forever in the eternal state. That is the way eternal life is profiled in this wonderful resurrection chapter. That eternal life begins in this life span when we believe and establish our relationship with the risen Christ.

In this context, consider again the purpose for which John writes this Gospel (20:30,31). His clearly stated purpose is to convince us that Jesus is the Christ. A vital part of his objective is his promise that we will have eternal life when we believe. That eternal life is the quality of life for which God designed us, for which He saves us, and for which He will raise us from the dead as Jesus raised Lazarus.

In this chapter, we learn that God will one day use the miracle of resurrection to make eternal life an ultimate reality for believers. However, the words Jesus spoke to Martha tell us that we do not have to wait until we die and are resurrected to experience eternal life. According to Jesus, eternal life begins when we believe and live out our lives in Him.

One of the greatest answers in this Gospel and in the entire Word of God to the question "What is life?" is the challenge with which Jesus concluded His resurrection instruction for Martha when her brother died: "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?" (11:25, 26)

When you receive a diagnosis that faces you with the reality of your own death, or the death of someone you love; when you stand at the graveside of a believer you have loved very much, this will be your ultimate challenge: Do you believe the Good News we find in the resurrection chapter of the Gospel of John?

Chapter Four

"The End of the Beginning"

(John 12:1-23)

John Chapter Twelve, begins: "Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with Him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

"But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray Him, objected. 'Why was this perfume not sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.' He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the moneybag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. 'Leave her alone,' Jesus replied. 'It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of My burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have Me.'

"Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of Him but also to see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in Him." (1-11)

This chapter begins with another dinner scene that involves Mary and Martha. As we might expect, we read these two words that describe the role of Martha: "Martha served." That was her gift pattern and her calling. We also find Mary demonstrating her calling, gift pattern, and priorities - at His feet offering a costly sacrifice of worship.

In that culture, they reclined on couches when they ate dinner. It was also the custom to wash the feet of your dinner guests when they arrived. It is in this cultural setting that Mary offers her beautiful gift of sacrificial worship. She poured a perfumed ointment that was worth about a year's wages on the feet of Jesus. The fragrance filled the house.

Remember that at the end of the tenth chapter of Luke, when Martha accused Jesus of not caring that Mary was not helping with the serving, Jesus defended Mary. Here again we find Him defending Mary. He says, in so many words, "This is a sacrificial act of worship. She has saved this perfume for this occasion to symbolically prophesy the day of My burial." (7)

Beginning with this chapter, the second half of this Gospel will record the most important week in the most important life ever lived on earth.

In those days, as we saw in the case of Lazarus, they wrapped the dead with bandages, like the ancient mummies. They also placed expensive spices in with the bandages to control the odor that was always a dreadful part of the horrible reality of death.

As Jesus defends Mary, He offers this commentary regarding Himself: "You will always have the poor, but you will not always have Me." (8) This is one of many subtle ways throughout this Gospel that John continuously makes his point that Jesus is God. Mary worships Him and He accepts her worship. He actually defends her worship of Him. The Apostles Peter and Paul will not accept worship (Acts 10:25, 26; 14: 11-18). But Jesus is more than a man, and as God in the form of man, He accepts worship.

The author of this Gospel inserts the commentary that it was not because Judas cared about the poor that he said what he did about the price of this offering being given to the poor. John is not very

subtle. He makes the comment that Judas said this because he was a thief.

I like the way John writes. In his little letter at the end of the New Testament, which is called, "First John" he is candid and very direct when he tells us how we can know that we are authentic believers. He writes that if we say we have fellowship with Christ and continue to walk in darkness, or if we say we love God but do not love our brother, we are liars! (1 John 1:6; 4:20,21) When He adds his commentary about Judas, he simply writes, "He said this because he was a thief." He informs us that Judas was the keeper of the moneybag, and he was stealing from that common purse.

Some people think that because Jesus said, "The poor you have with you always" we should not be concerned about helping the poor. He was not suggesting that we should not help the poor. He was essentially making the observation that you will always have the opportunity to help the poor, but you will not always have Me. It is therefore fitting that Mary should offer this beautiful and costly worship, which Jesus said symbolized His death and burial.

We read that people gathered around this home not only to see Jesus, but also to see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. Therefore, the chief priests, who were already planning to kill Jesus, made plans to kill Lazarus too because the miracle of his resurrection was causing many of the Jews to believe in Jesus.

As we learned in the eleventh chapter of this Gospel, when we believe in Christ and live our lives in Him, we will never die.

While we continue to live out our lives in Christ and in this world, there is a sense in which we experience a personal resurrection. Paul described that resurrection this way: "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. Look at Him. Old things are passed away. All things are become new. And all this is God's doing." (II Corinthians 5:17, 18)

There is a sense in which that is a metamorphosis or an experience of victory over death. If you have experienced the new birth, one of the ways your experience glorifies God and exalts Jesus Christ is that other people come to Christ when they see the new creature you have become. Like Lazarus, they will be attracted to Jesus when they see the miracle He has worked in your life.

There will also be those who will hate the Christ in you and they will hate you also. They may even try to plot your death the way they planned to kill Lazarus.

The First Palm Sunday

As we move into the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of John, we reach a transition point in the twenty-one chapters of this Gospel where it can almost be evenly divided. Approximately half the chapters of this Gospel cover the thirty-three years of the most important life ever lived. When we read this chapter, however, we discover that the second half of this Gospel will now primarily emphasize only one week - the last week of the life of Jesus Christ.

As I have observed frequently in my teaching of the four Gospels, that week of the life of Christ is emphasized because it was during that week that Jesus died and was raised from the dead for the salvation of the world. The events John is now going to describe begin that critically important week in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We call that week, "Holy Week" or the week that begins with Palm Sunday and concludes with what millions call "Easter Sunday" and others call, "Resurrection Sunday."

The End of the Beginning

His three years of preaching, teaching, healing and training apostles are now about to end and His most important work is about to begin. This is not the beginning of the end of His ministry. There is a sense in which the events of this chapter describe the end of the beginning of His ministry. He is now entering into His most important work, His death and resurrection, which will be followed by His Ascension, the Day of Pentecost, the birth of the church, and the miraculous work of Christ that has continued ever since. The Gospel of John introduces the end of the beginning of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ when we read: "The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!'

"Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, 'Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your King is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.' At first His disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

"Now the crowd that was with Him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that He had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet Him. So the Pharisees said to one another, 'See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!'" (12:12-19)

As John points out to us here, the significance of this event is profiled by one of the prophets (Zechariah 9:9). Another prophet wrote that He would come "suddenly". (Malachi 3:1) His word "suddenly" should be translated "unexpectedly" meaning that He would not come the way we might expect a Messiah to come.

The spiritual leaders of the Jewish people had their preconceived ideas about how the Messiah was going to come into this world. Their ideas were based on Scriptures that were pre-filled when Jesus came but will be fulfilled only in the Second Coming of Jesus (Isaiah 61:1, 2). Even the apostles believed that the Messiah would overthrow the Roman Empire and deliver Israel in a literal and political sense (Acts 1:6). If those who professed to be the people of

God had really understood the prophets, they would have been excited when He rode that little donkey into Jerusalem.

As we try to understand the meaning of the first Palm Sunday, we should think of an ambassador formally presenting himself to a foreign kingdom. When an ambassador goes to a foreign country to represent his king, or head of state, he may be in that country for some time before he goes to the palace of the foreign sovereign and formally presents himself and his credentials as an ambassador.

Jesus is an Ambassador from heaven representing His Father God to a foreign land. Jesus left heaven to come to this world. He has been here for some time and He has done many wonderful works. He is now formally presenting Himself to this world as the Ambassador of heaven.

He does not go to the political capital of the world and present Himself to Rome. He does not go to one of the sin capitals, like Corinth or Ephesus. He goes to the spiritual capital of the world, and addresses God's people and the leaders of God's people. I am convinced that He does this because He realizes that it is the plan of God to use the people of God to accomplish the purposes of God. He knows that the people of God are a "sleeping giant" and He wants to wake up that giant.

In the twenty-first chapter of Matthew - one of the most dynamic chapters in the four Gospels - Jesus formally takes the kingdom from the Jews and announces that He is going to give that

kingdom to those (Gentiles – you and I who are not Jews) who will produce the fruit of that kingdom.

The Book of Acts records the miracle that the church Christ was and is now building is where we will find the people of God to whom the risen, living Christ has given that kingdom He took from the Jews. This is not to imply that the church was an afterthought or an alternate plan of Christ. Jesus clearly stated in the Gospel of Matthew, before He took the kingdom from the Jews, that all the powers of Hell could not keep Him from building His church (Matthew 16:18).

In many ways the church is asleep today. But the church is a sleeping giant. If the people of God in the church could be awakened and made aware of who, what, and why they have been saved by Jesus Christ and strategically placed by their Lord in this world, Oh, what a giant the church could be!

It is easy to lose patience with the people of God, bypass them and think God is not going to do anything through them. However, make the observation that throughout church history the work of God is and has always been accomplished in this world through the people of God. The word "church" literally means, "called out people" who are called out of this world to follow and obey the risen, living Christ. They are then sent back into this world to be the vehicles through which their Lord and Savior saves lost people (John 17:18; 20 21).

Since this is a spiritual absolute and a strategic ministry distinctive of Jesus, observe how much time Jesus spends trying to awaken the “sleeping giant” - the people of God. See how emphatically He appeals to the people of God. Consider all the time and energy He invests in those times of hostile dialog with the leaders of the Jewish people.

Realize that He did reach many of these leaders when He finished His awesome sermon near the conclusion of the eighth chapter of this Gospel. He also reached Nicodemus the distinguished Rabbi. Could Saul of Tarsus have been in attendance in some of those hostile debates Jesus had with these religious leaders? In His risen form, Christ came back to reach that Pharisee of the Pharisees on the road to Damascus. Then Saul of Tarsus became the great Apostle Paul.

Chapter Five

"The Hour Has Come"

(12:20-50)

The events of the first Palm Sunday are followed by another commentary on the people who were impacted by the resurrection of Lazarus. They continued to spread the word. We have seen that because great crowds of people are now gathering around Jesus every

time He appears, the Pharisees make this observation: "Look how the whole world has gone after Him!" (19)

These religious leaders were actually speaking a prophecy when they made this observation. It always was the plan of God that the ministry of Jesus was for the whole world (Genesis 12:3; Luke 2:10). God so loved the world, not only the chosen people of Israel, before they chose not to be chosen. At this point in the Gospel of John, the beloved Apostle will tell us that the mission of Jesus Christ clearly was directed to the whole world.

At the peak of this popularity, some Greeks come to the Apostle Philip with a request: "Sir, "We would see Jesus." Philip tells Andrew about the request of these Greeks; Andrew and Philip in turn tell Jesus. There is a sense in which this request of the Greeks represents what our approach should be as we read this Gospel. We should read this Gospel looking for Jesus.

The elders of my first church had those words engraved on a little plaque and attached to the inside of the pulpit. Every time I preached I was looking at those words: "Sir, we would see Jesus." What the elders were more than suggesting was: We want to see Jesus when you or a guest preacher speaks from this pulpit.

As soon as Jesus hears that these Greeks (Gentiles) are seeking Him, we read these words, "Jesus replied, `The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'" (12:23)

Reading through these first twelve chapters, we have read before that Jesus had specific time priorities. He told His mother

before He turned water into wine, "My hour has not yet come." (2:4) When His brothers suggested what His schedule ought to be, He made it very clear to them that He had a schedule and everything on His schedule was determined to by the will of the Father. We read that He said: "My time is not yet come." (7:6) He repeats this statement and says, "My time has not yet fully come." (7:8) In the next chapter we need that no one laid hands on Him, "For His hour had not yet come." (8:20)

That prepares us to appreciate the gravity of what Jesus is saying when He announces, "The hour has come." (12:23) These words mean that He is now about to begin His most important work - He is entering into the work of His cross, death, resurrection, and the beginning of the work that will continue until and beyond His Second Coming when He will reign over His kingdom that will never end. We are now prepared to discover one of the most significant passages in this entire Gospel: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves Me must follow Me; and where I am, My servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves Me.

"Now My heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name!' Then a voice came from

heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to Him. Jesus said, 'This voice was for your benefit, not Mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.'

"He said this to show the kind of death He was going to die. The crowd spoke up, 'We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up?' Who is this 'Son of Man?'" (23-34)

As He responded to their obvious unbelief, He quoted two passages from Isaiah, which raise the question of why some believe and others do not believe. Isaiah began one of his most profound sermons (chapters) with the question: "Who has believed our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" In another place, Isaiah teaches that when we see the response of unbelief, it is sometimes because God has blinded the eyes of those who do not believe (Isaiah 53:1; 8:10).

"Then Jesus told them, 'You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.' When He had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid Himself from them." (35, 36)

In this passage, John is quoting Jesus as He tells us that the cross was the very reason He came into this world. In His dialog with Rabbi Nicodemus, He made a clear and concise mission statement when He essentially told the Rabbi: "I must be lifted up, (which meant crucified), because I am God's only Son, I am God's only Solution, and I am God's only Savior." (John 3:14-21) In this passage here in the twelfth chapter of John, we find the same concise and clear statement of mission.

When He came to His hour and was facing the cross, He used a beautiful metaphor when He said: "Unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it is just a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." (24) He used a natural law to teach a spiritual law. As the Master Teacher, He begins with the known and then proceeds to teach the unknown that we might understand spiritual truth. Since we regularly observe and are acquainted with natural laws, He often uses illustrations from nature. For example, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow," - then consider how you grow spiritually. (Matthew 6:28)

That is what He is doing here. If a kernel of wheat is not buried or planted, it remains a seed. It will always be only a seed. But when it is buried in the ground, it produces many seeds. He is applying this principle first to Himself and His death on the cross. He is saying that He is the kernel of wheat, and He must be crucified, buried, and resurrected, because that is the way the Father will make His life fruitful.

He then applies the principle to anyone who calls Him Lord and calls himself a disciple who follows Him. He concludes this profound teaching with the solemn declaration that if we call ourselves His disciples, we will follow Him and serve Him by applying this principle to our lives.

This is the way He then illustrates the essence of the principle He is teaching: "The man who loves his life in this world will lose it, but the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." This illustrated application is also recorded in the other Gospels (Luke 9: 23-25; Matthew 10:39; Mark 8:35).

Jesus is teaching some spiritual facts of life. To better understand His illustration, imagine an hourglass. Let the glass represent your body and the sand represent the life in your body. You cannot keep time from passing you any more than you can keep sand from coming out of an hourglass. He is teaching that you cannot save or preserve your life. That is what the Psalmist meant when he wrote: "No man can keep alive his own soul." (Psalm 22:29)

We cannot save our lives in the sense of preserving our lives. In fact, a human being who would try to preserve their life would be the biggest loser of life, according to Jesus. Can you imagine saying, "I am going to lock myself up, sit down and save (preserve) my life?"

One day I was jogging on an airstrip in a primitive culture. People came out of the jungle to watch in amazement because they believed the best way to preserve your life was to rest as much as possible. Their thought was, "The harder you work and the more

energy you burn, the sooner you will die because you are spending your life when you burn energy." Of course, we know that the opposite is true. If you simply sit and rest all the time, you will shorten your life considerably. Although Jesus was making His application on a deeper level, what He taught is true on a physical level. You must literally pour out your life by exercising, or you will lose your life.

You cannot save your life, but Jesus does teach that there are certain things you can do with your life. You have some control over how the sand comes out of the hourglass, or how your life will be spent. For example, you can simply let it all spill it out until there is no sand left in the glass. You can live for seventy years and never give any thought to the purpose for which you should spend your life.

In the Old Testament, we read: "We spend our lives like water spilled on the ground that can never be gathered up again." (II Samuel 14:14) If you do not even think about the purpose of life until you are eighty-five, you have allowed your life to spill out. We are creatures of choice, and that is a choice you can make. You can spill your life on the ground like water that can never be gathered up again.

You can also commit the sin of Esau and sell your birthright for a bowl of soup (Genesis 25:29-34). There are many people bidding for your life. You can sell your life to the highest bidder, or to whoever pays your salary. Jesus warns you not to sell your

birthright: "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" One translation refers to the "soul" as "himself". "What does a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his true self? What can he give to buy that self back?" (Mark 8:35- 37) There are actually two essential questions here: "What will it profit a man if somebody gives him the title to every piece of property, and all the money in the world, if he will simply give up himself?" And, "What will a man give in exchange for himself?" These are profound questions.

The dictionary defines the word "self" as: "The individuality, the uniqueness of any given person that makes them distinct from every other living person." In other words, there is somebody God wants you to be, and Jesus teaches that you would be a fool if you were offered the whole world for that identity and you sold your true self for that price.

The second question is even more searching. "What will a man give in exchange for himself?" In other words, for what does a man sell himself? The biblical answer for Esau was "a bowl of soup." He does not value himself, so he sells himself very cheaply.

Jesus modeled something for us when He went to the cross. He not only offered the sacrifice that can make salvation possible for you and me. That is the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of the New Testament epistles, and the theology of the New Testament. However, in addition to the salvation that is based on the

cross of Christ, there is a philosophy of life that is taught and modeled as Jesus faces His cross. He showed us the right choices to make about how "the sand should come out of the hourglass" that is our life. Jesus was teaching us to sacrifice our lives when He tells us that a seed cannot be fruitful until it is planted in the ground.

In Summary

The clear teaching of Jesus is that you cannot save your life. You can spill it, you can sell it, you can sacrifice it for the wrong purposes, and you can sacrifice it for the right purposes - for God and what God wants you to do with your life. This is what Jesus modeled for us when He faced the cross for which He came into this world.

We read that when His most important hour came, He was troubled. This word "troubled" is interesting. It is used in the eleventh chapter at the tomb of Lazarus. When He saw Mary and the Jews crying we read that, "He was deeply troubled." It actually means "righteous anger". There at the tomb of Lazarus He was face to face with two of the worst consequences of sin, - sickness and death. He was angry with the power of the devil and sin, the byproduct of which was staring Him in the face there at the tomb of Lazarus. He is now angry at all the powers of hell which are fighting Him and trying to keep Him from going to the cross.

The temptation of Jesus as it is recorded early in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, tells us that the evil one departed from

Him for a season at the conclusion of that temptation. (Matthew 4, Mark 1, Luke 4) The evil one continued to tempt Him and oppose Him, right up to the cross. He was coming face to face with all the powers of hell when He made the decision to let His life fall into the ground like a seed and die, so it might be fruitful. This is the most dramatic description in the Gospels of Jesus making this choice to sacrifice Himself for the will of the Father - which was the salvation of the world.

We read that His soul was troubled and He asked in prayer He asked the question: "What shall I say? 'Father, Save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.'" (27, 28)

His enemies mocked Him while He was actually hanging there on the cross, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save." (Matthew 27:42) That was a true statement because you cannot save others and still save yourself. You must make a choice. You either choose to save others, or you make the choice to save yourself. When He made His choice to save others, He did it in such a beautiful way. We read that He prayed this great prayer: "Father, glorify Your name!" This beautiful response came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." (John 12:28) What a beautiful epitaph for the perfect life of Jesus Christ.

What is the purpose of a life? The purpose of life is to glorify God. How do you glorify God? When Jesus has spent His last hours with the apostles, and is about to be arrested and taken to the cross,

He prays a magnificent prayer (John 17). He sums up His life of thirty-three years with these beautiful words, "Father, I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work that You gave Me to do." (4) When Jesus prayed that prayer, He showed us how we glorify God.

A devout American author and pastor named, A. W. Tozer often said that all of us should pray this prayer: "Father, glorify Yourself and send me the bill - anything, Father - just glorify Yourself!" That is the heart and the spirit of the prayer Jesus prayed here when He accepted the assignment of His Father God to die on the cross. The response to His prayer from His Father was: "I have been glorified through your life and I will be glorified again!"

Think of how the Father was glorified again and again and again through the perfect life of Jesus. As He faces the cross, when He prays, "Father, glorify Your name," and He receives that beautiful response from heaven, He shows us how we should face the awesome crises that come into all our lives.

I wonder if you can sincerely pray that kind of prayer. We are all so self-oriented. Selfishness is the very definition and heart of what the Bible calls sin. The Bible teaches us that we were not created to be self-centered. We were created by God to be God-centered. God did not create us to do our own will. He created us with the ability to choose our will or His will. As Jesus modeled for us, we were created to choose to do the will of the Father. We are

not to glorify ourselves or to do our will, but to glorify the Father by doing His will.

Jesus lives out everything He teaches us in this passage. He is saying to us: "I am going to let My life fall into the ground like a seed and die, that it might bear fruit." Having stated that for Himself, observe that He relates this principle of a personal death and resurrection to you and me when He says: "Whoever serves Me must follow Me." (12:26)

He obviously means, "My authentic disciples will live in the spirit of what I am doing and teaching here if they are truly following Me." The essence of the promise He made to those who understand and apply this teaching was: "If you understand this truth of losing your life that you might find it, My Father will honor you."

When I was a small child, I remember asking my devout mother, who had eleven children, "If you had it to do all over again, would you have had so many children?" I remember her response: "Yes, I would. But, before I made that commitment, I would also decide that I was not going to have a life of my own."

There are millions of people in the American culture today who would respond to the commitment of my mother by exclaiming: "Perish the thought! You have a right to a life of your own." A popular expression in America today is, "Get a life!" Humanistic, secular philosophy says, "You are the absolute center of your personal universe. The only absolute in life is what you want, and what you must do to get what you want." That is the opposite of

what Jesus taught by precept and example. Jesus taught: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (John 15:13)

In Chapter Eleven, after He prays before He raises Lazarus, He states that His prayer was not because the Father needed to hear it, but was for the benefit of those who heard the prayer. Jesus now responds to the voice the people thought was thunder or an angel speaking to Him: "This voice was for your benefit. Not mine. It was not for My benefit but it was for your benefit that the Father spoke these words." (30) On these two occasions, He is telling us that He and the Father had a perfect communion. Because He was in union with Father all the time, He knew the thoughts of the Father and the Father knew His thoughts.

After the declaration that the voice was not for His benefit, He gives a great teaching about judgment: "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out." He is now entering into a face-to-face head-on collision with all the powers of hell, and with the evil one. (31)

As I have observed, the temptation of Jesus began at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus Christ and continued throughout His three years of public ministry. The final victory over the evil one is now taking place as He faces the cross. He makes this great claim in verse thirty-two: "But I, when I am lifted up (meaning crucified) from the earth will draw all men to Myself.' This He said to show the kind of death He was going to die." (32, 33)

In the third chapter of this Gospel, John tells us how Jesus reminded Nicodemus of when Moses was instructed to place a serpent of brass on a pole at the center of the camp of the children of Israel. When the people who were snake-bitten looked to that serpent of brass they were healed of their snakebites. Jesus related that miracle to His death on the cross and He referred to both these miracles as being "lifted up". But here, He adds a beautiful promise: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to Myself." He has been lifted up now for two thousand years and millions of people have looked to Him for salvation.

The religious leaders responded: "We read in the Law that the Christ is going to live forever. How do you say, the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" (34)

"Son of Man" is an expression in the Bible that sometimes simply means "man". But when Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man, the expression means more than that. As we are the sons of God and He was the only begotten Son of God, He is claiming that He is the Son of Man.

They did not believe in a Messiah, Who was going to die. They expected the Messiah to conquer and reign forever. If they had known their Old Testament Scriptures better they would have believed in and expected a Messiah Who would be the Lamb of God and the fulfillment of all the animal sacrifices that were offered in the wilderness Tent of Worship and in the Temple of Solomon. (Exodus 12: 3; Isaiah 53: 7; John 1:29)

Ultimately, Jesus responds to their question by saying, "Walk while you have the light; you are not going to have the light forever. Put your trust in the light while you have it." (35) Here we have a good definition of faith. What you do about what you know is always a basic, biblical way to focus your faith. Jesus essentially taught: "No light, no sin." (John 9:41; 15:22) A basic definition of sin is therefore the rejection of light. Paul teaches that if we live up to the light we have, God will give us more light (Philippians 3:16). Another basic answer to our question of what faith is would be that faith always walks in the light of what God reveals.

Fear of Man - Fear of God

There is another response to Jesus recorded here that shows us what faith is not. We read that people believed but they valued the approval of the Pharisees more than the approval of God. They valued the approval of men more than the approval of God (12:42, 43; 5:44).

We read that, "Jesus cried out: 'When a man believes in Me, he does not believe in Me only, but in the One Who sent Me. When he looks at Me he sees the One Who sent Me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in Me should stay in darkness.'" (12:44-46)

The Apostle John has told us before that Jesus cried out when He preached. In Chapter Seven, we read that when He invited thirsty people to come to Him, Jesus cried out so dynamically the soldiers

who were sent to arrest Him did not lay a hand on Him. They came back saying, "Nobody ever spoke like that man!" (46)

Jesus must have been the perfect conversationalist. He was the Master of dialog with His apostles and in settings like the context in which He taught the Sermon on the Mount, His Mount Olivet and His Upper Room Discourses. He was also the Master of hostile dialog. But Jesus was also a mighty preacher! That is why John tells us "He cried out" when He preached – not only speaking so all could hear Him, but with great authority.

As Jesus told us in Chapter Ten, He and the Father were absolutely one (10:30). In the Upper Room Discourse, which we will look at soon, He will say in the dialog He shared with the apostles in that intimate setting: "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." (14:9) What amazing words! He says the same thing in this passage: "The man who believes in Me, ... when he looks at Me he sees the One Who sent Me."

Then He adds these words: "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in Me should stay in darkness." (46) He then tells us about a dimension of judgment we probably do not think about very much: "As for the person who hears My words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it." (47) Do you remember that truth being taught in Chapter Three? He was not sent into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world (3:17).

He tells us here: "There is a Judge for the one who rejects Me and does not accept My words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. Because I did not speak of My own accord, but the Father Who sent Me commanded Me what to say and how to say it. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told Me to say, and I know that His command leads to eternal life." (48-50)

According to Chapter Seven, He made the great claim that His teaching was the teaching of God. In this passage, He applies that dogmatic claim when He declares that since His teaching and preaching is the Word of God, that Word will judge you and me because it is the Word of God. By application, the essence of what Jesus is saying is: "If you reject, or fail to apply His Word, at the judgment the Father and I will not need to judge you. The word you have heard will be your judge."

As I have observed, we find this recurring theme in the teaching of Jesus: What we do about what we know. As He said in Chapter Nine, and will say again in Chapter Fifteen: "No light, no sin." (9:41; 15:22) But the light we have rejected or ignored will judge us. "I did not come to condemn you, but there is no way I could come and speak the words of the Father without you condemning yourself when you reject or ignore the words of the Father." In effect, that is the spirit of what Jesus taught about the way what we know will be our judge.

Well, Who is Jesus in this twelfth chapter of John? He is the One Who sacrifices Himself and essentially prays: "Glorify Yourself,

Father, and send Me the bill." When He does, the Father responds: "I have done that before and I will do it again." Jesus is the One Who speaks the words of God the Father the way the Father tells Him to speak them.

And what is faith? Faith is the realization that you believe because the Holy Spirit has given you eyes that see, ears that hear and a heart that understands. Faith is valuing the approval of God more than the approval of men. Faith is living up to and walking in the light that you have received from God.

And what is life? Life is that which results when your life is like a seed falling into the ground and dying that it might bear fruit. Life is being fruitful. Life is the seed of your life producing many seeds. Life is the way Paul applies this teaching. In one verse written to the Galatians, Paul tells them three times that he lives because he has been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20).

That is who Jesus is, what faith is, and what life is, according to the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of John.

Chapter Six

"The New Commandment"

(13:1-38)

There are more than five hundred commandments in the Bible. These commandments are summarized in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17; Deuteronomy 5:7-21). There is also that which the Scripture calls the first and Great Commandment. Jesus tells us the greatest of all the commandments is to love God with all our being and He summarizes the Ten Commandments in two commandments when He tells us the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:35-40). The chapter we are now approaching introduces us to "The New Commandment" of Jesus. (13:34, 35)

As we begin our study of Chapter Thirteen, we need to realize that we are approaching the way the Apostle John remembered and recorded - under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit - the longest discourse of Jesus. This discourse is known as "The Upper Room Discourse." Jesus gives several major discourses, like the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), the Mount Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24, 25), and this Upper Room Discourse (John 13-16). Since the seventeenth chapter of John is the prayer of Jesus for the apostles - the only ones who heard that discourse in the upper room - that prayer can also be included with the Upper Room Discourse.

When we study these major discourses of Jesus, we discover that they were not only lectures, or sermons. One of them was initiated by dialog (Matthew 24, 25). When Jesus gave these discourses, He deliberately asked or implied questions that were obviously designed to stimulate dialog with those who heard Him. For example, as we study this longest discourse of Jesus, when we get to the end of Chapter Thirteen and the beginning of the next chapter, we will find that the apostles asked Jesus several questions. His response to their questions is the heart of what we call a discourse.

As we begin Chapter Thirteen, another reason we are coming to an important division in our study of the Gospel of John is that Jesus has now finished His three years of preaching, healing, teaching, and apprenticing apostles.

He began His public ministry with what I call a retreat. If you have heard my broadcasts, or read my booklets that describe the Sermon on the Mount, you know I believe that discourse was given in a retreat context. The purpose of that retreat was to recruit disciples and those He commissioned to be apostles, or His sent ones. Mark describes the context of the that discourse when he writes that Jesus chose twelve men, appointed them to be with Him and then to be sent out (Mark 3:13-15). I call that discourse "The First Christian Retreat."

He has now trained these apostles for three years and the "seminary education" has ended. Before He goes to the cross, the

last thing He does is to have another retreat with these twelve men. I therefore call this discourse "The Last Christian Retreat." These chapters are profound because they record the last will and testament of Jesus as He commits to these men He has trained for three years, the mission and the ministry the Father committed to Him.

The Order of the Towel (13: 1-17; 34, 35)

This is the way John begins to record the longest discourse of Jesus: "It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love.

"The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him." (1-5)

What a beautiful way to begin a retreat. The other Gospels tell us the apostles often argued over which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom Jesus was going to establish. Even while they were on their way to the upper room, they were arguing over who was going to be the greatest in that kingdom (Matthew 20:20-

28; Luke 9:46-48; 22:24-27). Some of them believed the Messiah would overthrow Rome and establish a kingdom on earth and (Acts 1:6).

The Scripture I have quoted above is John's beautiful account of how Jesus responded to their argument over who was going to be the greatest. He began His last retreat with them by doing something that must have shocked these twelve men. He laid aside His clothes and assumed the role of a slave. In that culture, it was common to wash the feet of dinner guests. But, it was often the role of a slave to wash the feet of those guests. Jesus was assuming the role of a slave when He took that basin and began washing their feet.

When we read that He began to wash their feet, this seems to prepare us for the fact that something will happen when He washes the feet of Peter. We read: "He came to Simon Peter, who said to Him, 'Lord, are You going to wash my feet?' Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' 'No,' said Peter, 'You shall never wash my feet!' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me. Then, Lord,' Simon Peter replied, 'not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus answered, 'A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.' For He knew who was going to betray Him, and that was why He said not every one was clean." (6-11)

In our study of the previous chapter of this Gospel, when Mary washed the feet of Jesus, we learned that they reclined when

they ate their meals in that culture. Picture the apostles reclining around a table with Jesus. Imagine that Peter is the fifth or sixth apostle He approaches with His basin and towel. By this time, Peter is in a state of shock because the Lord is washing their feet. Peter cannot stand it when the Lord actually comes to him. So he says, "Lord, are You going to wash my feet?" The Lord replies to Peter in such a beautiful way: "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

Have you ever had your feet washed by another believer? I shall never forget the night my feet were washed by the chief of a tribe of primitive people who had been converted. When he unexpectedly washed my feet, I felt exactly like Peter. I was horrified! I found myself saying the exact same words: "Are you going to wash my feet?" He smiled and knew enough English to say, "Just like Peter!"

Peter is very honest here when he expresses his feelings. I have asked you if you have ever had your feet washed by another believer. Perhaps a better question would be: "How would you feel if your feet were unexpectedly being washed by Jesus Christ, the Lord of lords, the Creator of the universe and even your feet? Can you put yourself in the place of Peter and imagine how Peter must have felt when Jesus washed his feet?

The verse that expresses the response of Jesus to Peter is such a beautiful verse: "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will understand later." (7) I have found these words to be

appropriate while standing at a graveside with believers who have tragically lost a loved one. There have been times when these were the only words that seemed appropriate for believers who have experienced one of those tragedies we simply cannot understand.

I must share with you at least one example of these many tragedies. Many years ago, I knew a couple that was planning to attend a theological seminary. While she was waiting for him to return from his last cruise with the Navy, she and another young navy wife, whose husband was on that same cruise, were involved in a terrible automobile accident. Both women were cremated when their car exploded into flames.

The families who lived in another state, not only asked me to conduct a double funeral for these two young wives, but to spend an extra day with them and tell them why God permitted this to happen. As it always is, the moment of truth was at the graveside. As I asked God to give me a word for these grieving families, the only word that seemed appropriate was what Jesus said to Peter: "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

In this life, we frequently have no idea what God is doing. With all my heart, I believe that one day, when we know even as we are now known, we will receive the answer to our why questions (I Corinthians 13:12). Until that day, these words of Jesus should bring us much comfort.

There is a sense in which Jesus had no interruptions - only opportunities because He always turned interruptions into

opportunities. While it seems as if Peter is interrupting Jesus, we simply see Jesus with an opportunity to teach something. When Jesus responds to Peter, in addition to telling Peter to wait until He finishes, He gives Peter another great teaching. When Peter asks Jesus for a complete bath, Jesus tells Peter that he does not need another bath. He merely needs to have his feet washed.

In those days they sometimes bathed in the public baths. When they walked to their homes after a bath, since their feet were damp, the dirt would stick to their feet. When they got home, or to the home of a friend who had invited them for dinner, they did not need another bath. They merely needed to have their feet washed.

The "bath" in this metaphor represents regeneration – being born again. When we trust Christ for salvation and are born again, our sins are washed away and we are cleansed. In other words, we get the bath. But, as we walk through this world, our feet get dirty. When we get our feet dirty, we do not need to be born again, again, or to have another bath of regeneration, but we need a continuous cleansing, or to have our feet washed.

That is why the Lord instituted His Table, the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, or Communion, as some call it. He knew we would regularly need to be reminded to have our "feet washed". When we sin, we need to continuously confess our sins, trusting Him to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and keep on cleansing us (I John 1:7-9). But, when that happens, we are not experiencing the

new birth again. We are merely having our feet washed; our body is already clean.

Then we read that He says: "Not every one of you is clean, because He knew that one of them was going to betray Him." (11) He will have more to say about the one who is going to betray Him. But, how Peter and the other apostles must have rejoiced to hear His next words, which were essentially: "And you are clean. You have had the bath. You merely need to get your feet washed once in awhile."

The story then continues as we read: "When He had finished washing their feet He put on His clothes and returned to His place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' He asked them. 'You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. If I have washed your feet, and I am your Lord and Teacher, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.'" (12-17)

When He finishes His inspired response to this interruption - the wonderful teaching He shares with Peter - He asks, "Do you understand what I have done for you?" What a question! Now, what had He done for them? Obviously, He had washed their feet and given them an example of humility and of serving one another that

they would never forget. He explains. I have given you an example that you should do as I have done." (15)

The Apostle Paul showed us how to apply this teaching when he exhorted the church at Philippi to have the mind of Christ and lovingly serve one another (Philippians 2:1-5). The personal and devotional application of the way Jesus began this retreat is to ask your Lord every day, "How may I serve You?" A good way to apply the symbolic act with which Jesus began this discourse would be to ask all those with whom you have a relationship, "How may I serve you?"

Perhaps an even better way to ask these two questions would be to ask your Lord and those with whom you are in relationship, "How may I love you?" Although it was not as obvious, Jesus had done something else for the apostles when He washed their feet. What had He really done for them? His question is actually answered in the first verse. My favorite translation reads: "Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love."

When He washed their feet, He loved them! From the time He met these men He had loved them. He loved them in a way and in ways they had never been loved before. John refers to himself several times in this Gospel as the disciple whom Jesus loved." (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20, 24) John never got over the experience of being loved the way he was loved when Jesus loved him. Sixty years later, when he dedicated the Book of Revelation to Jesus, he

remembered Jesus as: "The faithful Witness, Who loved us and washed us (or loosed us) from our sins in His own blood, and made us kings and priests." (1:5)

As the Apostle John dedicates the last book of the Bible to Jesus, what is the first thing He remembers about Jesus? "He loved us!" Jesus had shown His love for the apostles in small ways for three years. When He washed their feet, He was simply expressing His love for them one more way. He showed these men the full extent of His love when He washed their feet. Make the observation that He loved them in a way they were not willing to love each other. That was the heart of this example of His love for them.

Jesus will confirm the connection between His love for them and the washing of their feet later when He issues what He calls "A New Commandment." He clearly taught that they should follow His example by washing each other's feet. The New Commandment will simply show them how to apply what He meant when He told them they should follow His example and wash each other's feet.

The New Commandment of Jesus was: "That you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples if you love one another." (34, 35) When He washed their feet, He loved them. When He told them to follow His example and wash one another's feet, He was instructing them to love one another, as He had loved them for three years, and as He had loved them when He washed their feet.

When these men joined Him for this last retreat, they all had one thing in common. They loved Jesus because Jesus loved them. Later, John will write: "We love Him because He first loved us." (I John 4:19) Jesus had loved these men, and to the best of their ability, they were responding to that love. However, when Jesus met with them in that upper room, all we can say is that Jesus loved them and they loved Jesus.

Essentially, when Jesus gave them His new commandment, He was saying to these apostles: "Do you see that man across the table from you? I command you to love him. In the same way I have been loving you, I now command you to love him!" He promised two results when this new commandment is obeyed: the world will know you are My disciples, and you will be greatly blessed.

If you study these apostles, you will learn that several of them were zealots, which means they believed in continuing the resistance against Rome even though they were conquered by Rome. One of them is described as Simon, the Zealot. But one of them was a publican, which means that he was not fighting against, but working for the Romans. He was collecting Roman taxes from his fellow-Jews. What did a zealot have in common with a publican?

I like to imagine Simon the Zealot looking across the table at Matthew. He and Matthew make eye contact. They both quickly look at the floor and then back at Jesus again. Their eyes both seem to be asking Jesus, "You mean him? Me, love him? You mean a

zealot wash the feet of a publican and a publican wash the feet of a zealot?"

With His eyes Jesus is answering: "Precisely. When the world hears that a zealot is washing the feet of a publican and a publican is washing the feet of a zealot - that a zealot is loving a publican and a publican is loving a zealot - they are going to know that you are My disciples."

After beginning the retreat with the profound symbolic act of washing their feet, He shocked these men with the sad news that He was going to leave them. They appear to have understood that He meant His death, although that is not absolutely certain. They did understand that He was saying to them: "I am going away and you cannot come with Me." (36)

He has also clearly said to them: "In light of the fact that I am leaving you, I am giving you a new commandment." Since it was His style to give the illustration before the teaching, or sermon, He had already demonstrated this new commandment when He washed their feet, and then asked them that question: "Do you understand what I have done for you?" When He washed their feet, He showed the full extent of His love, and when He said to them, "If I have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet," He was really saying, "If I have loved you, you ought to love one another."

My wife and I have loved and nurtured five wonderful children. We were told that a good way to introduce our children to the proper relationship between a husband and wife was to show

loving affection in the presence of our children. One morning we had been especially affectionate at breakfast and before the children left for school one of our daughters asked, "Is that what you do all day after we leave for school?"

From what we were told, when that daughter married, she would have a good attitude toward the joyful expression of sexual love in her marriage because she had observed a loving physical relationship that her parents showed her was good and proper for happily married believers.

Jesus was telling His apostles that for three years He had trained them, and He was now giving them a commission to communicate a message of love to a world that was filled with violence and cruelty. He was now simply telling them that the best way to communicate that love message was to love one another.

Before many years had passed, cruel, pagan people watched, as followers of Christ were put to death in unspeakable ways at the Coliseum in Rome. While watching these followers of Christ die together, the spectators frequently exclaimed: "Behold, how they love one another!" History tells us there were actually times when those who were watching Christians die in the Coliseum joined the disciples of Jesus and died with them because they were so impressed with the way they loved one another as they died together!

When he writes his short letter that is found near the end of the New Testament, the Apostle John will give us ten good reasons why we must love one another (I John 4:7-21). Tradition tells us that

when John was very old, he was so weak he had to be carried to the meetings of the church. In a feeble, weak voice he would bless the congregation with this benediction: "Little children, love one another!" The Apostle of love really understood the new commandment of Jesus.

A New Covenant and a New Community

When He gives the new commandment in the upper room, Jesus is essentially saying to His apostles: "You have made a commitment to Me and I have made a commitment to you. You are in covenant with Me and I am in covenant with you. I offered that covenant to you when I issued you this challenge: "Follow Me and I will make you." (Matthew 4:19) You made the commitment to follow Me, and I have been making you one of My solutions and answers now for three years. But now I am commanding you to establish a covenant and make a commitment to each another. Love each another in the same way I have been loving you for three years!"

That is the spirit and essence of the way Jesus began the Upper Room Discourse and of the New Commandment that instructed the apostles to apply the truth He taught by the dramatic gesture with which He began this Last Christian Retreat. The new commandment introduced the apostles to the idea of a new covenant, and that new covenant created a new community. That new community is what we call a church today. We should all pray that

the church of which we are a member will be the community of love Jesus designed it to be when He gave His new commandment to the apostles in the upper room.

Jesus then concluded His introduction to this Last Christian Retreat with a beautiful description of faith: "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (17). Many cultures today believe knowledge is virtue - the more you know, the more virtuous you are. That way of thinking has no place in the church because it cuts across the values and the truth our Lord modeled and taught in the upper room. Jesus taught that it is what we do about what we know that makes us virtuous.

Throughout the four Gospels, we read that Jesus valued performance above profession (Matthew 21:28-31). He taught that we prove His teaching is the teaching of God, when we approach His teaching with a will to do, rather than a will to know. In other words, He taught that the doing leads to the knowing, while most of the world believes the knowing leads to the doing (John 7:17).

According to Jesus, it is not knowing what He taught when He washed their feet that will bless the lives and relationships of the apostles. They will be blessed when they do what He taught by the example He gave at His Last Christian Retreat. Jesus concluded His First Christian Retreat with a profound illustration of the difference between those disciples of His who hear His Word and apply what they have heard, and those who merely hear and never apply what they hear (Matthew 7:24-27).

The profound symbolic act with which Jesus begins this discourse and the new commandment that interprets and applies his love for the apostles, are the foundation on which His church is to be built. Any church that is not built on the foundation of love for Christ and one another will fall when the storms of problems from within and without beat down on that church. The church that is built on the new commandment and the way Jesus began His longest discourse will stand because it is founded upon the Rock of the risen, living Christ.

"Is it I?" (18-38)

Between the symbolic act of washing their feet and the new commandment, Jesus elaborates on the statement He made earlier that not all of the apostles were clean and that He knew which one of them would betray Him.

In verse eighteen, Jesus says: "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the Scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'" (Psalm 41:9) Then He continues: "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He. I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the One, Who sent me." (18-20)

After He had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." His apostles stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them He

meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to Jesus. Simon Peter motioned to this apostle and said, "Ask Him which one He means." Leaning back against Jesus, he asked, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." (21-26)

Then, dipping the piece of bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. We read that as soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. "What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him. But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. We read that, "As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night." (26-30)

This is the remarkable story of the betrayal of Jesus. Make the observation that John keeps inserting into his record the fact that what he is telling us about was a fulfillment of Scripture. In addition to frequently making that observation, there is the emphasis that certain events were controlled by the Providence of a sovereign God. We find this kind of commentary all the way through this Gospel of John.

We hear these same two truths from Jesus in this passage when John quotes Jesus saying: "You are all clean, but not all because I know whom I have chosen. I do not mean to say that all of you are unclean. But one of you is. And this is to fulfill Scripture. 'He who shares My bread has lifted up his heel against Me.'" (18, 26)

In those days, the most intimate expression of friendship was to recline around a table and dip bread in a common dish. To be at someone's table and break bread with them and then not be a true friend was considered the very essence of betrayal.

According to the other Gospels, when Jesus told them that one of them was going to betray Him, every one of them asked, "Is it I?" (Matthew 26:22; Mark 14:19) I have been intrigued by the way every one of them responded to this news that one of them would betray their Lord. Think of how that revealed the insecurity of these apostles. How very fragile their faith and commitment to Jesus must have been when they spent these last hours with Jesus before He went to the cross to die for their salvation.

This was especially true of the Apostle Peter. This chapter closes with the Lord predicting the triple denial of Peter. Try to imagine the turmoil in the heart of Peter when he hears his Lord tell him that before the rooster crows he will deny his Lord three times. Peter was the catalyst that gave Jesus the opportunity to teach those wonderful truths in the context of his feet being washed by his Lord. Peter now becomes the spark that turns this discourse into a dialog between Jesus and these eleven men.

The prediction of his denial was in response to two questions Peter asked Jesus. In His training of these apostles, it was obviously the teaching style of Jesus to encourage and sometimes deliberately stimulate questions from them. For example, it was the statement of Jesus that He was going somewhere and they could not come with

Him that drew from Peter the two questions: "Where are you going and why can I not come with you? I am willing to die for You!" (John 13:36, 37)

The way this thirteenth chapter concludes gives us another example of the principle of Bible study I shared in booklet Twenty-five - that we should never let chapter divisions break our train of thought as we read the Bible. These two questions of Peter stimulate questions from Thomas, Philip and the Apostle Jude, which are asked and answered by Jesus for them and for us in the next chapter.

Jesus responds to Peter's questions at the end of this chapter, but He answers Peter's questions and the questions of these other apostles in Chapter Fourteen. The questions of these four apostles, and especially the answers of Jesus to their questions, are the key that opens the fourteenth chapter of this Gospel for us. The context for Chapter Fourteen is really found at the conclusion of Chapter Thirteen.

As you read the next chapter of this profound Gospel, look for the answers to the questions Peter asks at the end of this chapter and locate the questions of the other apostles. Be sure to focus your study on the answers of Jesus to their questions. His answers are the heart of His longest recorded discourse.

As I conclude my commentary on another magnificent chapter of this glorious Gospel, to summarize the first of four chapters that record the Upper Room Discourse of Jesus, I must return to the questions I have asked throughout this study.

Who is Jesus? In this chapter, Jesus is the humble Lord and Master, Who assumes the role of a slave and serves His disciples by washing their feet, showing them the full extent of His love. He is the loving Lord, Who loves His apostles and then commands them to love one another as He has loved them.

What is faith? Faith is what we do about what we know. Faith is applying in our relationship to our Lord, and then in all our relationships with people what we have learned from Jesus about humility and love. Faith is asking the Lord, and then the people who intersect our lives, "How may I serve (love) you?" Faith is asking ourselves if we are the colony of love the Lord of the church wills us to be, then striving to by faith to follow His example. Faith is asking the question: "If we were accused of loving one another as the first generation believers loved one another, would there be enough evidence to convict us of that charge? If there would not be enough evidence, then faith would be doing whatever it takes to produce that evidence - to love each other as Jesus has loved us (34).

What is life? Life is what we experience when we are loved unconditionally the way Christ loved the apostles. Life is all that we experience when we love and are loved with the love of Christ.

It is my prayer that you are getting to know Jesus, coming to a stronger faith and experiencing the quality of life God intended for you through our study of the Gospel of John. Together we have learned a great deal in chapters 11-14 of the Gospel of John. We must conclude this booklet here, but I invite you to request booklet

Twenty-seven, which continues the verse-by-verse study we have begun in these wonderful chapters of this Gospel. I conclude with the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, you also should love one another." (John 13:34)