

eureka



by Keith Glasgow

The joy of discovering
the truth about Jesus



Take a 7 week journey through the Gospel of John

EUREKA

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EUREKA

There is a special joy in discovering truth. In a day when many people are confused about what to believe, the Bible presents Jesus as the Truth. He is the exclusive revelation of God to all people everywhere. This claim should not be waived aside without honest investigation.

This book takes us on a guided tour through some of the most well-read pages of this world's literature.

The Gospel of John is an eye-witness account of the life of Jesus Christ. But it is more! It helps explain the unique person of Jesus Christ and can lead a person into a life-changing relationship with God.

The Greek word "Eureka" means "I found it". It is the response of many people, then and now, who find Jesus to be the answer to their deepest quest: the desire to find meaning and truth.

Eureka is designed to be read on a daily basis alongside the text of John's gospel in the New International Version. Each week a review provides an opportunity for the reader to meet with another person, or in a discussion group, to tease out some of the topics raised, and work through any issues and questions that arise.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to a fascinating journey through some of the most well-read pages of this world's literature. "John's Gospel" is the name Christians give to a book in the Bible which was written by an apostle of Jesus Christ. Apostles were those who had been personally taught by Jesus and, after His death and resurrection, were sent by Him into the world with the message of God's love and forgiveness.

Imagine we have been whisked back to the time when Jesus lived in Israel. We are met by the Apostle John who will be our tour guide. He has only a brief time to show us much about the wonderful person Jesus Christ. He has to be very selective in what scenes to bring before us, so he chooses those events which will convince us that Jesus is the Son of God. His purpose is not merely to inform our minds, but to move us to put our faith in Christ, and so receive God's gift of eternal life through Him.

In chapter 20, verse 30 to 31 John explains: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."

Although his book was written many years after the events occurred, we can trust his accuracy and integrity because:-

1. John's gospel is one of four historical records of the life and teaching of Jesus found in the Bible. There is absolutely no evidence of collaboration in order to fabricate a story. Each gospel stands alone as an independent witness to the events, while at the same time verifying the others.

If one of your neighbours gave a convincing account of a flying saucer which landed in your street at 3 am one morning, you might not believe it. However, if four people gave independent accounts of what happened, you would be wise to take it seriously. In the same way, the four gospels call for an honest and open investigation to be made by everyone.

2. The events which are recorded in the gospels were not done in secret. Many of the people who opposed Jesus Christ, who later became enemies of the church could not deny the historical facts of His life and miracles, even though they desperately wanted to! This is especially true of the account of the resurrection. The tomb was empty. The soldiers guarding the entrance had fled, the story that Jesus was risen could not be proven wrong. The enemies of the church could not disprove the resurrection of Jesus as the body was no longer in the tomb. History can never be removed. What has happened cannot unhappen! God has given us a reliable basis for our belief.

3. The apostles would have no problem writing an account of the events, because they were recording facts concerning amazing occurrences which could not easily be forgotten. Actually, the time-lag lends weight to the validity of the gospels, as time is the great test of all things. Lies become distorted and change in the face of unforeseen questioning; but the truth of an eye-witness report never changes.

4. There are some who find it hard to believe that the apostles could remember the exact words of Jesus over the period of 30 to 60 years before writing them down.

However:

I. There is no reason why these sayings could not have first been written down in a temporary form for the apostles' own personal reference.

II. The writers did not have to rely on their own memories alone (read Luke 1:2-4).

III. The apostles did not live the intervening years in a vacuum. They were constantly preaching, teaching and conversing about the things Jesus said and did.

IV. The common way for rabbis (teachers) to instruct their disciples at that time was by memory. Even today Eastern people show a great aptitude for verbatim memorisation.

V. The Holy Spirit of God brought to their remembrance the things they heard and saw (John 14:26).

VI. The final evidence is subjective, but nevertheless valid. The gospels have the "ring of truth" about them as they are read by anyone with an open and honest mind (John 7:17).

As you read this gospel and think through the comments in this guide, try to imagine yourself beside John as he witnessed each event he describes.

Millions of people down through the centuries have found God in a personal way as they have considered this powerful book. The Lord has a wonderful promise for you if you seek Him earnestly: "You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). Be open to God's Spirit as He helps you to understand and believe its life-changing message.

Every time you are about to read, pray this simple prayer:

*"Dear God, please give me understanding and faith as I read today.
In Jesus' Name, Amen."*

NOTE: you will gain greater value through this guide by meeting with a Christian you know once a week, to discuss the "Thinking it Through" pages together.

1 THE WORD

Read John 1:1-2

The first scene in John's account of the life of Jesus is not His birth! John calls us to stand with him on the stage of history and look through the backdrop of time into the eternity which existed before anything was created.

Only God stands outside the theatre of time and space. The eternal God has no beginning. Jesus Christ, as "The Word", already existed "in the beginning". Before the very first act of creation, "the Word already was" (verse 1). He existed "with God", showing He is a distinct person; and He also existed as God ("The Word was God").

John uses the title "Word" when referring to the Lord Jesus because He is presenting Him as the one who fully reveals God. Just as our spoken words reveal the hidden thoughts of our minds, so the Divine Word reveals the hidden character and truth of God. When He became a human, the God who would otherwise be unknowable to us, "became flesh" (verse 14).

Although the Bible teaches there is only one God, it also teaches that He is a plural being. There are three persons who exist together in the one God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each of these three are distinct persons, and are no less God than the others. Together they exist eternally as one complete being. The word we use to describe this is 'trinity'.

This concept of God is impossible to fully grasp with our minds, but we must believe it, because God has revealed these truths about Himself in the Bible. The trinity could be likened to light, which, when it passes through a glass prism, splits into a variety of colours. Each colour in the spectrum is different from the others, but each is still that same light. God, who is one being, is revealed as three, but remains one God in essence.

The key to understanding the remainder of this gospel is accepting the great truth that Jesus Christ is the Word, the One who reveals God. As the life of Jesus unfolds through it's pages, remember that you are seeing God as He really is.

If you are a little sceptical about Jesus' claim to be God, ask yourself: "If God really does exist, and He did become a man, what proof would I look for in the things He said and did?"

2 THE WORD REVEALED

Read John 1:3-5

Whenever God reveals Himself, "The Word" is the One who does the revealing. Although God did not fully reveal Himself until Jesus came ("the Word became flesh" - verse 14), He did show Himself in other ways. For example, the Bible is the "Word of God", which is a written revelation of God's truth.

In verses 3-5 we see two other ways that God has revealed Himself to mankind. Both of these involved Jesus Christ, "The Word":

1. Creation

The music of Beethoven, the paintings of Michelangelo, and the writings of Shakespeare all reveal the otherwise hidden qualities of these men. Likewise, God's qualities of power, beauty, order and glory are seen in His great masterpiece - creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1).

John tells us that it was Christ, the Word, who created everything. Not one thing of all that God made, came into being without the creative power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even life itself came from Him ("In Him was life").

2. Light

Not only has God revealed Himself in what He has made, but He has also placed a 'revelation' within every person (verse 4). Inner light in humans is similar to instinct that is genetically programmed into animals, only with humans it is an awareness of God's existence. The life humans received from God was personally breathed into Adam (Genesis 2:7) and then passed on to every descendant. In John 1 we find that the Life-Giver was none other than Christ the Word.

In verse 5, John alludes to a battle between our inner light and the influence of darkness. This refers to a conflict between truth and error, where many end up shutting their minds to the truth God has implanted, replacing it with human wisdom, or a man-made religion. This battle has continued through history, and today more than ever there are many voices that would seek to replace our inner light with false notions of reality.

"But", says John, "the light has never been extinguished, nor shall it ever be." Truth must prevail. Despite all the lies and deception, people's instinctive knowledge of God has never been put out. When faced with Jesus Christ, their inner light is able to discern the truth of who Jesus is. Our human life has its source in Him, so recognises Him.

3 THE WORD REJECTED

Read John 1:6-11

Imagine a good king being deposed by a usurper, and sent into exile. The new ruler then deceitfully turns the minds of the people against him. Should the rightful king find a way to return and claim his throne, he would have to convince his subjects of his own goodness, and the evil nature of the usurper. Then he would need to choose a strategic time to present himself as their true king.

A wise move would be to send ahead of him a special envoy of loyal subjects to call the people to turn from their rebellion and receive the good king when he comes. An envoy of this kind would be important if the plan were to be successful, but would not guarantee its success.

With humanity having rejected God and having been deceived into false beliefs, it was necessary for God to send an envoy to prepare people's hearts for the coming of His Son into the world.

John the Baptist was the last in a whole line of special messengers whom God sent to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus Christ. The forces of darkness had deceived the world into rebellion against God, making necessary his unique mission. John the Baptist not only called people to repentance, as did the other prophets before him, but he identified the King of Kings who had come into the world. He pointed to Jesus Christ and said: "Follow Him."

Not all listened to John's message. The people of the world, even though they were made by Jesus Christ, did not recognize Him (verse 10). Surely the source of all Light would be recognized by those He had created, who were given that same light to be within them! But most did not come to Him.

In verse 11 mention is made of the Jewish nation. They had been specially prepared by God to receive His Son. He had given them the Scriptures with many predictions of the coming King. John the Baptist brought the nation to a crisis of faith. They were told by Him that Jesus was this one they were waiting for. But as a nation they did not receive Him. The word "receive" used in verse 11 denotes an official "red carpet" reception of a dignitary. Israel failed to receive their King. Instead they put him to death on a cross. Some, however, did receive Him, and many more have done so since.

The Creator-King wants to be restored to His rightful place in your life. Will you receive Him? He is the good king. Where He reigns there is always peace and joy.

4 THE WORD RECEIVED

Read John 1:12-13

The people of the world were created by Christ and enlightened by Him, but when He came, they did not recognize Him! God especially prepared the Israelites for His coming, but they did not receive Him!

Did His mission fail? Not at all! God used their rejection to impliment a plan He had from the start. He began seeking individuals of any race who would personally receive Christ: "...His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (verses 11-12).

Any person who is willing to receive Christ is given two great gifts from God:

First, He gives "the right to become children of God." We do not deserve this position of honour, for we have sinned. All of us are rebels and deserve judgement. God freely forgives us and accepts us without hesitation because Christ died in our place and bore the punishment we deserve. Christ's sacrifice on the cross opens the way for us to become children of God.

Secondly, those who receive Him become members of God's family. To be adopted gives someone the status of family, but adoption is unable to impart the life of one born into a family. However, in relation to God, those who receive Christ are not only adopted and called children of God, they actually "become children of God." They receive God's life in a miracle which Jesus calls being "born again." This new-birth is contrasted in verse 13 with physical birth. When a child is born into a human family, the life comes from the blood-stock of the parents. The baby is a product of human desire and decision. In contrast, new-birth is something which God alone does. We cannot do a thing to make ourselves children of God.

How then can we be born again? John gives the answer: "To all who received Him, to those who believed in His Name" (John 1:12). The Jewish people of that time did not receive Him because they did not believe Him to be the Son of God. His Name represents all that He is and has done. To believe in His Name is to receive Jesus Christ for who He is - the eternal Word who is God, who created everything, and who is the only Son of the Father.

Today we are faced with the same choice as the people of Jesus' day. If we are willing to receive Him we can do so in a prayer of faith and commitment. If we do nothing we remain in the kingdom of darkness forever. There is no neutral ground. Jesus said: "He who is not with me is against me" (Luke 11:23).

5 THE WORD EXPERIENCED

Read John 1:14-18

God the Word was “in the world” (verse 10). How then did He reveal Himself? Did he appear as a spirit, a phantom, or an image of dazzling light? John says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (verse 14). He left the invisible spirit-state of His eternal existence and, without surrendering His divine nature, assumed the body, soul and spirit of true humanity. He did not borrow a body for a brief period. He permanently became a man.

How did John and the others of his day recognize the normal looking man, Jesus, for who He was? How was He different?

“We beheld His glory”, says John. Not the outward glory of divine majesty, but the moral glory of “grace and truth.” Grace speaks of God’s love, and truth speaks of His holy character. Even a superficial reading of the gospels will show the unique blend of these two divine qualities in the life of Jesus Christ.

John had seen the miracles which Jesus had performed, and yet these wonders alone had not convinced him about Jesus. What brought him to faith in Christ was the perfect example of His life. Jesus was full of grace and truth. Even Moses, the greatest of God’s prophets, was no more than an agent, sent merely to pass on God’s law to mankind. Jesus was different; He embodied grace and truth as only the Son of God could do.

No one has seen God at any time. When Moses asked to see God in all His glory, God said “No one may see Me and live” (Exodus 33:20). However, God has now fully shown Himself to mankind in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this passage there are three witnesses to Jesus Christ:

1. John and the other apostles (verse 14), who were eye-witnesses of His glory. They saw His unique life, His undeserved death, and His unexpected resurrection. The New Testament contains the written record of the things they saw and heard.
2. John the Baptist (verse 15) who was the official witness, sent to prepare the nation of Israel to receive their Messiah.
3. Christians down through history who have not seen the Lord Jesus physically are also witnesses, having experienced His power and grace in their lives. “From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another” (verse 16).

6 THE MISSION OF JOHN

Read: John 1:19-28

With the introduction to his book now over, John brings us to the first scene in our guided tour through the life-story of Jesus.

People from all over Palestine were continually flocking to a remote desert location. Often travelling for several days on foot, they would come to hear the powerful preaching of John the Baptist. By the side of the Jordan river he would call the people to turn from their sins and live a life that was pleasing to God. Those who believed his message were baptised (literally “immersed”) in the river, as a symbol of their changed life. The religious leaders of the Jewish faith became increasingly aware of the impact which John’s ministry was having on the whole nation, and, curious to know who he claimed to be, they sent a delegation of temple officials to question him.

The people of that time were eager for the appearing of their long awaited Messiah-King. Some self-appointed messiahs had risen up with a band of followers, but had failed to make any deep impression on the nation. John was different. He was not calling people to follow him, but to turn their attention to the One who would come after him.

The delegation asked, “Who are you?” John did not answer their question until he had first stated clearly that he was not the Messiah, nor was he any other special person mentioned in the Scriptures. He was simply a voice “crying in the wilderness” as the prophet Isaiah had promised. His mission was to prepare the people for the coming of their King.

John’s admission of his own personal insignificance created a problem in the minds of the religious leaders. “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet” (verse 25)? What authority did he have to introduce a new rite into their religion, since he admitted he was no one special?

John the Baptist replied that, even though he was only a voice in the wilderness, he was a voice with a very important message. “In fact”, says John, “I already know the one who is to come after me, and He is right here in this crowd now. You don’t know Him and even if you tried to recognize Him you would not be able to do so”.

Jesus still stands as close to any of us today as He was to the crowd by the Jordan river that day. In fact closer! Yet many fail to recognize His presence. John’s words to the delegation from Jerusalem could be equally applied to many of us: “among you stands one whom you do not know”. Is Jesus Christ just a name to you, or do you know Him personally as your own Saviour and Lord?

7 THE MISSION OF MESSIAH

Read: John 1:29-34

The time had come for John the Baptist to point out the Messiah. This was a critical time in his mission. The people's hearts had been prepared by his call to repentance, and their minds had been prepared by his reference to the special person who would come after him. Anticipation turned to excitement. "Is Messiah here?" "Who is He?"

Seeing Jesus walking toward him John said: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world". He could have said "Behold the Messiah". Why did he introduce Jesus in the way he did?

If John had said "Behold the Messiah", the people would imagine that Jesus was going to lead a rebellion against the Roman empire, under whose rule the Jews were chafing. They expected the Messiah to be a political King who would eventually rule the whole world.

John knew that Messiah's first mission was not to reign. Christ had come to suffer the punishment for the sins of the world. He pointed to Jesus as the Saviour. Messiah had come to deliver the world from the bondage of sin, not to be the immediate answer to the nationalistic desires of the people.

The words "Behold the Lamb of God" would draw the people's attention to the animal sacrifices which God had instituted in Israel. The practice was for a person who had sinned to bring a lamb to the altar, confess their personal sin, and then kill the innocent lamb in place of themselves. The Bible says "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The death of a lamb in the place of the sinner was a continual picture to Israel that, even though their sin incurred death, God's way of forgiveness was only through the sacrifice of an innocent lamb in the place of the guilty.

Jesus' mission was to die as an innocent substitute for the sin of the world. All have sinned, and all therefore deserve to die. Jesus, being sinless, did not deserve to die. "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).

The people of Israel found it hard to accept a Messiah who was despised and rejected; one who was hung in shame upon a cross. Jesus so easily could have fulfilled the expectations of the people, but He chose to do the will of His Father. He came to deal with man's deepest problem - sin.

Even today Christ does not cater to the expectations of people who want a Messiah who will be a solution to their problems. Jesus Christ delivers those who seek freedom from the guilt and power of sin. He died on the cross as an innocent sacrifice to purchase your pardon. If you receive Him, He will forgive and cleanse you from all your sin and make you a child of God.

THINKING IT THROUGH

John 1:1-34

Answer the questions as best you can, referring back to the Bible verses for help. Note down anything you cannot understand under the heading "Questions and Difficulties". These can then be discussed with another person or in a group on a weekly basis.

1. What does the title "Word" tell us about Jesus Christ? What are some ways God reveals Himself to us? (Psalm 19:1, Romans 2:15, 2 Timothy 3:16)
2. What was the mission of John the Baptist (verses 6-8)? What special preparation do you think God may have done (or be doing) in your life, in order to lead you to trust in Jesus Christ?
3. What is required for a person to become a child of God (verses 12-13)?
5. What caused the apostles to recognize Jesus as the Son of God (verse 14)?
6. From verse 29, describe in your own words the mission of Jesus Christ. How does this affect you personally?

QUESTIONS AND DIFFICULTIES:

8 EUREKA!

Read: John 1:35-42

Have you ever watched an exciting relay race? All eyes are fixed on the runner with the baton. Once it has been passed on, the new runner becomes the focus of attention. John the Baptist had run well. His mission was almost finished. Selflessly he weans his own followers off himself, and, by encouraging them to follow Jesus, passes on the baton.

Those who became disciples of Jesus at that time represent different types of people who come to Him today.

1. First there was Andrew and another disciple. They had seeking hearts. Jesus knew their deepest desires, so He asked them "What do you want?" (verse 38). After spending time with Him, they were convinced that they had found what they were looking for. "Eureka!" Andrew exclaimed, "We have found the Christ!"

To all those with seeking hearts Jesus asks "What are you really searching for?" Are you seeking for peace with God? Are you searching for answers to perplexing questions? Are you looking for something which you know is missing from your life? Jesus alone can meet you in your need.

2. Simon, Andrew's brother, was the next one to find Jesus. The Lord knew all about Simon's fickle and impetuous nature. But He gave him a new name, Peter, which means "rock". He was anything but a rock, but as he followed the Lord Jesus, he would grow into a stable, strong person. How wonderful to know that Christ accepts us as we are, but sees in us the person we will eventually become with His power and help!

3. Then Jesus found Philip. The word "found" suggests that it wasn't a chance meeting. Jesus took the initiative and asked Philip to follow Him. Some people are like Philip. Quite unexpectedly they hear the call of the Lord Jesus. Without much prior searching or thought they respond in faith to Christ and His message of forgiveness.

4. Finally, Jesus was found by Nathanael. He had a sincere heart. Jesus knew he was genuine, without any sham or pretence. He knew what had taken place in Nathanael's private life. Perhaps under the fig tree in his home town, Nathanael had overcome a strong temptation, prayed, or confessed his sins in deep sorrow. Such genuine concern had reached the heart of God and of the Lord Jesus.

Many people are seeking today, but God knows those ones who are sincere. "He rewards those who earnestly seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

9 MORE THAN A MIRACLE

Read: John 2:1-12

The miracles of Jesus are not mere wonders designed to create attention or cause amazement. They are signs. That is, they point to His uniqueness as the Son of God (John 20:30-31).

To most people at the wedding feast that day, Jesus was just another guest. But the miracle He performed was the means by which some (including His new disciples) could catch a glimpse of His true glory. Verse 11 says: "He thus revealed His glory and His disciples put their faith in Him." God had sent other messengers in the past, and their miracles had not brought glory to themselves. Jesus, however, brought His own glory into view by His miracles as well as to His Father in Heaven. They were signs of who He was, and what He had come to do.

Mary, who knew her virgin-born Son to be the Lord from heaven, was eager for Him to start proving Himself. She came to Him with news of the embarrassing shortage of wine, knowing that this provided an ideal opportunity for Him to reveal His true identity. But the Lord was not going to bow to this temptation (Luke 4:9-12). If He is to act, He must do so in His own time and for the right reasons. Up until this point He had been accustomed to responding to His mother's direction as a loyal son. Gently but firmly He reminds her that He had now embarked on His special mission where He moved only at the impulse of His Father's will. Nevertheless He did act, but in a way that was to produce faith in those who saw past the spectacular, and perceived in the miracle the glory of His person.

It is significant that His first miracle was not to heal the sick, give sight to the blind or raise the dead. His first sign brought joy and happiness to a family situation after their own resources had failed.

Any happiness derived from earthly things will always be temporary. The wine of this world will eventually fail us. But when we turn to Christ as our personal Saviour, He transforms our lives and gives us the wine of heaven. God saves the best wine till last! Jesus said: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

Rather than creating wine out of nothing, Jesus chose to turn water into wine. This action pictures us when we turn to Him. He takes us as we are and transforms us. He renews us. He recreates us. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

10 THE DIVISION BEGINS

Read: John 2:13-22

Trains which stand side by side at a station platform can end up thousands of miles apart. Through his book, the apostle John brings to light a division among the people in their response to Christ. This division widens as the story unfolds. On one track there are those who believe, and on the other track there are those who do not. Initially these two groups are not easily distinguishable, but gradually they, like us, are forced to take sides. The division began when Jesus went up to Jerusalem at the Passover feast. He presented Himself officially to the Jewish Nation as their Messiah.

The religion of the Israelites had degenerated into a money-making racket. Thousands of pilgrims came annually to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. The priests would only accept animals from the "approved" vendors who had set exorbitant prices. The people's money had to be changed into the "sacred" currency (the shekel) by temple officials who charged high exchange interest and lined their own pockets.

Jesus was indignant, but had kept silent each time He had previously gone to the feast. Zealous for His Father's glory, this time He was ready to act. Without losing control He calmly platted a small whip, (a symbol of authority and judgement), then strode into the temple with all the moral command that belonged so naturally to Him.

There was no resistance to His startling presence, but there was a response! The disciples had their faith strengthened. They remembered that the Old Testament spoke of the Messiah being consumed with zeal for God's house (Psalm 69:9). Others responded by questioning His authority to act in this way.

There was no need for Jesus to provide a direct answer, as His action sat well with everyone's conscience. Jesus nevertheless did give a sign of His divine authority by predicting His own death at their hands, and His bodily resurrection three days later. He moved from talking about the temple building where they were standing, to refer to the 'temple' of His own body. The temple in Jerusalem was the place on earth where God dwelt in His glory. Jesus Himself is the true Temple. He is God who "made His dwelling among us" and the disciples "beheld His glory ... full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

This, the first public action of Jesus, set alight a small fire of opposition to Him. The fire will first smoulder, and then burn. Finally, out of control, these same people will cry out "Crucify Him, crucify Him". At the same time, those who believed had their faith gradually strengthened, and finally rewarded.

Which group do you belong to? Jesus says: "He who is not for Me is against Me" (Luke 11:23).

11 SHALLOW FAITH

Read: John 2:23-25

An excited hum rippled through Jerusalem as news spread of Jesus' startling activities. Who was this man who dared to stand up against the temple officials and religious leaders? Was He the long awaited Messiah-King? Many came from all parts of the crowded city, joined by feast-day visitors, and they listened to this newly recognized public figure as He taught with divine authority. They watched as He performed amazing miracles with undeniable ease and power. "He must be Messiah!" one would say. "I believe He is!" another would affirm.

But Jesus was not running for office! He was not seeking the short-lived admiration of people who wanted a king to suit their own ends. He is king, but those who come to Him must come on His terms or not at all.

Jesus was well aware of the source of these people's attraction to Him. The signs and wonders He had done ignited an immediate response from the people. They had been expecting their Messiah to come at any time, and, seeing the miracles, believed in Jesus. But Jesus, seeing inside their hearts, did not have faith in their faith! He realised that it had no depth.

The Lord has perfect knowledge of the secrets of every heart.

1. His knowledge is universal ("He knew all men" verse 24). No one is outside the orbit of His unlimited knowledge. Every person on earth, old and young, rich and poor, clever and simple, good and bad; all are tested by His piercing gaze.

2. His knowledge is unaided ("He did not need man's testimony about man" verse 25). It is not necessary for the Lord to send out spies, or to rely on any external help in order to know all about us. Being God, He has that ability in Himself.

3. His knowledge is complete ("He knew what was in a man" verse 25). We can't hide any part of ourselves from His piercing eyes. "For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:12,13).

As Jesus is portrayed before you in this gospel, examine your response to Him. Is it genuine faith which springs from a sincere and honest heart. Shallow faith involves no commitment. If there is no commitment in your faith towards Him, there will be no commitment on His part towards you.

12 THE GREATEST MIRACLE

Read: John 3:1-10

Nicodemus was one of those mentioned at the close of the previous chapter. The appearance of Jesus had awakened in him a renewed hope that at last the new age was about to dawn. Cautious excitement moved him to speak privately with this newly recognized prophet. He was a genuine seeker. He wanted to probe Jesus and come to a definite conclusion which would satisfy him. Jesus' miracles were proof that God was with Him, but who was He? And what had He come to do?

In order for Jesus to answer this man's quest, He had to challenge his inbred belief about the role of Messiah. Nicodemus expected the Kingdom of God to come with unhindered power and glory. Messiah, he believed, would appear and rule the world. Jesus calls attention to the indispensable condition which must exist in people's lives before they become a part of that glorious Kingdom. A miracle must occur, far greater than all the wonders Jesus had performed - the miracle of new-birth. "Unless you are born again", Jesus said, "you cannot see (or enter) the Kingdom of God."

New-birth is a new beginning midstream in the course of one's life. It can happen to a child, an adult or to a person on their death bed. It is a creative act of God's Spirit as real and as necessary as natural birth. We can only enter our human existence by birth ("flesh gives birth to flesh" verse 6) and like-wise, we can only enter God's kingdom by a spiritual birth ("Spirit gives birth to spirit"). It is impossible to enter God's kingdom as we are, in our natural state. There must be a radical transformation which springs from a brand new life given to us by God. Natural birth marks the beginning of life in the flesh and new-birth marks the beginning of a new life in the Spirit. Jesus went on to talk about this new life in verses 15 and 16, where He calls it eternal life.

Nicodemus, being a good man and a religious leader, believed he had done all that was necessary to give him the right of entry into God's kingdom. Imagine the shock he received when the Lord pointed out that all his religion, all his good works, all his (outwardly) blameless living, and even his love for God, were not enough to gain him a place in God's kingdom! Without the miracle of new-birth he was as far away from heaven as the worst sinner. For the first time in his life Nicodemus realised that he needed a Saviour! He could not earn his way, nor could he perform the miracle of new birth himself. He had to trust someone else to do that for him!

You and I are the same. All our good deeds are unable to help us. We need the Lord Jesus to perform in us the miracle of new-birth, and give us eternal life by His Spirit. If we receive Him personally, trusting Him to be our Saviour, we are born again (John 1:12).

13 LIFTED UP

Read: John 3:11-15

Nicodemus had never been taught about the need to be born-again, nor was the subject ever discussed among his fellow rabbis. What right did Jesus have to speak so emphatically?

Every Rabbi can only teach what he has personally come to know and experience. Jesus was the Son of God, and having come down from heaven, He had first-hand knowledge of spiritual things. He was also in continual, vital touch with His Father, and could speak with perfect knowledge of heavenly things.

He revealed spiritual truths in a way that earth-bound people could grasp. He used earthly concepts (e.g. birth), to dress up spiritual teaching in an understandable way. If Nicodemus could not believe Him when He used earthly illustrations, how would he cope if Jesus spoke in purely heavenly terms!?

The Lord then explained the ultimate purpose of His coming. Jesus had to be "lifted up" on a cross, and die for the sins of the people, in order for new-birth to be experienced. Until sin is forgiven, God cannot give eternal life. Through Jesus' death God dealt with sin once and for all, making possible the miracle of new birth.

Jesus points to an Old Testament illustration which parallels the way we receive eternal life today (see Numbers 21).

1. The people of Israel had sinned, and God judged them by sending poisonous snakes. Many were bitten and lay dying. In a similar way our sin has brought upon us God's judgement: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Jesus came into the world to save us from the serious consequences of our disobedience.

2. God instructed Moses to lift up a brass effigy of a serpent on a pole in easy sight of all the dying people. Likewise, Jesus was lifted up on a cross to die. His death was an event which has become known by people far and wide. All people have a chance to believe in Him and be saved.

3. The people of Moses' time needed only to look in faith at the brass serpent on the pole for God to instantly forgive and heal them. Imagine hearing the news - "all you have to do is look at the brass serpent and you will not die!" God says much the same today: "...the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Our sins are forgiven when we look in faith to the One who was crucified for us - "whoever believes in Him shall...have eternal life" (John 3:16).

14 IN FOCUS

Read: John 3:16,17

I remember as a young boy being fascinated by the way a small magnifying glass was able to focus the sunlight into a concentrated pinhead of light and energy. The sun's rays passing through the lens were narrowed into a miniature sun, with intense heat.

Jesus acts like a divine lens. He gathers up many rays of truth in the Bible and focuses them into a summary statement in verse sixteen. The great themes of God's Word converge, and central to them all is the love of God.

Although God had the right to judge the world (as Nicodemus would have expected), God sent His Son to save the world from its predicament. The verse highlights God's love as follows:

1. The OBJECT of God's Love is "the world". The world means humanity in rebellion against God. We do not deserve being saved. There is nothing in us that merits God's action. It was while we were "still sinners" and "God's enemies", that "Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8,10).

2. The OCCASION for God's Love - "He gave His one and only Son" The thought behind the word "gave" is not that of sending but rather surrendering. He did not hold back His only Son. It was precisely because Jesus was the unique Son of God that the little word "so" is used. His love was shown in giving His best for the world's worst. God surrendered His Son to the cruel and humiliating death of crucifixion. He did it in order that we might be forgiven! Such is God's love.

3. The OBJECTIVE of God's Love - "shall not perish". If there was no hell, Christ's death would be a tragic extravagance. God warns of a broad road that leads to destruction. He knew that the penalty of our sin could not be removed in any other way than His Son's death in our place.

4. The OFFER of God's Love - "whoever believes". The good news is universal in its scope. It is for all people. Every race and religion. The good and the bad. The educated and uneducated. All are included in the word "whoever". What is more, the word "believes" brings people of different intellects and cultural backgrounds onto the same level. The Bible College professor and the child; the wealthy business executive and the tea-lady have an equal opportunity to simply believe in Jesus Christ.

5. The OUTCOME of God's Love - "may have eternal life". God's love didn't just promise a never-ending life after death. He gives eternal life at the very moment a person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. "The gift of God is (now!) eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Do you have eternal life right now? Have you personally trusted in the Lord Jesus, asking Him to forgive your sin and come into your life?

THINKING IT THROUGH

John 1:35-3:17

1. What do we learn from 1:35-48 about Jesus' knowledge of us as individuals?
2. What do we learn about Jesus from the incident in the temple (2:14-17)? How can we reconcile this event with the gracious and gentle Jesus we read of elsewhere?
3. How does 2:20-21 support the belief that Jesus was raised bodily from the dead?
4. What do we learn about new-birth in 1 John 3:9 and 1 Peter 1:3-4? According to John 1:12-13, what do we have to do in order to be born again?
5. Why do you think verse 16 has become one of the most popular verses in the Bible? What part of the verse speaks most to you?

QUESTIONS AND DIFFICULTIES:

15 GOD'S VERDICT

Read: John 3:17-21

The morning sun piercing through the forest is welcomed by creatures of the day. Birds and animals come out from their nocturnal hideaways, as if drawn towards the light of the new day. At the very same time, the creatures of the night slink back into their burrows and dens as if repelled by the brightness of the sun. The same light which attracts one group, repels the other. So it was with the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world. He caused a division between those who believed and those who did not; between those who were attracted to Him and those who were indifferent or even hostile.

Sent by His Father, Jesus came to die for our sins and to give us eternal life. Christ was not sent to sit in judgement on the world; that would come later. He came to save, not condemn. However not everyone is willing to receive God's offer of salvation.

Although the purpose of Christ's coming was not to judge, a judgement still occurs (verse 18). Those who do not believe in the Name of the one and only Son of God are already condemned! They have passed sentence upon themselves by their response to the Lord Jesus. Their choice becomes their verdict. Their decision seals their destiny. The future judgement day will only serve to ratify the sentence of eternal death.

The reason for this startling truth is explained in verses 19 to 21. The coming of Jesus Christ into the world is like the rising of the sun for the creatures of the day and night. Christ is like the sun in that He shines with all that is good, all that is right and all that is truth ("the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" John 1:14). Our response to this light is the greatest test of our true inner attitude towards God. Those who truly love God will be attracted to Jesus who is God in the flesh. To be religious does not prove love for God. Elsewhere Jesus quoted Scripture with the words "These people honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from Me" (Matthew 15:8). Our response to Jesus Christ is the method God uses to judge our heart's true attitude towards Him.

Most people love darkness rather than light. They prefer the independence and pleasure of their sinful lifestyle rather than turning to follow Christ. As you read about the Lord Jesus, your response is by far the most important decision you will ever make. To believe in Him and receive Him as your own Lord and Saviour results in a verdict: you are not condemned. Your sins are forgiven and you receive eternal life. But to fail to believe in Him also results in a verdict: you are "condemned already", with no hope of escape from future judgement. It's your choice - but it's God's verdict!

16 ECLIPSED

Read: John 3:22-36

As the brightest star fades from sight when eclipsed by the growing light of dawn, John the Baptist, the greatest of all the prophets (Luke 7:28), was left standing in the shadow of the Lord Jesus. His loyal disciples were dismayed. Baptism was the distinctive feature of John's ministry, and now Jesus was also baptising, and everyone was going to Him!

John was quick to correct his zealous but misguided disciples. He saw himself as the prelude to a symphony. Important as a prelude is in preparing listeners for the main theme, it is not itself the symphony. John was raised up by God with the sole purpose of awakening the people's hearts to the coming Messiah. At first he had been given a principal role, but once Messiah appeared, his prominence ceased. John asserted that Jesus must become greater and greater, while he must become less.

John explains that he received his mission from God (verse 27), and he could not assign to himself a greater lot than that which God had given him. He is not the Christ (verse 28), but merely the fore-runner to the Christ. In verse 29 he uses an apt illustration. His own disciples are pictured as the bride of Jesus Christ. John, is like a friend of the bridegroom, and so rejoices when his disciples begin following the Lord. It is to Him they really belong. He humbly accepts his lower office, and stands back to allow Christ His rightful place.

John then explains why Christ is to be given the place of honour above himself.

1. Because of who Christ is (verse 31). Earth-bound people, even prophets like John, are no rival to the One who comes from heaven!
2. Because of the authority and truth of Jesus' teaching (verses 32 - 34). When Christ speaks of divine things, He is not passing on something He has learned through heavenly visions. He is The Revealer, and speaks with perfect knowledge of the truth. Though some do not receive His teaching, the ones who do, certify by their faith that His teaching is nothing less than God's Word. He is the True Light, not a mere reflection!
3. Because of the dignity of His office (verse 35). Christ has the Holy Spirit in unreserved fullness, and has all things at His sovereign command. Universal dominion and absolute power are His by right.
4. Because of the character of His mission (verse 36). He came in love to save sinful people from judgement. He died to suffer that judgement for us when He died on the cross. But the brighter the light, the darker the shadow. God's mercy being so great and His free offer of life being so costly to Him, those who refuse to accept it remain under God's wrath and judgement forever.

17 THIRSTY?

Read: John 4:1-15

John now brings us to a new scene in our guided tour through the life of Christ. Jesus was weary and thirsty. What an amazing contrast to the elevated view we have of Christ in the previous chapter! Such is the paradox of this unique person. He is God indeed, but He became a real man. Before He left the splendour of heaven, He had never experienced weariness or thirst. Now as a man, He is able to enter into the emotions and common experiences of those He created.

What is more, physical thirst is similar to a much deeper, spiritual thirst. Jesus, in asking for a drink from the woman, was able to identify with her inner screaming emptiness. She needed a different kind of water; something to satisfy her spirit. She needed the fresh new spring of life which He came to give. "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

Thirst is a natural desire built into us by God for survival. Without water we would very soon die. In the same way, God knows that without eternal life we will perish. Our sins have become a barrier between us and God, leaving us cut off from the source of life. We are empty and unsatisfied because we were made to live in vital union with God. Our spiritual thirst betrays our separation from God. Sin brings darkness and death, but Christ came to bring God and us back together.

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that He alone is the one who can give her the water of life. He is able to quench her inner thirst. If she drinks of the living water, she will never thirst again. He says that physical water only satisfies for a brief time - but the water He gives will not only satisfy permanently, but will be a spring with an abundant, overflowing and fresh supply.

Chasing money and possessions, entertainment and pleasure; and even religious experience, are some ways that people try to quench their parched spirits. But Christ alone can give eternal life. He alone can pour into an empty heart the refreshing streams of His abundant life.

The woman's body cried out for water, and moved her to go to the well, draw out water, and drink. Satisfying our spiritual thirst is much the same. In order to experience God's gift of new life, we must go to Jesus Christ, and then personally receive Him into our lives. We need to drink from His spring of living water that He provides for our deepest spiritual need. He said to the woman: "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst" (verse 14).

18 NO COMPROMISE

Read: John 4:16-45

A custom of some tribes in Africa is to receive a gift with both hands. To do otherwise would be culturally unacceptable. God's gift of eternal life is bountiful and free. All we need to do is to receive it in simple faith. But we must receive it with both hands. We cannot reach out with one hand to receive His gift, and with the other clutch on to a sinful lifestyle or a wrong belief.

Like the people in Africa, we must receive the gift with empty hands. We must be willing to let go of everything that is inconsistent with following Jesus Christ. The Lord will not compromise His holy character - He cannot ignore our sinful ways. He calls us to be willing to change.

The woman at the well desired God's gift but she needed to receive it with both hands. Before granting her request, the Lord Jesus sought a complete change (repentance) in two essential areas.

Repentance involves:-

1. A new attitude towards sin

Nothing in the woman's life was hidden from Him. She had been trying to quench her spiritual thirst with the waters of immorality. Her sins, though as indelible as scarlet dye, would be cleansed as white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). Jesus was to pay her penalty in full when, about 2 years later, He would die on the cross. There was nothing she could do to earn or merit forgiveness. It was a gift of God's grace, as it is now. But the gift must be received with both hands. She had to give up her sinful ways.

Today there are many who want God's gift of salvation without being willing to forsake their sins. Christ is not fooled! He only responds to faith that is sincere and repentant.

2. A new attitude towards truth

The Samaritan woman had a different religion to Jesus, but the Lord would not compromise with the truth. She had to be willing to change her beliefs where they did not agree with what the Bible taught. She asked the Lord where she should worship. Christ points out that since worship is a spiritual exercise, it does not matter so much where she worships. What is important, is whom she worships. All religions do not lead to God. There is only one which contains the whole truth. Later in the gospel Jesus says: "I am the truth ... No one comes to the Father except through Me" (14:6).

Eternal life is free, but God requires a new attitude - a willingness to believe and obey the truth. He loves you, but will never compromise!

19 FAITH MADE STRONG

Read: John 4:46-54

News of Jesus' miracles in Jerusalem had preceded Him when He arrived back in Galilee. The people were excited and curious, expectant of a similar display of divine power before their own eyes. But Jesus is not a magician! He will never respond to people's desires for the spectacular. The people of his home province found it hard to believe that Jesus was anything more than the son of a local carpenter. Because of their lack of faith Jesus did not perform many miracles there.

But some had faith. One was an official who travelled almost twenty miles to find Jesus. His son was dying. The Lord responded to the man's request for help with the words: "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will not believe." In saying this, Jesus addressed the man, but also spoke to all the people about Him. He rebuked their lack of faith. They saw nothing of value in Jesus beyond His ability to do wonders. Until their curiosity about what He did led them to a conviction of who He was, He would be unable to do much for them.

But the Lord saw in this official a spark of real faith. Evidence of this is seen in the man refusing to be dissuaded, speaking of his son as a "little child" in renewing his plea. Jesus uses this opportunity to strengthen the man's faith. Real faith grows strong when it is put to the test. Jesus said, "You may go. Your son will live." As the man turned and went on his journey home, he had no evidence that his son would be healed. He believed without seeing. All he had as a basis for his faith was the promise of Jesus. His faith rested on the trustworthiness of Christ.

Later, finding out that his son had been healed at precisely the time Jesus had spoken, he and all his household believed. Faith grew to an even higher level. His faith embraced the truth that Jesus had come from God. That He was the Son of God.

The Lord Jesus had displayed two of God's attributes: power to give life (healing a person many miles away) and all-knowledge (knowing exactly who and where the boy was). The miracle was a sign that pointed to Jesus, revealing the glory of His divine nature.

Jesus calls us to believe His word whether we can see or not. In your journey of faith, you may not yet be at the place where you believe Jesus to be the Son of God. If you trust Him despite your lack of understanding, He will cause your faith to grow until you can eventually confess, with sincerity and certainty: "Jesus Christ is Lord".

20 HELPLESS NOT HOPELESS

Read: John 5:1-14

The paralysed man lying beside the pool of Bethesda is a picture of helplessness. For most of his life he had waited and hoped. He was now an old man, unable to help himself, and having no-one to assist him. All he could do was lie there and wait to die.

The Lord has a heart of compassion for those who are helpless. When he went to Jerusalem, He was not to be found among the rich, the learned, or men of high rank. He was attracted to the unsavoury end of the city. It was a place where the stench of animals passing through the "Sheep Gate" was as offensive to many as the unsightly mass of broken and sick humanity crowded around the pool.

For thirty eight long years the cripple had waited expectantly. His eyes were constantly on the water which he hoped would be the means of his cure. Jesus turned his gaze away from the water to the One who alone was able to help him.

"Do you want to get well?" Jesus asked.

Had the cripple finally given up hope? Did he still want to be cured?

He was helpless, but not hopeless! His hope was renewed and his faith was inspired by Jesus' words. He turned his hope away from the waters of the pool and started trusting in the man standing in front of him. Instantly he was healed.

The only way we can come to God today is by admitting our helplessness. The Lord will not save any who do not realise that there is nothing that they can ever do to save themselves. God declares: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9).

Sometimes people go for many years without reaching the point of total helplessness. Only when they reach that point is God ready to freely give them what has eluded their grasp for so long. The more affluent, popular and secure a person is, the further that person is from the place where God can meet them. Jesus said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort" (Luke 6:20,24). Jesus ministered mainly among the poor, the broken and the unacceptable of society, not because He showed partiality, but because of their willingness to admit their helplessness.

The Lord is able to save you from judgement and give you eternal life, but you must admit your own inability to save yourself, and put your trust in Jesus Christ to be your Saviour.

21 DIVINE IMPULSE

Read: John 5:15-30

The human brain is continually sending electrical impulses to the heart, keeping its beat to the correct rhythm and appropriate speed. Without these impulses the heart would cease to function, causing death.

Jesus Christ depended on continual impulses from His Father in order to live and work on earth. When He became a human being, He was as much a man as any other (except He was sinless). He did not masquerade as a human, He actually became one of us!

Since there is only one God, and therefore only one will of God, it was impossible for the Son to act independently of His Father while on earth. His whole life as a man had to be one of constant communion with His Father. He worked, spoke, acted, reacted and thought at the impulse of the Father. Like a distant terminal of a mainframe computer, Jesus received all knowledge, direction and power through His perfect and unbroken link with His Father in heaven.

The enemies of Jesus were angry that He had healed the paralytic man on the sabbath. God had commanded Israel to keep the seventh day as a holy day - a day where the Jews had to cease from work. Jesus justified His action by explaining that He always worked in harmony with His Father, and that He did nothing of His own initiative. In healing the cripple He had acted upon the impulse of His Father, therefore His action was not breaking God's law. Elsewhere He also said He is Lord of the Sabbath, and that the Sabbath was made for man (for his good). Healing did not go against the spirit of the law.

Jesus also explained that, as the Son of God, He had been given two great works to perform; works which are far greater than the mere healing of a person's body (verse 20). One was to give eternal life to whoever He will. This gift of life includes resurrection and pardon from sin's punishment (verse 21).

The other great work is judgement (verse 22). He will one day bring every person who has ever lived before His throne, and He will be the one who sends many to an eternity of darkness and separation from God (verse 29).

These two great works, the power to save and power to condemn, are exclusively God's prerogative. That is why the Lord Jesus said that He is to be honoured on an equal basis with the Father (verse 23).

His work as Judge must wait for a future day of reckoning, but as Saviour He is active now. "I tell you the truth", He says, "whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me, has (here and now) eternal life, and will not be condemned; he has (already) crossed over from death to life" (verse 24). Have you?

THINKING IT THROUGH

John 3:18 - 5:30

1. If Jesus Christ is perfectly good, and yet some people refuse to come to Him, what does that show about their true inner character (3:19-21)?

2. What is the cause of spiritual thirst (4:14 compare Ephesians 4:18)?
What are some ways that people try to satisfy their spiritual thirst today?

3. In your own words, define God's holiness. How did Jesus make the Samaritan woman face up to her sinful life?

4. What progression can you see in the official's faith (4:48,50 & 53)?
What does this passage teach us about the kind of faith God requires?

5. Why does God wait until we see our own helplessness (like the cripple by the pool) before He saves us? (Look up Titus 3:5 and Philippians 3:4-9)

6. What three great promises does the Lord give us in 5:24?

QUESTIONS AND DIFFICULTIES:

22 CREDENTIALS

Read: John 5:31-47

When new ambassadors arrive from foreign land, they show their credentials. There is no doubt in their own minds that they are the ones sent to represent their countries, but they produce documents to prove that they speak with authority on behalf of their governments. Jesus was God's "ambassador", the One sent by His Father (verses 23-24, 36-38). He claimed to have divine authority to give eternal life, raise the dead, and sit in judgement; works which God alone performs. In claiming to do them Himself, Jesus provoked an objection in the minds of His opponents. What proof could He give to back up His words? What were His credentials?

The Lord admits that His own claims about Himself, though they may be perfectly true, still needed endorsement by God (verse 31). Jesus said that His Father had given valid testimony concerning Him. Though John the Baptist's witness was true and important, he was still a fallible man and as such could be viewed as suspect (verses 33-36). Jesus explains that His Father had given two great and indisputable evidences that He was the "Sent One". The miraculous works He did, and the Old Testament Scriptures, were the Lord's credentials.

1. Miraculous works (verse 36)

If Jesus claimed to give eternal life and raise the dead, but was unable to heal a paralysed man (such as the one by the pool in verses 1-15), then His opponents would have just cause to suspect Him of falsehood. The miracles of Jesus Christ were obvious works of God. In Acts 2:22 the apostle Peter declares: "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through Him." If the Lord Jesus was a deceiver, or was Himself deceived, God's power would not have been with Him.

2. Old Testament Scriptures (verses 37-47)

The people of Jesus' time were powerless to hear a direct word from God, let alone see Him personally (verse 37). Therefore the only way they could validate Jesus' claims was by carefully reading what God had already said about the coming Messiah in their scriptures. But most were blind to the hundreds of pictures and predictions in the Old Testament which were perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ. They diligently studied for long hours with a view to seeking honour from men. Their motivation was not love for God, but love of self (verses 42 and 44). Jesus' selfless, humble attitude was such a contrast to their way of thinking, their eyes were blind to Who it was before them. They were unable to recognize Him (verses 41,43). The very scriptures that had all the evidence they needed, would one day be used to condemn them for their wilful unbelief (verses 45-47).

23 FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Read: John 6:1-13

There is no record of Jesus ever telling His disciples who He was before they had come to believe in Him for themselves. His miracles, along with His life and teaching, were sufficient to convince anybody that He was the Son of God. His works are called signs. They point to the person behind the miracle, and reveal His true identity as the Son of God.

For almost two years Philip had observed Jesus at close quarters. He could not count the number of amazing wonders his Master had performed. The time had come for the Lord to bring Philip (and the other disciples) to a crisis of faith. Was Philip convinced that Jesus was God's Son? He tests Philip with a question: "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

Never before had Jesus asked advice of anyone! Sadly Philip's faith could not rise above a mathematical calculation as he looked out at the thousands of hungry faces around them. Even if they had enough money to buy everyone a small snack, where would they obtain it?

Andrew suggested a small boy's lunch as a possible solution, but immediately recognized the impossibility of sharing such a tiny morsel with the multitude spread out across the hillside. He said: "but how will this small lunch go among so many?"

Jesus did not rebuke either of His disciples for their lack of faith, but took the few small wafers of dry bread and the two small fish into His hands. He broke the bread and handed it out. He kept on breaking it and passing it around until all had eaten as much as they wanted.

When this same Divine Person had created mankind back at the beginning of history, He had taken a little dirt and made from it Adam's body. Then He took a rib from Adam and created a woman (Genesis 2 & 3). Now this same Creator was seated with the descendants of Adam and Eve, and was creating bread and fish.

Was it a trick? An illusion? Each person that day would have to say a definite "No!". It was no illusion when their hunger was satisfied. There was no illusion in the twelve baskets of fragments left over at the end. The next day the disciples would still have those baskets full of bread and dried fish to reassure them after a good night's sleep that they had witnessed one of the most amazing miracles ever.

Jesus Christ is the Creator-God who entered His creation as a man. He deserves the faith and worship of His creatures.

24 CUPBOARD LOVE

Read: John 6:14-27

A full stomach is a good feeling! The prospect of Jesus being their king filled everyone's conversation. He could provide unlimited social security and free medical care! He was just the kind of Messiah the people wanted! Even today there are those who would gladly acknowledge Jesus as king if He were to satisfy their desires for a better lot in life.

But Jesus will not be moved by cupboard love. He sent His disciples to the other side of the lake and went to a mountain area to pray. The Lord Jesus will only respond to faith. Even weak faith will be rewarded.

The disciples had set out in obedience to the Lord's command (Mark 6:45). The dusk sky quietly grew dark, and the noise of the thinning crowd gradually gave way to the splash and groan of the oars. Then unexpectedly the breeze on their necks grew strong. Soon it was a furious gale which whipped the sea into a frenzy. Rowing harder, yet making no progress, they realised they were at the mercy of the elements. But there is One who has power over the wind and the waves. Jesus drew near to the helpless disciples, walking on the water. Knowing of their fear, He said: "It is I, don't be afraid". They accepted Him by faith into their boat and they found themselves instantly in calm waters at the shore where they had been going.

To the crowds seeking a bread-king, Jesus hid Himself; but those who believed in Him (though their faith was weak), they experienced His presence and power in their time of need.

The next day some of the crowd caught up with Jesus and His disciples. They had gone to considerable lengths to find Him, but Jesus knew that their interest was not in Him, but in the bread He could provide. "I tell you the truth", He said, "you are looking for Me, not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill" (verse 26). They had missed the point of the miracle. "Instead of seeing in the bread the sign, they had seen in the sign only the bread" (Lange).

Through this sign God put His divine seal on Jesus. He openly declared that Jesus is the Son of God who had come to give eternal life to all who hunger for it.

Why put all your effort into satisfying bodily desires when the body is going to perish one day. Rather, put your energy into seeking the "Bread" which will prepare you for an eternity ahead. Don't seek Christ as a means to improve your health and happiness, but seek Him for the gift of eternal life which will bring fulfilment of the deepest hunger of all- the hunger for the gift of life.

25 BREAD FROM HEAVEN

Read: John 6:28-50

It is unbelievable that those who had witnessed Jesus feeding the multitude by His divine power, could then say to Him the very next day: "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?" (verse 30). In their estimation, Jesus was inferior to Moses, as His miracle was not as spectacular as the bread from heaven at Moses' time. The Israelites during their forty years of living in the desert under the leadership of Moses had been fed daily with sweet "manna" bread that came down 'from heaven' with the morning dew. Yet Jesus claimed to be greater than Moses!

Jesus replied to their challenge by showing that it was not Moses who fed their fathers with the miraculous bread. God had done it. He then presented Himself as the true bread from heaven who could nourish the hungry soul. He is the life of God who had come down from heaven in a visible, tangible form. He had come for the very purpose of giving new life to all who are hungry enough to want it.

Jesus exposed their unbelief: "You have seen Me and still you do not believe" (verse 36). Then He contrasted them with true believers of all times. Those who are sincere, whom the Father calls, will come to Him. They will not seek Him merely for fulfilment. Nor will they be stumbled because His miracles may not meet their expectations.

Those who come to Him in genuine faith receive two great assurances:

1. Assurance of acceptance by Christ (verse 37)

He will not drive them away. He will not hide Himself so that they cannot find Him, as He had done the previous day (verse 15). He recognizes the ones who seek Him sincerely. They will be freely forgiven and receive God's gift of eternal life.

2. Assurance of resurrection and heaven (verse 39)

Christ recognizes the work of His Father in the lives of those who sincerely seek Him. God stirs their hearts, opens their minds and moves them to trust in Christ. Then the Father gives them to the Son as a gift.

Jesus had come down from heaven to do His Father's will, and that was to be the Saviour of all whom the Father gave Him. True believers need never worry that they may not go to heaven. Christ's responsibility is to lose none of those whom the Father gives Him.

The miracle bread of Moses' time did not give the people life, it only sustained the natural life they already had received at birth. The Bread of life which Jesus offered would give them eternal life.

26 GIVING AND RECEIVING

Read: John 6:51-59

I remember my daughter spending all her pocket money on a gift for me. I received the gift with deep gratitude, knowing she had spent all she had in order to purchase it. But the gift, lovingly given as it was, could not be mine until I had personally reached out and received it. These two components, the giving by one party, and the receiving by the other, are both spoken of by Jesus in relation to God's gift of eternal life.

1. The Gift is given at God's expense. The value of my daughter's gift was far more than the mere two dollars she had spent. The gift was costly to her as she gave all she had.

What value can be put on God's gift of eternal life? How much did it cost Him? Jesus spoke of the Bread of Life as His own flesh and blood. In this way He referred to His forthcoming crucifixion. God's gift of eternal life could not be given to anyone while Jesus lived and walked among us. The bread had to be broken. Christ had to give His life on the cross, so that it would be shared with those who receive it.

2. The Gift is to be received by a personal act of faith. My daughter's gift cost me nothing. But it was not mine until I reached out and took hold of it. Eternal life cannot be earned, merited or achieved. It is a genuine gift from the loving hand of God. However it must be taken by faith. Jesus explains this faith-response in a graphic way. "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life ... so the one who feeds on Me will live forever" (verses 53,54,57,58).

Some people have falsely applied these words of Jesus to the communion feast (Eucharist, or Lord's supper), which is an ordinance of the Church. However, the bread and the wine on the communion table are not themselves the body and blood of Jesus, nor do they impart eternal life to those who receive them. They are simply symbols of the broken body and outpoured blood of the Lord. The communion is a remembrance feast: "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:25).

Jesus was addressing unbelievers (verse 36). He warned that until they personally reached out in faith and received the Lord Jesus into their lives, they would have no life and hope.

Knowing that Jesus offers eternal life, will never be enough. You must personally receive Him. You must trust Him to be your own Saviour, just as a starving man must eat food in order to live. In 1 John 5:11-12 we read: "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

27 STUMBLLED

Read: John 6:60-66

This time Jesus had gone too far! True, He had said and done many magnificent things, but to say that one must eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to have eternal life was not acceptable! Doubts began to flood into the listener's minds. "Maybe we have been mistaken" some would reflect. "One who insists that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood is not a suitable candidate for Messiah!"

But Jesus had purposely caused them to stumble at His words. He knew that their attraction to Him did not spring from an inward work of God. It was outward and lacked deep conviction. "Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray Him" (verse 64). Recognizing them as a harvest which would never ripen, He makes the pathway to faith difficult.

Taken in its natural sense (without God's enabling) His words would cause offence, and stumble them. He wanted to prevent them from following Him on a merely superficial level. Jesus went on to show that if they stumbled over the little obstacle of His preceding teaching, they would certainly stumble over the large obstacle of His claim to share God's glory as the Son of God.

He explained that flesh itself (as a material substance) is not able to impart life. The eternal life which God promises does not enter us by eating something physical. His life is imparted by His Spirit. He does this through God's Word, and in particular, the Word of Christ. "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (verse 63). Thus Peter explains how believers have received eternal life: "Through the living and enduring Word of God" (1 Peter 1:23). The Spirit of life uses the living Word to impart life into the person who responds to it in faith.

This teaching of Jesus was hard, and the people lacked spiritual understanding. Many turned back and ceased to follow Him.

The Holy Spirit is needed to open our eyes and interpret the Lord's words correctly. The Bible says that "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Some people still stumble over the teaching of God's Word. Their search for the truth is short-circuited by a lack of genuine faith. God allows a variety of challenges to prevent people accepting Jesus Christ with a superficial faith. Some have excuses like: "I tried it and it didn't work" or "My intellect prevents me from believing in God" and "If God is loving, why am I suffering?" But today as at the time of Jesus, those who are genuine will not fail to find Him and receive eternal life.

28 THE TRUE AND THE FALSE

Read: John 6:67-71

Jesus was deserted by the majority of His disciples. Their outward attachment to Him had proven inadequate. He knew all along that a division among His followers must inevitably come. For many, the truth could not displace their fixed idea of what the Messiah should be.

Not long before this event Jesus had chosen out from among them a small group of men who were receptive to the truth (Luke 6:13). They were men whom He would prepare to be His ambassadors. To these Jesus now addressed the question: "You do not want to leave too, do you?" He did not encourage them to leave, but opened the door. He said in effect, "You are free to go if you wish." The Lord was aware that one of the twelve had the same attitude as those who had just departed from Him. The heart of Judas was alien to the rest of the small group.

Those who openly turned away and ceased to follow the Lord were honest with themselves and their own understanding. They did not believe, so they disassociated themselves from the ones who did. Many of these probably came to faith in Jesus Christ at a later date. Their understanding changed after the Lord had risen from the dead.

Judas was different. The Lord saw his heart. He was a deceiver - a liar. Outwardly he was a follower of Christ, but inwardly he was far from Him. There will always be the true and the false disciples in the Christian church. Hypocrites are not merely those who fail to reach a standard of behaviour they claim to live by, but actors who play the part when in actual fact they are something quite different. Hypocrites may deceive themselves and others, but the Lord searches men's hearts and is not fooled. "... He knows the secrets of the heart" (Psalm 44:21).

To His small group of disciples Jesus asked: "You do not want to leave too, do you?" The apostle Peter is spokesman for the others and answers that they would not turn back from following Jesus. "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" Peter said (verse 68). Other teachers were no comparison to the Lord. His words were rich with life and power. They fed the soul, they satisfied the mind, they lifted the listeners up into unexplored spiritual realms. These unique qualities of Jesus' teaching caused Peter and the others to believe, even though they did not understand many things.

The other distinctive quality which Peter recognized was the absolute holiness of Jesus: "We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." The spotless perfection of Christ was a most impressive seal of His divinity. Peter well knew the weakness of sinful human nature! Thus, in the midst of unbelief and desertion, the faith of the apostles climbs to greater heights.

THINKING IT THROUGH

John 5:31 - 6:71

1. Why was it important for Jesus to “show His credentials” to the people of His day? What do you consider is the greatest proof that Jesus is the Son of God?
2. How would the miracle of feeding the multitude help the disciples to believe? What does Mark 8:18-21,29-30 tell us about the disciples faith?
3. How did Jesus respond to those who only sought Him for what He could do for them (6:26-27)? What has Jesus promised to those who seek Him sincerely (verses 37 and 40)?
4. What does verse 35 tell us about our need of eternal life?
5. How do we “eat” the Lord’s flesh and “drink” His blood (compare verses 53-54 with verse 35)?
6. When many turned back from following Jesus, what caused the true disciples to stay (6:66-69)? What does this tell us about a true disciple?

QUESTIONS AND DIFFICULTIES:

29 PLEASING GOD OR MAN?

Read: John 7:1-13

If God made known to us the person He regarded as the most suited to be the next President of the United States of America, His choice may well come as a big surprise. The person ideally suited for a position of such power and prominence would probably be reluctant to aspire to it. Imagine this person learning that God had chosen him to become the President, even though he is an unknown businessman from a country town in Mississippi. He may be the right man for the job, and even aware of God's choice of him, but it's still a long way from a small business operation to the most powerful office on earth!

He would be tempted to orchestrate his own rise to power; to jostle and manoeuvre himself into a place of prominence. His humble attitude to life which had once gained God's commendation, could change in order to gain the praise of men and public recognition. He would be tempted to turn a blind eye to corruption and wrongs within the political system if by exposing them his new career would be jeopardised.

Jesus, the small-town carpenter, knew His high calling, but He was not looking for votes. His aim was to please His Father, and this led Him into a collision course with the religious hierarchy. "The world hates me", He said, "because I testify that what it does is evil" (verse 7). Neither would He manipulate people or circumstances to achieve His own ends.

Jesus' family knew that He claimed to be the Messiah - chosen by God to eventually rule the world. But they couldn't reconcile His unassuming, quiet nature, and His lack of worldly ambition, with His calling as King. If He was on the path to power and glory He should not continue with His aversion to prominence - doing the bulk of His work in the seclusion of rural (and despised) Galilee. "Get out into the limelight" they said. "Leave here and go to Judea" (verse 3).

The feast in Jerusalem at that particular time was one which, more than others, inspired national hope that their Messiah would soon be revealed. They urged Him to go up and do His miracles, and capitalise on the people's expectancy. "Go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing; for no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world" (verses 3-4).

The Lord would not in any way be aligned with this attitude. He remained in Galilee until the others had left on their pilgrimage, and then He privately made His way to Jerusalem. If He was to be revealed as King, it must be in a way that pleased His Father in Heaven.

30 THE TEST OF A TEACHER

Read: John 7:14-24

Jesus' teaching was unique. Even His enemies had to admit "never a man spoke like this man" (John 7:46). But Jesus lacked formal Bible training. The people wondered: "How did this man get such learning without having studied?". Jesus knew their thoughts and told them: "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgement" (verse 24).

In the same way, we tend to judge Bible teachers by their position in the church, or the letters after their names, rather than their individual qualities.

Jesus gave three reasons why we should accept His teaching:

1. The source of his teaching is God (verse 16).

Jesus said: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from Him who sent me." If a man's teaching comes from his own wisdom, intellect or imagination, he is not a messenger of God. Even though Christ was the Truth, He did not teach independently of His Father, nor did He disregard what God had already said in the Scriptures.

2. The hearts of the hearers (verse 17).

Lack of acceptance by the hearers does not prove a teacher is false. If our desire is to do God's will, we will have no trouble recognizing true and false teaching. When we refuse to live in a way that pleases God, we become blind to the truth and open to false teaching (Romans 1:19-25 and Ephesians 4:17-19).

3. The Lord's motivation (verse 18).

"He who speaks on his own does so to gain honour for himself". There is no glory in merely passing on the thoughts and words of another. But one who proclaims his own insights and thoughts can easily be motivated by self-interest. A teacher who works for the honour of another (as Jesus did) can be trusted to teach what is true.

Jesus then gives an example of His teaching. He had been accused of being a false teacher because He had healed a man on the sabbath (chapter 5). Jesus showed that His action was consistent with God's Word. The Law commanded all Hebrew males to be circumcised on the eighth day. Some therefore had to be circumcised on the sabbath, a day when God commanded that no work was to be done. Jesus had healed a man's whole body on the sabbath; was that not more important than a minor skin operation?

So skilful and honest was His application of God's Word to the point in question, that anyone desiring to do God's will would have no difficulty accepting Him as a true Teacher.

31 SHROUDED IN MYSTERY

Read: John 7:25-52

Jesus did nothing to calm the turmoil of questions and opinions concerning Him. He seemed to allow His true identity to be shrouded in mystery. Instead of direct answers to the people's dilemma, He spoke somewhat vaguely of His being the One sent by His Father.

The division among the people was now quite apparent. Those who believed became even more convinced that He was Messiah. Those who did not, grew more opposed to Him.

Jesus was acting in harmony with God's usual method of revealing truth: God reveals Himself and conceals Himself at the same time (Mathew 16:16-17). In so doing He forces people to stand with Him or stand apart from Him. There can be no middle ground.

Today it is exactly the same. The Scriptures have enough evidence to convince anybody who humbly and honestly seeks the truth about Jesus. But there is insufficient proof to convince the self-opinionated sceptic. Many are confused about who Jesus really is. There are those who are outwardly Christians, but are not clearly with Him or against Him. Some believe He is the Son of God. Others do not. Some are even strongly opposed to Him. Like it was at the time of Jesus, all are forced to 'take sides' at some point in their lives.

Jesus stood up on the last and great day of the feast, aware of all the argument and diversity of opinion. The feast was instituted to commemorate the time in Israel's history when the whole nation was dying of thirst during their desert journey from Egypt to Canaan. God told Moses to strike a certain rock, and upon doing so, a fountain of fresh water gushed out in abundance. Jesus presented Himself to Israel as the One who had come to provide the living water of the Spirit to a thirsty nation. In saying "If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink", Jesus was stating that He was the fulfilment of that Old Testament picture.

Part of the ritual of the feast was that a priest lead all the people in a procession from the temple to the fountain of Siloam. He would fill a golden pitcher with water and, surrounded by much joy and singing, would return to the temple where the water would be ceremonially poured out.

Jesus applied this symbolic action to Himself, and said that He would pour the Spirit into all who come to Him. They would be filled with the water of life. Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit who comes to live in any person at the moment they trust in Him personally as Lord and Saviour. He is the answer to the deep spiritual need that even religion has no power to fully satisfy.

Do you have the Holy Spirit in you? Give yourself in faith to the Lord Jesus. Trust Him now to wash you clean of your sin and fill you with His Spirit.

32 AMAZING GRACE

Read: John 7:53 - 8:11

She was guilty - caught in the very act. The Pharisees and religious leaders were opportunists, and took advantage of her indefensible guilt, to see if Jesus would abide by the Law of Moses which demanded the penalty of death. If He said "Do not stone her", they could accuse Him of being a fraud by claiming to be from God yet failing to obey His command.

They were only interested in trapping Jesus. The Lord, however, was interested in helping the guilty woman. They had put the spotlight on the woman, but the Lord turned the light back on them!

It was true that the woman was guilty and worthy of death; but it was equally true that her accusers were also guilty of breaking God's laws. It is not just the immoral who are under God's curse, but all sinners. "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (Galatians 3:10). The Bible teaches that "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). All of the woman's accusers stood guilty and condemned because of their own sin, so they were in no position to call for judgement on the woman.

Jesus wrote in the dirt with His finger. We do not know what He wrote, but it was obviously something which caused the woman's accusers to sense their own guilt. Perhaps He wrote the words He had spoken in Matthew 5:28, "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart".

The Pharisees could not bear the spotlight exposing their sinfulness, and so they slunk away silently. His words were powerful: "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." But only He was without sin! He was the only one in the crowd that day who had the right to carry out the sentence of God's law upon the woman. But He had not come to judge people. His mission was to save people from judgement (John 3:17).

Like the woman, all of us stand guilty before God. Any endeavour to obey God's law will not save us from death and judgement, for "No one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law, rather, through the law we become conscious of sin" (Romans 3:20). The Pharisees boasted of observing God's law but were not able to withstand the piercing eye of Jesus Christ. But Jesus did not come to condemn us. He came to be our Saviour, but He cannot save us unless we turn from our sin and trust in Him. If we do not turn, we will face Him as Judge. The woman was not forgiven - she was simply told to stop sinning and was given an opportunity to trust in the Saviour. That opportunity is also given to you. Have you taken advantage of it?

33 THE LIGHT OF LIFE

Read: John 8:12-20

A ship making its way into harbour at night needs the assistance of a light on the shore so that it can be guided safely between the shallow waters and the rocks. If the captain placed a light on his bow and used that as a guide, he would soon run aground! The light must be in a fixed position outside the ship so as to keep the vessel moving in the right direction.

Many people today rely upon their own insight and feelings in order to determine the truth. They say: "You believe what you want to believe, and I'll believe what I want to believe", or "My thoughts on the subject are ...". It is a mistake to set up your light on the bow of your own ship and use that as your guide.

We need an infallible guide to find the truth. Jesus claims to be that light. He did not say, "I will show you the light of the world". He said, "**I am** the light of the world." When you trust in your own wisdom and reasoning power you will continue to walk in darkness. But when you look to Jesus Christ as teacher and guide, you will have the light of life.

The Pharisees were intimidated by these words. They challenged His right to say such a profound thing about Himself. The Lord Jesus replied by saying that He was not deluded about who He was, because He had a perfect understanding of His origin (He came from Heaven). The Pharisees had accused Him of overrating Himself, but Jesus replied "You judge by human standards." At first sight Jesus seems to be no different from any other human. Certainly He was a true man, but, had the Pharisees known God, they would have discerned His unique identity. They thought they were competent to make a judgement about Jesus Christ by the light on the bow of their own ship.

Jesus, even though He is the Light of the World, does not presume to make judgements on His own. He only does so by reference to a 'light' outside of Himself - by communicating with His Father. "But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father who sent Me" (verse 16).

In becoming man the Lord Jesus had voluntarily placed Himself in a position of total dependence upon the Father. He chose to limit Himself to the life of a normal human. The vital link He maintained with His Father enabled Him to know and judge correctly in all situations.

Christians can enjoy a similar vital link with Jesus, and so make true judgements about what is truth and what is error. They have a Light to safely guide them into the harbour.

34 WHO ARE YOU?

Read: John 8:21-29

The time for Jesus to die was drawing near. The multitude of visitors who were in Jerusalem for the feast would soon disperse and journey home. The question addressed to Christ in verse 25 was in the minds of all the people: "Who are you?"

What they believed about Him was no small matter. He warned those who did not believe in Him, that heaven, would forever be closed to them. They would die in their sins and remain forever in a place of separation from God. Jesus alone could save them from divine judgement. Once they rejected Him, He was unable to alter their eternal destiny.

He said: "Unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins." Jesus takes the name of God for Himself. In Exodus 3:13,14, God revealed Himself to Moses by the name "I AM". The Jews knew what Jesus meant by these words because later and they tried to stone Him to death for speaking blasphemy (verse 58). From the beginning of His public ministry the Lord Jesus had claimed to be the revelation of God.

Although these claims were veiled, they were unmistakable. When the people asked Him, "Who are you?" Jesus answered, "Just what I have been claiming all along." He said that He was the True Temple (2:19), the Living Water (4:14), the Unique Son (3:16, 5:23), the Bread from Heaven (6:35), and the Light of the World (8:12). His miracles accompanied His claims and gave evidence that He was not deceiving them, nor was He Himself deceived. Yet He did not come out plainly with a statement such as "I am God".

He veiled His identity so that even His closest disciples had difficulty coming to a clear, firm belief. When they did, He said to them "this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). Many people today do not believe that Jesus is God, but they arrived at this conclusion by their own reasoning alone; not as a result of an earnest and honest search aided by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus did not want superficial followers. Their attachment to Him had to spring from sincere faith. He knew that many of His listeners who found it so difficult to believe in Him, would come to faith after He had died and risen again. Thus He prophesied that His death and resurrection would be the great crisis point of faith for the nation, and eventually for the whole world. He would divide all humanity into two camps.

If you struggle with Jesus' claims, and find it hard to believe that He is God, it may be a help to reflect on His death and resurrection. Read each of the gospel accounts and ask God to show you the truth about Jesus.

35 OUTWARD RELIGION

Read: John 8:30-47

Anyone can say they have faith in Jesus Christ and call God "Father". Every Sunday there are some who pray "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name ...", but their lives do not in any way hallow His Name! They no doubt claim to be Christians. People in Jesus' day often showed the same superficial attachment to Him.

In verse 30 we read that "Many put their faith in Him". The Lord was not dazzled by this apparent success. He knew their hearts, so He immediately challenged their sincerity. The test was a cause for stumbling for some, but a wonderful promise to those who had genuine faith.

He showed that true Christians (disciples) would allow Christ's Word to change their beliefs and behaviour. "If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (verses 31, 32). Jesus knew that despite their claims to be His followers, they had no room in their hearts for His Word (verse 37). He could see them going so far with Him but eventually dropping away. The pathway of faith is always strewn with obstacles. Only those who overcome the stumbling blocks and, as Jesus said, "Hold to My teaching", will enjoy the blessing of freedom from the power and penalty of sin (verse 32).

Jesus condemns His new admirers. They are not His disciples, evidenced by His knowledge that they are slaves of sin. They are not children of Abraham or of God; they belong to their father, the devil!

His judgement of them was not based on externals. Their outward keeping of the law did not mean they were free from the inner slavery to greed, hatred, jealousy and lust. Being outward descendants of Abraham did not make them God's people. Inwardly they were far away from God. Outward appearance may be deceiving to some, but not to the Lord. His eyes are able to pierce to the very core of our being. We may pray "Our Father ..." but our hearts reveal that we do not share His holy nature. The devil is the source of all evil, and all opposition to the truth. He is the murderer and the "father of lies" (verse 44). If we do by nature what the devil does, then we must recognize him as our father.

Jesus, showed by His life that He was from His Father, God. No one could prove Him to be guilty of any sin, so their opposition to Him only condemned them as ones who do not love God. The devil used those who only outwardly belonged to God to be his instruments of evil. They shut their ears to the truth and eventually murdered the perfect Son of God.

Outward religion can blind our eyes to the truth, and leave us open to being an instrument in the hands of the devil. Be real! Open your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ.

THINKING IT THROUGH

John 7:1 - 8:47

1. In your opinion, how different would history be if Jesus had been motivated by a selfish desire such as wanting to rule the world? What did motivate Jesus (7:18)?
2. What kind of thirst do you think Jesus refers to in 7:37? What does He say we have to do in order to have that thirst satisfied?
3. How did Jesus use the incident in chapter 8 to trap those who sought to accuse Him? What was the Lord's response to the woman's sin, and what does this tell us about His attitude towards our sin today?
4. What does it mean to "die in your sins" (8:21)? Why is the belief that Jesus Christ is God the Son so important (8:24)?
5. What kind of freedom is Jesus talking about in John 8:32 and 36 (compare with verse 34)? What do the two responses to the teachings of Christ tell us about them (8:31,37,44)?

QUESTIONS AND DIFFICULTIES:

36 LUNATIC OR LORD?

Read: John 8:48-59

Many of those who had professed to put their faith in Jesus Christ had been stripped of their shallow facade. They became angrier as the conversation continued, as Jesus exposed their true inner state. He condemned them as children of the devil. With this, their arguments turned to insults. They called Him an enemy of the Jewish people who should be as despised as a Samaritan. They reasoned that He must be a madman to condemn such respectable, God-fearing, law-keeping religious people!

The Lord replied to their malice with a simple denial. He explained that their dishonour of Him, whose only aim was to honour His Father, proved the truth of His previous judgement of them.

Jesus then gave a wonderful promise: "If anyone keeps My word, he will never see death" (verse 51). Those who allow Christ's word to change their lives and beliefs, will share Christ's victory over death. For them there will be no death in death! The body will die, but they will not even taste death. They will pass through the gate of death into life everlasting.

"Who do you think you are?" the enemies of Christ retorted. "All the great men of God in the past have died, yet you say that anyone, no matter who they are, if they become your disciples will enjoy blessings which even men like Abraham and the prophets never received! Who do you think you are to be claiming such things?"

Jesus replied that He knew God, and they didn't. He also spoke of Abraham as rejoicing in anticipation of seeing the day when Christ would come to earth. His joy two thousand years before, was now matched by His joy in heaven as He actually saw the appearance of Christ in fulfilment of the ancient promise.

Jesus then answers the challenge: "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" He says: "Before Abraham came into being I AM" (verse 58). Jesus contrasted His divine pre-existence with the historical beginning of Abraham's existence. He did not say "I Was" (in existence before Abraham) but "I AM", using the Name God gives to Himself in Exodus 3:14.

There were only two alternatives for the Jews in response to Jesus' claim. Either they could believe and fall down in worship, or they could charge Him with blasphemy and call for the punishment of death by stoning. They chose the latter, but failed in their murderous attempt.

Jesus claimed to be God. Either He knew it was a lie and deceived the people, or He was not aware that it was a lie because He was deluded, or He was telling the truth. You must choose which one to believe.

37 I MUST WORK

Read: John 9:1-17

It was the Sabbath, and Jesus saw the blind man in need of healing. What would He do? The last time He healed on the Sabbath it almost cost Him His life (chapter 5).

“We must do the work of Him who sent me” said Jesus, “as long as it is day.” In effect He was saying: “The night of rest from My work on earth will soon come, and that will be the true Sabbath rest. Until then, if a person is in need, and I am sent to help, I must work!”

Jesus then chose a way to heal the man which would be less likely to arouse the anger of his enemies. To just speak or touch the blind man and heal him, the miracle would be seen as work on the Sabbath; so the Lord made two small patches of mud with His own saliva, and, having pressed these firmly over the man’s eyes, sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam. In this way the healing would be attributable to God, and yet the saliva would provide a vital and personal link between Jesus and the miracle. The Lord Jesus will never be turned aside from doing His work in people’s lives. He will find a way of bringing light and life to all who seek it, despite what others may do to hinder His loving work.

The prevailing belief of the day was that a person’s suffering was caused by sin. Jesus’ disciples were influenced by this thinking, and asked: “Since the man was born blind, was his own sin or the sin of his parents which caused his disability.

Jesus did not deny that the man and his parents were sinners, but He did not link their past conduct with the man’s plight. Rather than delving into the cause of the man’s blindness, He directed their attention to the purpose God had in allowing it. The cause of suffering is often hard to determine, but the end for which God permits it is very clear. God’s work consists of making evil an occasion for good.

A person who has suffered, or who has experienced great loss or sorrow, often thinks seriously about life. Our extremities become God’s opportunities to show His goodness and love.

The blind man not only received his physical sight, he was healed spiritually as well. He will be forever grateful that his temporary handicap in life led to him finding Christ, and entering into the enjoyment of the permanent and very precious gift of eternal life.

38 NONE SO BLIND

Read: John 9:18-41

The old adage is true: "There are none so blind as those who will not see!" The Jewish leaders refused to see in Jesus more than a mere human. And not just human, but they regarded Him as a sinner, because He healed on the Sabbath! They were faced with a problem, however, as they could not deny the miracle of the blind man's healing. They were motivated by their wilful unbelief to find grounds to explain it away.

To believe that the man had been healed by the power of God, and that this power had come through Jesus, would force them to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God! They recoiled at the very thought! They had to discredit Jesus or the blind man!

It is always hard to be totally impartial. Have you ever gained an impression about someone which then affects your whole attitude? You find out months later that your initial judgement was wrong. All that time you refused to allow yourself to believe anything different about that person. Your mind had been prejudiced, and it took a significant event to turn your thinking around.

The religious leaders were set in their minds. Jesus did not measure up to the type of Messiah they expected, so they did everything in their power to discredit Him. But the life and miracles of Jesus could not be dismissed. The parents of the man, though afraid to identify Jesus as the healer, bore witness that a miracle had occurred. Their son had been born blind.

At that time Rabbis believed that some miracles were possible in answer to prayer, but there were a few miracles that only Messiah could do. One of these 'Messianic Miracles' was that of healing a person who had been born blind. No wonder they responded the way they did!

Enraged at the mounting evidence against their disbelief, the Pharisees attacked the character of Jesus (verse 24) and then the character of the healed man (verse 34). They cast him out (but Jesus received him)! He had been healed physically, but now he received spiritual sight. He believed in Jesus and worshipped Him as God.

In contrast, the Pharisees who claimed to know the truth, were judged by Christ as blind to the very things they prided themselves in knowing.

There is no middle ground! We are forced to choose to believe in Jesus or reject Him. The more we know of His life, miracles, claims and teaching, the harder it is to stay indifferent.

39 HIS MASTER'S VOICE

Read: John 10:1-21

I used to take our neighbour's dog with me for a jog. He was an English Setter, and I had trouble controlling him without a lead! He would run off in all directions in an exuberant display of freedom. At times he would sprint down a side street, and when I called, clapped, and whistled to turn him back, the scent of another dog made him oblivious to everything else around him. However, when my neighbour called him there was an immediate response. He obeyed. My efforts to mimic the sound of my neighbour's voice did not fool the dog. He knew his master's voice and would not listen to any other.

The blind man's faith, which had led him to worship and follow Jesus, stands in sharp contrast to the unbelief of the Pharisees (chapter 9). The Lord Jesus here pointed out the reason for these differing responses to Him.

The blind man was one of God's true sheep within the whole flock of Israel. All Israelites would claim to belong to God, but Jesus knew better! Jesus is the true Shepherd, and He came to draw out to Himself those who were genuine. Others had come who claimed to be the Messiah, but Jesus alone is the One whom God appointed.

From among the outwardly religious Jews, Christ calls His sheep. He "leads them out" and they recognize His voice (verse 3). They will not follow a stranger (verse 5), because the voice does not sound familiar.

Those who did recognize Jesus as their shepherd and came out to follow Him, He saved from God's judgement (verse 9) and gave them life in its fullest measure (verse 10).

He proved His genuine care for His sheep by laying down His own life to protect them. He did this when He died on the cross to pay sin's penalty. In contrast, other religious "Christs" only cared about their own welfare, and would not be willing to give up their wealth, reputation, and power, let alone their lives, in order to care for their followers.

Jesus, in calling the true sheep out of Israel, spoke of another flock, the Gentiles, which He would join with them to make one new flock (verse 16). He anticipated the church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles. This one flock would be made up of all who have heard their Master's voice and followed Him in faith and obedience.

40 STANDING OR STUMBLING

Read: John 10:22-42

The same sun that melts the snow, hardens the mud. Jesus always divides people into two camps. Peter spoke of Him as a Rock which, for the Christian, is very precious. But the same Rock is for unbelievers a stone that causes them to stumble and fall (1 Peter 2:6-8).

Jesus was nearing the end of His three year public campaign. He had presented Himself to Israel as their King, and the whole nation was faced with a decision. Some had come to believe that He is the Son of God, and having watched Him, and listened to His teaching, had grown strong in their faith. Those who did not believe or who were only aroused by the sensation of His miracles, became increasingly settled in their unbelief.

The words of Jesus in verses 27 to 30 brought the division of faith and unbelief closer to its climax. His followers were like sheep with their shepherd. For them, Jesus' words give comfort and hope. No matter what life may throw at us, whether health issues, financial stress, hurt and suffering, or grief and loss; Christians have the great assurance that eternal life for them is secure, both now and after death. No power or person can take us out of the safe-keeping of our Lord.

The foundation for a Christian's security is not a doctrinal creed or a system of ethics. It is not even the teachings of Jesus. True security is found in Him as a person. Jesus, as Shepherd of His sheep, calls us out to Himself ("My sheep listen to My voice"). He gives us eternal life, He saves us from judgement, and He protects us for eternity. The reason He can offer such security to us is that He is one with the Father. He is not working independently, so He will bring to complete fulfilment what the eternal God has purposed.

This very same truth, which is so encouraging to the believer, caused the enemies of Jesus to try and kill Him. They stumbled over His words. To say He was one with the Father was blasphemy and unforgivable! But Jesus reminded them that His claim was not just empty words. The miracles He performed were undeniable evidence of God's power. He was the Son of God, and the only reason they could not believe was their refusal to become one of His sheep (verses 25-26).

41 LOVE'S PROVIDENCE

Read: John 11:1-16

Marooned on a small island after being adrift in the ocean for many weeks, a man set to and built a hut with a few pieces of driftwood and some palm branches. Days later as he was returning from a walk, he saw a cloud of smoke drifting out to sea from where his lean-to was situated. Everything he owned was in the hut, and all was lost in the flames. Forced to sleep under the stars that night, the man became angry with God. "Why did you let this happen? Don't you care for me?" His anger turned to shame when a few hours later a ship anchored in the harbour. "We saw the smoke coming from an uninhabited island and came to see if someone was in trouble!" the captain said.

God's providence is His ability to control all the circumstances of our lives and work all things together for good. At times our circumstances may cause us to think that He is not in control, but His inaction is part of His wise and loving purpose.

Martha and Mary were close friends of Jesus. When their brother Lazarus became critically ill, they sent word to Him because they knew He had the power to heal him. Upon receiving their message, He remained a few extra days in the place where He was, and finally arrived after Lazarus had died. The funeral was over, and the body had been laid to rest for days! Both sisters could not understand. Why did Jesus not come in time. If only He had been there, Lazarus would not have died.

Jesus could have spoken the word and healed him from a distance. After all, He loved him!

Jesus always acts on His own initiative in union with His Father. He chooses the right time to act, and acts the way He decides is best. His ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts our thoughts. At times He does not act when we think He should, or how we expect Him to, leading us to doubt His love and control.

Some people have sought Jesus at a time when they felt they needed Him, and He seemed to be deaf to their prayers. He waits for the time He knows best to answer the deepest needs people face. His providence and His love will cause a true seeker to find Him at the right time and in the right way. When Jesus does not answer our call, it is because He has something better in store.

When our hopes go up in smoke, and He seems distant and disinterested, trust Him anyway. He cares.

42 DEAD DOGMA

Read: John 11:17-32

The church has always had her dogma; the doctrines or formal beliefs that she holds. Martha knew the dogma of resurrection. For her it was part of the system of belief she had been taught since childhood. Now her brother was dead, and Jesus spoke of resurrection. "Your brother will rise again" He said. "I know he will rise again" she affirmed, but went on to say: "in the resurrection at the last day".

Dogma can bring a certain degree of comfort, especially if a belief has special relevance. But Jesus wanted her to look beyond the formal dogma to the source of what she believed.

To know the dogma of resurrection is one thing. To know the One who is that very life and power is another! "I am the resurrection and the life" Jesus said. Martha was encouraged to put her faith in a living person, instead of a dead dogma. She responded to Jesus with a clear statement of faith "I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God" (verse 27).

Because resurrection has its source in the person of Jesus Christ, the only way to share in it is by trusting in Him. For those like Martha who are willing to put their faith in Jesus, He pledges Himself to them. If they die, they will live ("He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies" - verse 25). Jesus is speaking here of a future day when He will restore the spirits of His people to bodily life, by giving them a permanent new body that will be far more wonderful than the original (Philippians 3:21).

Before that day of resurrection takes place, Jesus will still save His people from death. He said, "Whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (verse 26). When Christians face physical death Jesus pledges that He will shelter them from the power of death.

When a believer passes away, the soul and spirit leave the body and enter immediately into the presence of God. The real person is not dead, but very much alive. Physical death merely becomes a gateway to life - life on a far higher plain than before.

To trust in the Lord Jesus is all we need to do. Jesus Christ is the source of life and power - He is the resurrection and the life! He is trustworthy, and has pledged Himself to save you from death's power, and give you a brand new body in a future day.

THINKING IT THROUGH

John 8:48 - 11:32

1. What did Jesus claim about Himself in John 8:58 (compare Exodus 3:13-14)? If Jesus' claim to be God was false, what would we be forced to conclude about His character?
2. What kind of blindness did the Pharisees have (9:39-41), and how did Jesus respond to them?
3. As the Shepherd of His sheep, what does Jesus promise those who follow Him (John 10:9,10,28)? How did Jesus show that He really does care for us individually? (compare 10:11-13 with Luke 15:4-7)
4. How do Jesus' miracles prove He was equal with God the Father (verses 37-38)?
5. How do you think Mary and Martha felt when Jesus seemed to be slow in responding to their urgent prayers for help (John 11:6, 21)? How did Jesus show He was in complete control?

QUESTIONS AND DIFFICULTIES:

43 PASSION AND POWER

Read: John 11:33-44

Advertising can be deceptive. You almost believe the soap-powder company is really concerned about your wash! They make extravagant claims about the extra-super-dazzling whiteness of your sheets after using their brand! Promises come easy, they are just words.

Jesus had made a startling promise to Martha (verses 25 and 26), but His words were not idle. To promise resurrection to a grieving sister would be cruel if He didn't match them with His display of divine power. Jesus' promise was not merely a statement of truth, it was a word of comfort that was born out of genuine concern.

Jesus wept!

His tears showed the depth of His love for His friends in grief. Sometimes we can think of God as aloof - sure He loves us, but even that seems to be 'at a distance'. But here we see the kind of love God has for us. The all-powerful creator who is unrivalled in glory and honour is touched deeply in His emotions by the agony of heart engulfing His friends.

But Jesus felt more than sympathy. The words "deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (verse 33) are unusually intense in the original Greek language. They indicate that Jesus was enraged and disturbed in spirit. As a Mother whose child had been molested and strangled, sorrow would be mixed with anger. So Jesus is filled with indignation. He went to the tomb like a lioness who has lost her cubs. His passion is stirred by the tragic consequences that sin has brought into the world.

Passion and power join together as He stood before the tomb and commanded Lazarus to come out. The One who is the source of life demonstrated openly that His claims are not hollow words. Lazarus entered life on earth for a second time after experiencing death for four days!

Today Jesus is still moved in spirit. He is touched by our feelings when we go through times of suffering (Hebrews 4:15-16). The same passion which moved Him to raise Lazarus, and later led Him to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins on the cross, now motivates Him to reach out in love to us. He may not immediately remove the consequences of sin (death and suffering), but if we trust in Him, He promises to do so after we pass through the gateway of physical death and live with Him forever in His Father's home.

44 GOD IN CONTROL

Read: John 11:45-57

The Bible teaches that God is sovereign. He is in complete control. He is reigning on the throne of the universe. Nothing happens by accident and nothing takes Him by surprise. He controls the affairs of men from behind the scenes. He even takes the things that men do against Him, and uses them to fulfil His own plans.

When the Jewish leaders observed the growing excitement about Jesus, climaxing in the people's exuberant response to the resurrection of Lazarus, their fear and jealousy came to a head. Little did they know that their hatred was to be used in the controlling hands of God to fulfil His loving purpose.

Unless Jesus died for the sin of the world there would be no way for mankind to be saved from judgement. God took the worst evil that man could do to Him (killing His Son) and turned it around to become the greatest love-gift He has ever given!

In Acts 2:23, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Peter tells the people that the crucifixion was not a mistake. He says that it was according to the set purpose and foreknowledge of God.

It is heartening to know that God is in full control! The death of Christ may seem to be a failure. If He died, and died such a shameful death, some may doubt His claims to be the Son of God. Knowing that His death was part of God's eternal plan, and believing in the truth of His resurrection, strengthens our faith in Jesus as the Lord and Saviour.

Evidence of the control of God over the death of His Son is seen in the High Priest's prophecy. Every year the High priest would be expected to speak on behalf of God. In his sin and anger, he said that it is better for one man to die for the people than the whole nation perish. He meant that if Jesus wasn't silenced, there would be such a following of Him by the common people, that Rome would be aroused and destroy Jerusalem in order to prevent a revolution. The words he spoke were true, though the meaning he attached to them was wrong. Jesus was to die instead of the nation, not to save Israel from perishing under the Romans, but from perishing under God's judgement for their sins.

The death of Jesus was no mere accident. God planned that your sins could be removed by the sacrifice of His Son. He sent the Lord Jesus into the world to die on a cross. God's love was the motive, and He did it for you!

45 IS HE WORTH IT?

Read: John 12:1-11

Mary had come to appreciate the Lord Jesus while sitting at His feet as He taught (Luke 10:39), and following Him as He went about doing good. Perhaps more than any other disciple, Mary believed Him when He spoke of His approaching death. She had observed the growing hatred of the Jewish leaders, and, not wanting to be unprepared, had purchased at great cost a pound of pure spikenard perfume. This was no ordinary perfume. It was customary to use spikenard to anoint the bodies of loved ones before burial, as an act of love. Knowing this, Mary took from her meager savings to be prepared should Jesus suddenly be murdered by a group of angry Pharisees.

But now her appreciation of the Lord was raised to new heights. The special mention in verse two of Lazarus being at the table indicated that the occasion of the feast was probably to celebrate the miracle of his return to life after being dead four days. Mary, having experienced first hand the Lord's power and grace in her brother's new life, was filled with an uncontrollable urge to show her love. She takes the white alabaster container of ointment and broke it, pouring the expensive contents on Jesus.

The response was immediate. Those present in the room looked with disapproval. Mary had loosened her hair, a disgrace for a woman in that culture. She had acted spontaneously with no second thought to what people might think.

Judas spoke out against such an extravagant waste. She had worked the best part of a year to earn enough to buy the perfume! Why not pour a little on Jesus and keep the rest for other times? Why not sell it and give the money to the poor?

Jesus came to her defence. The selfish heart of Judas was so alien to the generous love of Mary. Judas' concern for the poor was a smoke-screen for his greed and love of money. Mary knew the value of the spikenard but she valued Jesus above all else. He was more precious than her most treasured possession.

When people today grasp the wonder of who Jesus really is, and decide to commit their lives fully to Him, there are others who regard it as a waste. The question everyone has to face is this - "Is He worth it?"

Your response to Jesus reveals your true assessment of Him.

46 BEHOLD YOUR KING!

Read: John 12:12-19

It was decision time. Israel had to make up her mind. The three years of public teaching, miracles and godly living had placed Jesus centre-stage in a great controversy. Is He the Son of God? Is He Messiah? Is He an impostor? Who is He?

Gradually the gap between believers and non-believers widened. Minds became set. Unbelief turned to hatred and faith grew into love. There was no value in prolonging the decision. Would God's chosen nation receive her king or reject Him?

The triumphal entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem was His official presentation of Himself as Messiah, the King of Israel. Visiting Jerusalem at that time were many country folk who believed in Him. Their expectation that Jesus would take authority and reign as King in Jerusalem was raised to great heights when they learned of the resurrection of Lazarus. They threw palm leaves and clothing in front of Jesus as He made His way on a young donkey up the incline towards the city gate.

Jesus accepted their praise. The event fulfilled what the prophet Zechariah had said over four hundred years earlier: "See, your King comes to you... riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9).

The whole of Jerusalem heard about it, and could not ignore the significance. Jesus' triumphal entry formally declared to Israel that He was their King. Neutral ground was now impossible. The nation had to decide whether or not to accept Him.

They chose!

A few days later they were crying out, "Away with Him ... crucify Him ... we will not have this man to reign over us ... we have no king except Caesar!"

Just as the nation of Israel was forced to choose, so must we. God gives us time to look at His claims, listen to His word and read of His miracles. Mental acknowledgement of Christ is not enough. Christ forces us out into the open.

There is a time to decide, and that decision is binding. Christ presents Himself to us as Saviour and Lord. We cannot avoid Christ, but neither can we avoid the consequences of rejecting Him. The decision is ours.

47 LIFE EXTINGUISHER

Read: John 12:20-26

Can you imagine the frustration of trying to put out a small fire in your home with a fire extinguisher which scatters the fire into hundreds of small flames around the room. Each of these in turn grows into a new fire. Your extinguisher would create a raging inferno within minutes!

Like a fire, Jesus came from Heaven and His flame took hold in the few years He went about teaching and healing. Having shown His power and glory, He knew what the response of some would be. They would try to extinguish Him. Many times He told His disciples that He would be killed by His enemies.

But the crucifixion would not be able to put out Jesus' flame! In resurrection He would share His life with all His disciples, who in turn would spread the same flame to their neighbours, friends and families. The death of Christ would only serve to ignite a great, spreading, circle of fire, beginning in Jerusalem, and spreading out to the furthest parts of the earth. In the book of Acts we read about His disciples receiving the Spirit (symbolised by tongues of fire coming down on everyone's head).

Prior to these events taking place, Jesus predicted it in a parable. In verse 24 He pictures Himself as a grain of wheat. While He is alive and walking around on earth His life is imprisoned within His body - it cannot be shared with even His closest family and friends. But just as a seed dies when it is planted, and from that death a plant grows and produces many seeds; so Jesus, through His death and resurrection, will grow His church. He will reproduce His very own life in the hearts of His followers.

After His resurrection the Spirit of Christ came upon one hundred and twenty disciples and indwelt them (Acts 2). They immediately went out and reproduced another three thousand. Then another five thousand believed. The early church was persecuted, causing the believers to scatter. The flame spread through the whole Roman empire in a very short time. Even today in places where Christians have been severely persecuted, the church of Jesus Christ is growing.

Jesus gave up His life in order to share it with others, and He calls us to apply the same principle to ourselves (verse 25). If you prefer to live your life without Christ (love your life), you may seem to gain it, but in the end you will lose it for eternity. However, if you are willing to die (to your independent life) and follow Christ, He will give you eternal life (verse 25).

48 WHO'S JUDGING WHO?

Read: John 12:27-33

A tourist being shown through an art gallery in Europe stood in front of one of the world's greatest masterpieces. The tourist surveyed the canvas and turned to the tour leader. "I don't think much of it" she said, to which the guide replied, "Madam your judgement does not matter. The picture is not on trial - you are the one who is on trial!"

Speaking of His approaching death, Jesus said it was a time when the world would be judged (verse 31). "Now is the time for judgement on this world" He said. The ones who thought they were judging Him, were in fact condemning themselves. It is in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ that the sinfulness of mankind is fully expressed. Pious, religious and law-keeping people show their true hearts when they reject the Son of God.

He also saw the victory of His death - a victory over the devil. Where the evil one seemed to win, the death of Christ would in fact be the devil's defeat. In Jesus' death, all of mankind's rebellion and sin were paid for in full. The devil now has no legal right to the earth or its inhabitants. He still may seem to be in control, but he is defeated.

The victory of the cross also means that people of every race and standing can enter into a saving relationship with God. The death of Christ would draw people from every people group across the whole earth to trust in the Lord Jesus as Saviour.

Only days before His execution, Jesus knew the anguish He was about to endure. He was human, and shrank in anticipation of the suffering He would have to go through. But He could not ask His Father to save Him from it, for His death was the great purpose of His coming into the world. His deepest desire was to glorify His Father by obediently doing His will.

He knew the outcome would be victory, but that knowledge did not take away the horror of the prospect. He went willingly to the cross to die as a sacrifice for our sins. His love was not sentiment. He gave His all.

Our response to Jesus Christ today determines our judgement. We may not have stood in the crowd crying out "crucify Him", but our response to Him seals our destiny. What will your response be?

49 HIDE AND SEEK

Read: John 12:34-50

Jesus hid Himself! The people looked everywhere but were unable to find Him. They asked His disciples, who were not able to help. The sudden disappearance of Jesus worked to emphasise the last words He had spoken (verses 35-36).

Every day for three years He had openly revealed Himself as God's Son. Though He had performed so many great miracles, and His teaching was so fresh and unique, and His perfect life measured up, most did not believe.

He had just told them that the time was close when He would no longer be with them. He warns them that when He does go, the light also goes.

If they do not believe when the light of God is in their midst, they would be left in darkness, without any sure means to find the truth. Even if they believed in God and read the Bible, they would be unable, by themselves, to know how to become children of God. Without Christ, their religion would be in vain. But if they believed in the Light (Jesus), they would become Sons of Light (verse 36).

The Lord wanted them to know the serious nature of their decision. He was not just another prophet or holy-man. He was the truth of God in human flesh. He was God and man in one!

It may sound illogical, but when God reveals Himself, He always hides Himself at the same time. For those who genuinely seek Him, He reveals enough to form a solid foundation to build their faith on. For those who do not really want to know God, He hides Himself. For example, a person with sincere faith will have his belief strengthened by reading the Bible, while a sceptic or closed-minded person may read the same pages and never see the light. God has chosen this method to screen out the genuine seekers from the rest.

When God's full revelation of Himself came into the world (Jesus Christ) He operated in the same way. His use of parables (Matthew 13:10-13) and miracles (Luke 11:29-32) and His personal dealings with people (Matthew 11:25-26) were used as a means to reveal truth and conceal truth at the same time. Many wanted more proof, but the disciples had proof enough.

John quoted from the Old Testament to show that the rejection of Christ by Israel was not because of Him, but because they were blind due to their hardened hearts.

The same principle is at work today. When faced with the light of Jesus Christ we are forced to make a decision. If we play around the fringe and refuse to make a commitment, there comes a time when the Lord Jesus hides Himself from us and we are left in darkness.

THINKING IT THROUGH

John 11:33 - 12:50

1. What does Jesus promise in John 11:25-26? In what way do Christians “never die”? (compare 2 Corinthians 5:8)
2. We cannot pour expensive perfume over the feet of Jesus (John 12:1-3), but what can we do to show our appreciation of Him?
3. In what ways can a person “love his life” (verse 25) and end up losing it? How would you answer the question Jesus asked in Mark 8:36?
4. Jesus said that His death would be the cause of people being drawn to Himself (verse 32). What is it about the death of Jesus Christ that moves people to trust and follow Him (Romans 5:8, 8:32)?
5. Why did Jesus stop performing miracles and showing Himself publicly (verses 36-37)? In what way can Jesus “hide Himself” from people today?
6. After reading through the first part of John’s gospel, have you come to a definite decision about Jesus Christ? What is it?

50 Believing is seeing

Read: John 21:19-31

Over the next few days please read through the remainder of John's Gospel. Chapters 13 to 17 record the night before the crucifixion when Jesus spent His last few hours with the closest of His disciples. He prepared them for His departure and encouraged them. He told them that His leaving would make way for God's Spirit to take His place and indwell, guide, teach and empower them for the mission He was sending them to do.

Then, in chapters 18 and 19 John records the trial and execution of Jesus. He emphasises that this was not a mistake, a failure or tragedy. God had planned it, evidenced by the number of references made to Old Testament prophecies written hundreds of years prior.

As you read the account of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, keep in mind that Jesus is the Son of God. He could easily have escaped the cross, and destroyed all His enemies. He submitted to the suffering in order to be a perfect sacrifice, taking the place of every guilty person.

We deserve the death that He endured on our behalf. His love was so great, He took our place and paid the penalty for our wrongs. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Wages represent what is owing for something a person has done, but a gift represents something that is unearned and free. Death is what is owed us for the wrongs we have done, but God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life are given free. The sinless One from heaven took our place and died the death that we deserve.

In Chapters 20 and 21 we read of the resurrection, and subsequent events that occurred before Jesus' return to heaven.

The disciples found it hard to believe that their Master had risen again. It was an intellectual challenge to them all, especially to the most skeptical - Thomas. He stated that he would not believe unless he saw proof. He would not be convinced without the marks of the crucifixion, proving it to be the actual body of Jesus that was risen from the dead.

Jesus appeared to him and showed him the fresh scars in His hands and feet, and the wound in His side. There could be no greater proof! Thomas worshipped! He called Jesus "My Lord and my God" (which Jesus accepted as a true statement of fact).

Many other disciples saw Jesus in the days that followed, including over 500 at one occasion (1 Corinthians 15:6). Jesus showed He was truly risen with "many convincing proofs" (Acts 1:3).

Jesus' words to Thomas are appropriate for us today. Thomas had said that he would not believe without seeing. Like the saying: "Seeing is believing"! Jesus said: "You believe because you have seen Me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing Me."