

PREACHERS' STUDY PAPERS

JOHN'S GOSPEL

BOOK 2

STUDIES 7 - 12

CHAPTERS 4:43 - 9

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Abbreviations for Bible Books

Old Testament

Genesis	Gen.	Ecclesiastes	Eccl.
Exodus	Ex.	The Song of Solomon	Song
Leviticus	Lev.	Isaiah	Is.
Numbers	Num.	Jeremiah	Jer.
Deuteronomy	Deut.	Lamentations	Lam.
Joshua	Josh.	Ezekiel	Ezek.
Judges	Judg.	Daniel	Dan.
Ruth	Ruth	Hosea	Hos.
1 Samuel	1 Sam.	Joel	Joel
2 Samuel	2 Sam.	Amos	Amos
1 Kings	1 Kings	Obadiah	Obad.
2 Kings	2 Kings	Jonah	Jonah
1 Chronicles	1 Chr.	Micah	Mic.
2 Chronicles	2 Chr.	Nahum	Nah.
Ezra	Ezra	Habakkuk	Hab.
Nehemiah	Neh.	Zephaniah	Zeph.
Esther	Esth.	Haggai	Hag.
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zech.
Psalms	Ps.	Malachi	Mal.
Proverbs	Prov.		

New Testament

Matthew	Matt.	1 Timothy	1 Tim.
Mark	Mark	2 Timothy	2 Tim.
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philemon	Philm.
The Acts	Acts	Hebrews	Heb.
Romans	Rom.	James	James
1 Corinthians	1 Co.	1 Peter	1 Pet.
2 Corinthians	2 Co.	2 Peter	2 Pet.
Galatians	Gal.	1 John	1 John
Ephesians	Eph.	2 John	2 John
Philippians	Phil.	3 John	3 John
Colossians	Col.	Jude	Jude
1 Thessalonians	1 Thess.	Revelation	Rev.
2 Thessalonians	2 Thess.		

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Study 7

Christ and his power

John 4:43 - 5:47

To heal

Introduction to the passage

John's purpose is to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (20:31). We have seen

- **the testimony** of various witnesses including the woman at Sychar and the response of the Samaritans who declared him to be the Messiah and Saviour (John 4)
- **the miracles**, demonstrating his power over nature (John 2)
- **the teaching**, demonstrating his authority and the ushering in of the age of grace.

This passage has more of the same, reinforcing the claim in new ways. There are two miracles of healing and a long discourse by Jesus. The miracles involve the healing of the son of an official and then we have the healing of a paralytic at a pool at Bethesda. Though these incidents are well separated in time, it is convenient to consider them together, as indeed John is doing by recording them in this way.

NB. This is a long passage and the study needs to be kept as a unit. Several sermons can be developed from different portions of the passage provided the overall context is understood and adhered to.

What these verses mean

Chapter 4

Verse 43

After the two days he left for Galilee.

We have some clear geographical information in this passage. Jesus returned to Galilee from Sychar.



Verse 44

(Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honour in his own country.)

What did Jesus call his own country? This verse has been much debated. He was rejected in Jerusalem (Judea) and welcomed by the Galileans. So how does this statement of a prophet's having no honour in his own country fit in? One view is that Jesus is referring to Nazareth, the place in which he was raised. (See Matthew 13:53-58 and Luke 4:16-24). Many of its inhabitants would have known of his family and some would have known Jesus himself. The proverb Jesus uses underlines its lesson; it is a proof of man's fallen state that he never values what he is familiar with, and that familiarity breeds contempt.¹ Jesus left for Galilee but not his home district of Nazareth.

Verse 45

When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there.

Jesus received an enthusiastic welcome that was a fulfilment of the prophecy by Isaiah (Is. 9:1-2; Matt. 4:13-16). However, the welcome of the Galileans is also ambiguous: they were concerned with the spectacular rather than the Saviour (see 4:48). The Galileans also rejected him in spite of this initial welcome (Matt. 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24). This is reinforced in the following chapters. It reminds us of John's comment in 1:11. The Greek of verses 45 and 46 begins with "therefore" (omitted by many translations). So it seems that we should understand this as "Because of his rejection in Jerusalem he returned to Galilee".

Verse 46

Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine.

Jesus' long Galilean ministry began at this point. We cannot be sure of the length of the period, but it could be as short as six months or as long as eighteen months. The other Gospel narratives provide considerable detail for this period (Matt. 4-9; Mark 1:16-2; Luke 4:16-5). John does not include as much in his Gospel and he does mention at the end of his account (21:25)

¹ J. C. Ryle (Expository Thoughts on John, vol. 1) Banner of Truth.

that it was impossible for him to report on everything our Lord had said and done.

And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum.

A royal official² travelled from Capernaum (a distance of about 22 kilometres and uphill) to seek out the Lord as his son was dying. Even the important people of this world need God.

Verse 47

When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

From 4:48 it can be assumed that this official was a Jew who recognised that this new prophet Jesus had power to heal. The man begged Jesus to come to Capernaum for his son was about to die. This showed the man's misunderstanding of Jesus in two ways; he thought that Jesus needed to be physically present at the boy's bedside and that Christ's power did not extend beyond death.

Verse 48

“Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.”

The Lord's response may seem harsh as he challenged the official. Why did Jesus challenge him in this way? To test his motives. The official had come out of desperation rather than conviction. He, along with other Jews, did not believe in the divine person of Christ. They did not believe what Jesus told them unless it were accompanied by signs and wonders. They were always looking for something sensational or exciting.

Verse 49

The royal official said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”

The father took to heart Jesus' warning and complaint though still not grasping the point that Jesus could heal without being present. He had moved on from relying on miracles to trusting in the word that Jesus had spoken. As one writer has stated, this court official did not bring to Christ full faith but sparks of faith.

² This official was probably a courtier of the tetrarch Herod Antipas. Jesus' Galilean ministry took place in the domain of Herod Antipas.

Verse 50

Jesus replied, “You may go. Your son will live.”

At this moment Jesus was healing the son's body and the father's soul. The NIV tones down the original text which states “Your son lives”. As Jesus spoke, the act of healing the child was taking place and he was being fully restored to complete health and vigour.

The man took Jesus at his word and departed.

The official took Jesus at his word. To many that heard him, there was a certain authority in the way he spoke that caused them to believe. That was so with this official.

Verse 51

While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living.

In Capernaum the servants noticed the sudden and remarkable recovery of the child. Filled with rejoicing they could not wait for the arrival of their master.

Verse 52

When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.”

The father met the servants the following day. Upon checking the timing of his son's recovery he was informed that it took place at the seventh hour. Using the Jewish method of time-keeping that would have been one o'clock in the afternoon. The Roman method would have meant seven in the evening, which sits more comfortably with the events. The father would have waited until the morning to travel. If the timing were one o'clock why would the father have not journeyed home that afternoon? The matter is inconclusive and does not materially affect the passage.

Verse 53

Then the father realised that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and all his household believed.

The father's faith was a faith that was to grow. His initial belief was simple, a trust that his son had been healed. But having seen it he believed that Christ was indeed the Messiah.

Verse 54

This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.

The healing of the royal official's son was the second sign that Jesus had performed in Cana, the first being the turning of water into wine. In both the Lord had shown his glory by demonstrating that he had complete control over the physical universe (water to wine) and that distance was no obstacle to his power (the healing of the boy). In both instances Jesus brought about faith, firstly in his disciples and secondly in the royal official and all his household.

Chapter 5

Verse 1

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews.

There is a time gap between the healing of the royal official's son in Cana and Jesus' going to Jerusalem for a feast. The feast could have been either the Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles. If it were the Feast of Tabernacles, which occurred in about October, the time difference could have been as much as 18 months. If the feast referred to were the Passover then the time difference would have been shorter. The important point is that John is linking together two events that are separated in time.

Verse 2

Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.

The Sheep Gate was a small entrance in the north wall of the temple. Sacrificial sheep came through this gate to be washed in the pool on their way to the temple. Nearby at the pool of Bethesda was a covered paving.

Verse 3

Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralysed.³

The sick people would come here as the pool was reputed to have healing properties (5:7). This was undoubtedly a superstition and without foundation. It was probably a concept that had come from the Greek religion.

³ See page 98 for the footnote

Verse 5

One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

One of these disabled people was a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. Some people have tried to read some significance into this number (as well as the number of colonnades in verse 2). We have no warrant to try to spiritualise such information. The man had been an invalid for a long time.

Verse 6

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

The Lord asked him if he wanted to be healed. This again may seem a strange question, but even today people (either the sick person or their “carers”) use disability as a reason to beg, so providing a source of income. Sometimes being made better is not always in the interest of some. Or perhaps this man had given up any hope of a cure?

Verse 7

“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no-one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

The man replied that he wanted to be healed but he was unable to get into the pool at the critical time because he lacked friends to help him. It was believed that an angel stirred up the waters and when this happened the first person to enter the water would be healed. This event was probably the result of the springs opening up into the pool.

Verse 8

Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”

We hear the Lord’s voice of authority, “Get up!” which parallels the verses 25, 28-29 concerning the last day. If the man had not obeyed Jesus’ command he would not have been healed. If we do not repent we will not be saved.

³ (from page 97) The original manuscripts of this Gospel did not contain the second part of verse 3 or verse 4. Later copyists probably put a note in the margins of the scroll to explain what the people believed. Some translations add after paralysed—***and they waited for the moving of the waters.*** ⁴ ***From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one in the pool after each disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had.***

Verses 9 and 10

At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The crippled man obeyed immediately. John did not often use expressions such as *at once*, *straight away*, *instantly* (in contrast for example with Mark in his Gospel). John, in using such phrases sparingly, was stressing the sudden and complete character of the cure. The man became completely healed; he picked up his bed and moved without any help or pain.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,¹⁰ and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

Here was an amazing miracle of healing, a demonstration of God's mercy. But what happened? Immediately the religious leaders - who claimed to know God well - started complaining because it was the Sabbath. There was no rejoicing. The problem was not God's but theirs. They had a legalistic approach. Their problem centred on the question of the nature of work. They claimed that the law forbade the man from carrying his mat (bed). The man's bedding was a straw mat which could be rolled up and carried away. But the law did not say that he could not carry his bedding. It was Jewish tradition and not God that had defined the nature of work. There are many possible ways of defining work, but the question is, What does God require? A study of the law gives us a good idea of what God is really talking about. The breaking of the Sabbath was a continuing charge made against Jesus - but he was Lord of the Sabbath. Sometimes when we refer to what our Lord taught, people will say, "He was a man of his time." What they mean is that he fitted in with the culture of his time and we must reinterpret things to match our present times. This incident gives the lie to that. Jesus opposed their distortion of the Word of God.

Verse 11

But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'"

The man who had been healed was not a theologian, but he knew the facts. The man who had healed him was the one who commanded him to carry his bed. The healer proved by his actions that he had the authority to instruct him as well.

Verse 12

So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

The religious leaders asked the man to identify the healer.

Verse 13

The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

The man was unable to tell the leaders who the man was that healed him. We see a similar situation in chapter 9.

Verse 14

Later Jesus found him at the temple

Some short time afterwards, maybe that same day or the next one or even later, the man was in the temple. There is nothing to indicate the reason for his being there. The Jews attended the temple in great numbers for religious and non-religious purposes. We cannot say whether the man was there to bring a thank-offering to God for his healing. In the temple Jesus came across the man again.

and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”

Jesus made himself known to the man, but warned him that if he continued to live a life of sin, then he could not expect God’s grace again. His paralysis was not a result of any particular sin but if he continued to sin and did not repent then there would be in store for him something worse than the physical illness from which he had been healed. Though he had physically healed the man, Jesus knew that the man was still in the state of not being reconciled with God.

Verse 15

The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

The man then served as a further witness to Jesus’ identity. The question they asked the man was who had told him to get up and pick up his mat and walk. In response the man identified Jesus as the one who had healed him.

Verse 16

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.

The Jews had little interest in the wonder of the man’s being

restored but were more concerned in his carrying a mat, thus breaking their Sabbath rules. The response of the religious leaders was persecution.

Verse 17

Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”

Jesus showed them that the God who gave the law also works on the Sabbath day and he was following his Father’s example. God stopped the work of creation (Gen. 2:2-3), but he did not withdraw from the world that depends on his continuing care and providence. God does not stop having compassion on the Sabbath, nor will Christ.

Verse 18

For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Jesus’ response aggravated the matter further because he appealed to his Father for his authority. As a consequence the planned persecution went up a level: they sought to kill him, not only because he broke their Sabbath laws, but because he made himself equal with God. He and his Father work in unison; it is a “family business”.

Verse 19

Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.

Jesus put his own activity on this Sabbath on the same level as that of God the Creator. The religious teachers recognised that God had to work on the Sabbath or else life would stop. But everyone else had to stop. So Christ was claiming the same right as God.

Verse 20

For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.

Jesus did not step back from the accusation of his equality with God. Rather he reinforced it by emphasising that he knows that God the Father loves him as his Son and that all that the Son does God has shown him to be part of the divine eternal plan.

Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these.

What will be staggering to these religious men would be greater things that God will do through his Son, Jesus. They will be greater than the signs and wonders of healing, such as this man, who had been an invalid for 38 years, experienced. What are the greater things that the Father will show? They are introduced in the next two verses.

Verse 21

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

Jesus said that he has power over death and the power to give life. To the Jews this was the prerogative of God alone. So Jesus was equating himself with God the Father in this. We keep seeing Jesus saying that he can do what only God can do. In verses 8 and 14 Jesus was exercising his authority over life (“pick up your mat and walk” parallels with the resurrection to life) and judgment. Here in verses 21 and 22 Jesus is showing that the greater matters of life and death over which he is Lord result from his unique relationship with the Father. There is a clear claim to his equality with the Father (5:23).

Verse 22

Moreover, the Father judges no-one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son,

The Father never acts alone in pronouncing judgment but has committed all judgment to his Son. “To judge” is an expression used in the Old Testament to include rule and government. The Father has given to the Son the offices of King and Judge. The whole administration of the divine government of this world is put into the hands of the Son, Jesus Christ. There is a reference here to Daniel 7:13-14. Judgment is the work of God (Gen. 18:25 - “the Judge of all the Earth”). God has trusted the implementation of this to his Son. He is not a weak and insignificant Saviour, but the Judge of all the world. He is the Saviour of the world and that goes hand in hand with judgment. Psalm 2:2 declares that YHWH and his Anointed One (Messiah) are associated in judgment.

Verse 23

that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He

who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him.

There is no inferiority between the Son and the Father. As they are equal in essence (5:17-18) and in works (5:18-19) so they are equal in honour. The Son is to be worshipped equally with the Father. Those who worship the Father alone are in danger of becoming idolatrous if they ignore the Son and the Spirit (Eph. 2:18). There can be no true knowledge of God except through equally worshipping the Son.

Verse 24

“I tell you the truth,

This translation undervalues the force of these words. What Jesus is about to say is the ultimate truth. He is saying, “Pay attention to this! What I am about to say is very important. It is a matter of life and death.” The two greater works of raising the dead and pronouncing judgment, assigned to the Son, are developed further in verses 24 to 30.

whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me

Spiritual change does not occur apart from the Word, the message that Jesus brought. The mere hearing of this message is not enough; it has to be believed. The message to be believed is that God the Father sent Jesus his Son to this earth. What will be the outcome for those who hear and believe?

has eternal life and will not be condemned;

The result of hearing and believing Jesus’ message is eternal life, which is expressed in the present tense and applies now and verses 28-29 talk about the future resurrection. Both tenses are themes in John’s Gospel record. John 6 has much to say on this and John 10:10 tells us that this is to be life in the greatest dimension: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

he has crossed over from death to life.

The description of a sinner is that he is by nature dead. When the great change takes place he passes out of death into life, a spiritual resurrection.

Verse 25

I tell you the truth,

Do not switch off; continue to pay attention; this is vital for you to

know. You Jews wanted proof of divine power and authority that the Son of God would give; now you will find out.

a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

One of the greater works – raising from death to life – is being done by Jesus at present in the spiritual sphere. This was a phase in the history of the world that was always promised (a theme running through the Old Testament) and now it had arrived and begun. The resurrection taking place now has nothing to do with the body; it concerns the soul. As soon as a person accepts the Word of Christ by faith he has everlasting life.

Verse 26

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.

The Father is self-sufficient, having within himself eternal life. The meaning of “granted the Son” is not to be taken as the giving of a gift, as if there is a point at which Jesus gained this eternal life that he had not had before. Rather it has to be understood in the context that the Father has appointed the second person in the Trinity, his Son, to be the giver of life to all mankind. Jesus could take on this responsibility because this life was inherent in himself.

Verse 27

And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

Jesus could give eternal life because that life was an intrinsic part of his nature. His authority to judge came from his humiliation as he allied himself with men’s infirmities. He left his position and the glory of heaven and limited himself to a human form, taking on our human nature and being born of a woman. He then suffered for man’s sake as the Son of Man. Jesus then is the most qualified within the Trinity to be the Judge because as a man he is acquainted with human thoughts, words and actions. He did not take this office upon himself but was appointed by God his Father. God has trusted the implementation of this to his Son, who is not a weak and insignificant Saviour, but the Judge of all the world. We see here the identity of the Son of Man as the Son of God.

Verse 28

Do not be amazed at this,

These words suggest that the Jews found Jesus' claim as a life-giver and a Judge to be unacceptable. Jesus was saying that they should stop being surprised about these things for now he was going to speak to them about the future, particularly the last day.

for a time is coming

The work of Christ in quickening the dead takes place in two phases. In the spiritual realm it is taking place at the present time when a person passes from death to life upon believing in Christ (v.24). Christ has still to accomplish the task of raising the dead in the physical realm, which is in the future, a time that is coming. This will be when Christ returns and that will also mark the last day of this present world. In the original Greek the phrase used is "an hour is coming".

when all who are in their graves will hear his voice

Christ's return on the last day will be to judge, by the authority given to him by the Father. The nature of this judgment will be related to our response to Christ. At his call all will hear his voice. He will summon everyone from their graves. This includes those who have not been buried but cremated, or their bodies lost in some catastrophe; they will hear his voice in just the same way.

Verse 29

and come out—

As Lord of life he will call for the final resurrection — but to what? There are three resurrections: that of the Lord (5:26); of believers (see also 1 Thess. 4:13-18) and of unredeemed sinners. This verse deals with the last two.

those who have done good will rise to live,

The nature of the "good works" is defined in verse 24 and again in 6:29 ("The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."). Christ by his death has taken the condemnation of those who will believe. As the Spirit stirs the human heart so the person believes in Christ. The believer will rise to glory and happiness, to rule with Christ for ever.

and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

The Lord will place those who opposed him into a clear

position of opposing God (5:23). Such will be condemned. The distinction between doing good and evil is that of obeying God and believing in Jesus Christ. The “doing good” arises out of believing in Jesus as God’s Son. By contrast “doing evil” is not believing in Christ. The description of evil does not relate to some terrible crime that has been committed or a terrible way of life. A person may, in society’s eyes, lead an upright and honourable life, but in the physical resurrection they will be classified as having done evil if they have not believed in Christ. There will be two types of physical resurrection, one to life and the other to be condemned.

Verse 30

By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

The Lord restates what he said to the Jews in verse 19, making it clear that he does not act independently of the Father. Now he uses the personal pronoun “I” and not “the Son”. Jesus was saying that the Jews had no right to judge and condemn him for healing the man at the pool on the Sabbath. Jesus was not acting alone, he acts in accordance with the one who sent him. His purpose is to serve the Father.

Verse 31

“If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid.

Jesus was addressing Jewish religious leaders who were against him and out to destroy him (v.18). They were hostile to the claims they had just heard from Jesus about himself. The way to understand Jesus’ words is in the context of Jesus’ testimony not being accepted by the hearers. They would raise the objection that because Jesus was testifying about himself they could not treat his testimony as being true as under Jewish law two witnesses were required.

Verse 32

There is another who testifies in my favour,

Jesus continues by introducing another witness. The testimony he gave was honest and reliable and is supported by another witness.

and I know that his testimony about me is valid.

Who is this witness? As the Son of God Jesus knows that the

testimony of this witness is true. This witness knows all about Jesus and can verify all that he told the Jews is correct. Jesus did not disclose this witness and these religious leaders would have been wondering whom Jesus had in mind. From verses 36 and 37 we know that Jesus is referring to God his Father.

Verse 33

“You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth.

In the minds of the Jewish leaders was Jesus referring to John the Baptist? Picking up on such thoughts of his hearers Jesus reminded them that they had sent investigators to listen to John the Baptist. What they had heard John speak about Jesus was true.

Verse 34

Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved.

Note the purpose of human testimony. Man of himself is not reliable; only the Godhead can be trusted. Christ does not need “proofs”. His Father gives that and his works demonstrate it, but there is value in human testimony. The Jews were being reminded of what they heard from John the Baptist concerning Jesus. The people believed that John was a prophet sent from God (Matt. 21:25). They were inconsistent in accepting John’s testimony and not believing what Jesus said himself as the Messiah. If they were to follow through and accept John’s testimony then it would lead to their salvation because they would be trusting in Jesus as the Saviour.

Verse 35

John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

Our Lord gave testimony to John the Baptist. John was a lamp that attracted crowds of people like a lamp that attracts moths. The people enjoyed this light for a while, the suggestion being that John the Baptist’s ministry had finished because he was now in prison..

Verse 36

“I have testimony weightier than that of John.

In verse 32 Jesus said that someone else was testifying about him. The Jews thought Jesus was speaking about John the

Baptist, but Jesus now makes clear it was not he. The testimony is superior to John's.

For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.

Jesus was referring to his Father whose own testimony was by means of the works of Christ. The works are the miracles that Christ did, including the healing of the man at the pool. The Jews were willing to accept the testimony of John the Baptist that was without miracles, but the greater testimony of the Father through his Son, which included miraculous works, was ignored. The religious leaders tried to interpret the miracles as being of satanic power. It was just the opposite; they showed that God was involved and it was proof that Jesus had been sent by his Father. Jesus' works are the mark of the Father's confirmation.

Verse 37

And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me.

Though entering the world in the human way by being born as a baby of a woman, Jesus pre-existed that and was sent by his Father. Beforehand the Father had testified of his Son's coming. This testimony was made clear in the Old Testament Scriptures. This testimony from the past has continued and has validity for all time to come.

You have never heard his voice nor seen his form,

Though the Jewish religious leaders knew the Old Testament yet they failed to hear the voice of God within. The voice of God is Christ himself and these Jews failed to see in Jesus the voice and form of God. His critics did not hear that testimony.

Verse 38

nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent.

The attitude of the hostile Jews to the Scriptures is further developed. They possessed the Scriptures, read them and could recite from them, but they did not have them in their hearts. They looked upon the Scriptures as a rule book, failing to understand the grace and mercy of God. In their unbelief they were not able to see; a veil had covered their eyes. They did not have confidence in the one the Father had sent to be the Messiah.

Verse 39

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me,

The Scriptures do not bring life of themselves, but they point to Christ who is the life (14:6). Six times the apostle John claims that Christ is the one of whom the Old Testament speaks. Why then did they not find him? It was their arrogance. The problems were in their minds, wills and hearts. Like some theologians today they studied the Scriptures, but still did not have the eternal life of which they spoke. This attitude is very common today. So many people, especially some highly qualified academics, despise the Bible and consider their own words more authoritative.

Verse 40

yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

Despite the Scriptures being very clear they refused to accept the testimony of Christ. Their hearts had hardened and rejected the Son of God.

Verses 41 and 42

“I do not accept praise from men, ⁴² but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.

Christ did not receive praise from the people, but that was because they did not have the love of God in their hearts. This was a clear statement both of who he was and of their alienation from the God they professed to worship.

Verse 43

I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him.

Yet they would receive the message of others. How this has proved right in history since. Many people today happily follow teachings of false and bizarre leaders.

Verse 44

How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?

It is a mark of man that if he rejects God he will worship anything or anyone else. Many people reject Jesus as Lord, but worship Satan in various forms of the occult.

Verse 45

“But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set.

His listeners are condemned by the one they claim to follow, Moses. His writings that were regularly read in the synagogues were a constant witness of their unbelief. The Jews of Moses’ day were stiff-necked and he constantly had to battle with their disobedience and hardness of heart. The people had not changed from that day.

Verse 46

If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.

The Lord may have had in mind several possible references in the Pentateuch, Moses’ books (Gen. 49:10; Ex. 12:21; Lev. 16:5; Num. 24:17), but probably predominantly Deuteronomy 18:15 (“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.”) They prided themselves in the words of Moses and considered themselves his successors, but they did not really believe him in any way.

Verse 47

But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”

The Jews placed writings above the spoken word, so they claimed. If they refused to accept the written words of Moses how would they believe in the spoken words of Jesus? If they were really followers of Moses, as they claimed (9:29), then they would recognise that Jesus was the one about whom Moses testified. To doubt Moses was to shut their ears to Christ as well. Moses and Christ agreed.

PP Summary

John sets out the events of two miracles to demonstrate the lordship of Jesus Christ. These actions took place in two different places and at different times. Christ’s lordship is seen in a multitude of ways. He is Lord over man, healing the boy and then a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. In healing the boy Jesus demonstrated that he is Lord over distance; he did not even have to be there at the bedside. He is

Summary continued on page 111

Summary continued from page 110

Lord over sickness; he was master over it and there was no struggle between him and disease. He is Lord over the Sabbath, being equal with God the Creator who has to maintain the continued working of the earth. He is Lord over life, having the power over death and the power to give life. Lastly John shows that Jesus is Lord over judgment, the authority having been given to him by the Father. As a demonstration of his lordship the people affected believed and put their faith in Christ. To those who would not accept his lordship and divine nature Jesus called upon witnesses. Jesus was doing his Father's will and his Father would vindicate him. There was the testimony of John the Baptist and the investigators the Jews sent heard John pointing to Christ as the Messiah. The very miracles that Christ performed were a witness to verify who he was. The Scriptures point to Christ, the Old Testament being about his coming to be the rescuer. Finally there was the testimony of Moses that a prophet would be raised up from among them.

P A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: Jesus is equal with God the Father (John 5:1-30)

Subject:

Jesus' healing of the paralysed man on the Sabbath provokes a controversy which leads to Christ's declaring his equality with God the Father as Life-giver, Saviour and Judge.

Aim:

For Christians to see who Jesus Christ is: to marvel, to honour, to believe. For non-Christians to respond by faith leading to salvation.

Introduction

Jesus instructed the paralysed man to rise, take up his bed and walk. Immediately the man was made well, took up his bed and walked. John calls the seven miracles in his Gospel "signs". Signs point us somewhere. Signposts direct us when we are lost. John's signs point us to Jesus and the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets predicted a time when God would visit his people. By choosing to record this miracle John is saying, "The LORD has

arrived – in Jesus Christ!” But let’s not accept John’s word; Jesus says it himself. The Jewish leaders were angry that Jesus healed the man on the day of rest; they thought it was blasphemous. Jesus told them that God is Father to him in a way he is not to anyone else. Jesus claims equality with God the Father. The Jews believed that God had to work every Sabbath or else the universe would fall apart. Jesus referred to this and said that the Father and he have been working together. The Father and Jesus are equal in their divinity. This was no slip of the tongue of an excited young preacher. Did you notice three times Jesus says, “I tell you the truth”? Three times Jesus declared his equality with God the Father. Let us see how.

1. I am the Life-giver. Honour me (5:19-23)

The Jews reacted to Jesus because he claimed three things that only God can do – and claimed that they are his right and he has the power to do them. He is claiming the right to be the face of God to us. How do you react? For over 1000 years the Bible declared that raising the dead was the business of God alone. All God’s people agreed this was so. Jesus breaks this rule with his claims to be the giver of life. He takes to himself what was reserved for God alone: the Life-giver. He is equal with God the Father and can give life to whomever he chooses. Jesus has sovereign choice, just like God.

But Jesus is not identical to God the Father (v19-20). Jesus is equal with God in his divinity. But he willingly submits to his Father’s authority, as the perfect Son of God. Here is a great mystery. The Father chose to reveal himself through his Son. When we see the Son at work, we see the Father at work through his Son. But submission does not make Jesus inferior to God – because only God could do the works of God. It is not enough to say you believe in God. Only those who worship Christ actually worship the one true God.

2. I am the Saviour. Believe in me (5:24)

So Jesus gives life to whomever he chooses. But can we spot whom Jesus chooses? Yes. They are the people who hear and believe. To hear and believe is to receive and obey the Word of Christ as God’s Son. Before a person becomes a Christian they are spiritually dead. They hear the call of Jesus to repent, trust in him and live. But they have no power to obey – unless Christ in his mercy gives them power. Until you see your need of a Saviour you will only ever see Christ as a good person. But when you see your sin, your eternal hell, your helplessness, then you will call on him. He has not changed. You have.

Have you heard Christ calling you? Will you turn to him today? When a person trusts in Christ amazing things are promised:

- They have everlasting life immediately - at that point.
- They have escaped judgment - at that point.
- They are no longer dead but alive - at that point.

But it can only come if that person hears and obeys the words of Christ, the Son of God, sent by God, to be our Saviour.

3. I am the Judge. Recognise me (5:25-30)

If you want to raise a laugh or provoke an angry outburst, or just stop a conversation dead talk about the Day of Judgment. It is not a popular subject but Jesus would have us realise the truth – it is a real day. One day Jesus the Life-giver will give life to all who lie in the graves. What will happen then? We shall all be judged (5:28). Wait! Is Jesus saying that we shall be given life by our good deeds? Does not the Bible regularly say the opposite? What is going on? Turn back to John chapter 3:18-21. John is clear: only those who believe in Christ are saved. But John is also clear that those who are saved produce good deeds. Evil people are those who stay away from the light, who stay away from Jesus. Good people are those who once were evil but who came to the light, to Jesus to have their deeds clearly seen. And notice, when they are forgiven, they realise it was God who forgave them. It is God who made them good.

Here is the command, “Do not be amazed at this” (v 28). To marvel is to be so amazed or surprised that we do not really believe it. Many today are like this. But Jesus begs to differ. We must recognise him as the Judge. Don’t shrug Christ’s judgment off. Don’t secretly snigger at those poor Christians, deluded into waiting for the final day whilst they miss out on so much sinful pleasure today. Don’t be shocked at the idea of a God of love judging those who repeatedly hate him and his Son. Do not be amazed, says Christ; I am the Judge! Fear me! Receive me!

Conclusion

What man has the power to command and make a cripple walk? Jesus is a man, but he is more than just a man. Whose voice can raise a man who had been an invalid for 38 years? No mere human voice, but this is God speaking to us today. Today this voice speaks to us, Rise up! Honour me! Worship me! I am the Life-giver! Hear and obey me, I am the Saviour! Receive me, I am the Judge! “I am God,” says Christ, “Turn to me and be saved.”

This is an edited version of a sermon preached by Adam Laughton on 4th December 2005.



Over to you

What is the relevance of this passage to the Christian culture of your society? Are healing and miracles the things that dominate and people get excited about? How would you use this passage to deal with such problems?

We live in a world of many religions. What makes Christianity unique? How would this passage help the people in your congregation to see the Christian faith is distinctive and that it is not just another religion?

When you stand and look at your congregation before you there will be those who do either good or evil. Everyone will fall into one of these two categories. How will you discern which are which and how will you address the issue?

Study 8

Christ and his power

John 6

To satisfy

Introduction to the passage

We have already seen references in John's Gospel to Old Testament events. In chapter 6 we have a parallel to another, the wilderness experience, which followed the people's exodus from Egypt. There are several similarities between the miracle of John 6:1-15 and the wilderness situation under Moses. A particular mention is the gift of manna by God. The exodus was preceded by other signs to demonstrate God's power. The miraculous signs in our study passage precede Christ's resurrection and the resurrection of all who follow him. Who are his followers? The events of this chapter involve two miracles, which can be summed up as **Satisfaction** and **Security**. This is followed by Jesus teaching the disciples and then the people. Many who heard the teaching fell away and were clearly not his followers.

RP

This study covers the whole chapter, a long passage with much material. The temptation is to break the chapter down into a number of studies. Such an approach would lose the unity of what John is conveying about Jesus. Once the theme of the chapter is understood the teaching of it can be broken down into smaller sections provided the context of the whole is kept.

We have divided the chapter as follows:

1. The miracles
 - the first miracle (satisfaction) [vs. 2-15]
 - the second miracle (security) [vs. 16-25]
2. The teaching [vs. 26-40]
3. The reaction [vs. 40-70]

What these verses mean

Verse 1

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias),

Jesus was back in Galilee. He crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida. This is about 8 kilometres from Capernaum (mentioned in 6:16) and was the home of several of his disciples (Philip, Andrew and Peter).

1. The miracles

(a) The first miracle (Satisfaction)

Verse 2

and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.

The people, seeing that Jesus was crossing the lake, followed him by walking around the lake because they were impressed by the miracles Jesus had done in healing the sick.

Verse 3

Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.

As Jesus saw the crowds he moved up the mountainside with his disciples.

Verse 4

The Jewish Passover Feast was near.

John notes that the Passover Feast was approaching and that gives us a time reference. It is about one year before the final Passover before Christ's death. In view of that knowledge we are not surprised to see that the crucifixion takes a larger place in his teaching from now on.

Verse 5

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards him,

Being on a mountainside it was easy for Jesus to see a crowd approaching in the distance when he looked up.

he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

We are not told why Jesus singled out Philip from amongst the disciples when he asked a question.

Verse 6

He asked this only to test him,

How much had the disciples learnt in the two years they had been with the Lord? Jesus wished to give Philip an opportunity to reveal whether he was moved with sympathy for these people and whether he had understood the lesson from the various signs and miracles that Jesus was able and willing to supply every need.

for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

The purpose of the question was not to obtain information about where to buy bread or to show that Jesus was at a loss what to do. He himself knew what he was about to do.

Verse 7

Philip answered him, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

Philip acted like a mathematician. In effect he replied, “It is pointless, Lord, asking such a question – it is impossible to feed so many.” He calculated that eight months’ wages would not be enough to give them even a nibble. Moses asked a similar question in the wilderness (Num. 11:13). As Christ said to Philip a year later (14:9), they were slow to learn the spiritual truth about his lordship.

Verse 8

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up,

In contrast to Philip, the mathematician, we are introduced to Andrew, the finder. He found a young lad with his lunch. Andrew is often involved in introducing others to the Lord, such as his brother, Simon Peter (1:40-41). He was not a theologian, but he brought folk to the Lord (another valuable lesson for us).

Verse 9

“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

Andrew did not know how much the boy’s lunch would help the situation but this is a further introduction to our God. He uses humble resources. Think of Gideon’s army. Thousands volunteered, but God said that it was too big for his purposes and reduced it to a company of 300 men (Judges 7:8). Similarly

Moses was filled with doubts and God asked him what he had in his hand. The answer of a shepherd's staff was enough. How much God achieved through Moses using that staff. The meal consisted of five barley loaves and two small fish. The barley loaves were the food of the very poor. The fish were probably preserved rather than fresh.

Verse 10

Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place,

There was no rebuke for the disciples' lack of faith but a simple instruction for the people to sit down. At this time of the year there was plenty of grass covering the slopes.

and the men sat down,

Everything was done in an orderly fashion and no-one hesitated to obey the command.

about five thousand of them.

The first miracle in this chapter concerned the feeding of a "great crowd". The account is recorded in each of the Gospels (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17) and these tell us that this great crowd amounted to five thousand men with women and children in addition. So the total number was possibly three or four times as many. (The miracle is often mistakenly described as the "feeding of the five thousand".)

Verse 11

Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

Jesus took the food, gave thanks and distributed it. The thanks came first before the miracle. John does not go into the detail as do the other Gospel accounts because this was written many years afterwards and John assumed that people would have been familiar with that information. The point John makes is that the people received as much as they wanted.

Verse 12

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted."

The people were fed and satisfied. He then told the disciples to clear up the left-overs. Despite the infinite resources nothing was to be wasted.

Verse 13

So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

The remains were in excess of what the boy had given to the Lord. These speak not only of the truth of the miracle (it had really happened), but also its greatness. As the Psalmist puts it, the Lord fills our cup to overflowing (Ps. 23:5).

Verse 14

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."

We see the result of this miracle in its effect on the people. It reminded them of Moses who, by God's hand, fed their forefathers in the desert. Moses had promised that a greater prophet would come (Deut. 18:15-19). Jesus must be this Prophet, the people thought.

Verse 15

Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

The people's thoughts always returned to Moses (6:32), but they only ever thought of the temporal. Therefore they wanted a king rather than a prophet. The Lord withdrew himself, knowing their intentions. He had not come to be crowned a king of one particular nation. His kingdom is not of this world. Jesus withdrew himself from his disciples for at that time they also did not understand the true nature of the kingdom of God.

(b) The second miracle (Security)

Verses 16 and 17

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷ where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them.

In the meantime the disciples went down to the lake and set off for Capernaum. The Master sent the disciples away so that he could have time alone with his Father (see also Matt. 14:22-23). Even he needed that time away from the disciples and the crowds to be with the Father.

Verse 18

A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough.

The disciples were half way across the lake (about 5 kilometres) when a storm broke out.¹ This was clearly a terrifying experience and these experienced fishermen recognised the severity and knew what the possible consequences could be.

Verse 19

When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified.

After they had rowed for quite a distance to get to safety the Lord appeared, walking on the water. This also was terrifying as they did not recognise the figure and thought it might be a ghost (Matt. 14:26). Undoubtedly they would have been wishing that the Lord were with them. If only they had recognised him their feelings would have been different.

Verse 20

But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid."

The Lord spoke, identifying himself and told them not to be afraid. Though this form of words is again "I am", it is probably only meant to identify him to the disciples, but, to us, we see that they are full of hope and power. He can help and will do so. The disciples would again hear the call to be at peace and unafraid after his resurrection. Jesus brings peace to his trusting people.

P The lesson here is that the Lord is always there with his people, whatever the circumstance. This is true when his church thrives and also when it suffers. Remember Romans 8:28-29. Jesus Christ is at work through all the changing scenes of life, in trouble and in joy.

¹ Storms can be the result of judgment (as, for example, in the case of Jonah or for the world in the days of Noah) but they also come, as a phenomenon of nature as we have in this case, to those who obey. We know from Matthew's account (14:22) that the disciples were being obedient to the Lord who had sent them across the lake. The storm did not come then because the disciples had sinned. Let us remember that God is behind all things, including the weather.

Verse 21

Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

The result: The disciples were then willing to take Jesus into the boat. Jesus had revealed himself by his word and the storm ceased and they sailed and found safety in the harbour.

P Application

So it is with our salvation. As Christ reveals himself to us, we believe and know our sins are forgiven and we have peace with God. The storm had deflected the boat from its goal, but Jesus brought them home. Sometimes this happens in our Christian experience. Temptations, trials and other things can deflect us from the pathway to glory and blessing, but as Jesus speaks we find peace and, ultimately, our spiritual home.

Verse 22

The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realised that only one boat had been there and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone.

The people either returned the next day or had rested overnight on the other side of the lake from Capernaum. But in the morning they found that the Lord and his disciples had moved on.

Verse 23

Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks.

Some boats had arrived from Tiberias. The boat owners in Tiberias somehow found out that there were people who needed to get from Bethsaida to Capernaum and it was a business opportunity. It is interesting that John, when describing the people's location, refers not just to where the people had eaten but to the Lord's giving thanks. Moses commanded the people, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God" (Deut. 8:10). Is thanksgiving an important part of our meals?

Verse 24

Once the crowd realised that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

The people climbed into the transport that had come from Tiberias. The boats took them to Capernaum, the place where Jesus had established his Galilean headquarters and where boats could off-load their passengers in such numbers. Once they had arrived they went in search of Jesus.

Verse 25

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

The teaching associated with the first miracle follows when the disciples and the Lord reached the other side of the lake.

2. The teaching

Verse 26

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

The Lord’s insight is apparent again; they wanted another free meal. He challenges them to get the right view of life.

Verse 27

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

Jesus had seen to the people’s needs the previous day by feeding them. Christians follow that example and seek to provide for the physical needs of people when it is appropriate. However there is something more important that we must never lose sight of and that is food that brings *eternal* life. The Lord Jesus Christ is the one who gives this food and the Father has put his seal of approval on him. The seal was the mark that a person of authority would put on a document to show it had his approval. God placed his seal on the Son by his statements (1:32-34) and by validating his works.

Verse 28

Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

How do we view life? Is it a matter of getting on in this world with its material and political or academic success? Or is our concern getting right with God, knowing his will and doing it? Christ makes this clear in his reply. The people said that they wanted to do the works God requires. That sounds good. This though had been their history. When they were given the commandments, God said, “If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession.” And all the people answered together and said, “We will do everything that the LORD has said” (Ex. 19:5, 8). And almost immediately they failed.

Verse 29

Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

The Lord’s reply would have had a startling effect on his hearers. The Jewish emphasis was on the “works of the law” as a means of satisfying God. By contrast Christ pointed out that the “work of God” was to believe on him, the Christ. So often the question is, “What must I do to be saved?” For example, it was the question asked by the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16). Jesus in his reply was emphasising the change from law to grace. The key word is “believe” whereas man wants to “do”. This is what the people found so hard to understand. What a mercy it is, because if it were what a person had to “do” then we would despair of attaining God’s standard. In the end we would have a low concept of God’s standard. It is God who has brought about our salvation. We cannot work it out, and we cannot believe in our own strength. Even the faith to believe is implanted by God’s Spirit as Nicodemus was told (chapter 3).

Verse 30

So they asked him, “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?”

In response to Christ’s demanding faith in himself as the one sent by the Father, the Jews asked to see his credentials. There is a parallel here with chapter 4, where the woman was pointed to the true water. They had seen the miracle of feeding so many with just a few loaves that it reminded them of Moses and the wilderness manna. It was a miracle that should have pointed to

God the Creator. Instead they wanted to be convinced by another miracle. In Judaism the best sign was one from heaven. What did they want above what they had seen? God had spoken from heaven (1:32); he had demonstrated his power over nature and evil; he had spoken with authority. We see the same attitude today. “If God would do this for me, I would believe.” Or, “If Christ would show himself to me, I would believe him.” “I can’t believe God loves me,” another person would say. What else can he do? We only have to look to incidents like this one and see that people are not persuaded by these sorts of events. In fact Jesus said that those who have not seen but have believed are the ones who are blessed (John 20:29).

Verse 31

Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

The people told Jesus what they had in mind. Moses had given their forefathers manna. They even quoted Scripture (Ex. 16:4). If Jesus is greater than Moses let him perform a sign that is greater than the one which Moses did when he gave them bread from heaven. Jesus had multiplied the bread from something; Moses gave bread straight from heaven.

Verse 32

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.”

Jesus points away from history to eternity: to God himself. Moses had merely given directions to the people in the way they had to collect the manna. It was God the Father in heaven who was the true giver.

Verse 33

For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

What is that bread? It is the “true bread”. The Father is giving the real bread from heaven. The real bread is Jesus Christ, for it is he who gives his life for the world.

Verse 34

“Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.”

They responded like the woman at the well (4:15). Their request was for Jesus to give them this bread and never to fail to

supply them with this bread. They wanted bread that would satisfy them always; it would last for ever. They were blind to the spiritual meaning of the bread.

Verse 35

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

Jesus did give them a sign. It was not the sign they expected; it was himself - he was the bread of life. The first words, “**I am**”, had a special significance which the people were going to come to recognise. Grammatically it is a normal construction, but it has an abnormal meaning. The context makes it plain that Jesus is claiming to be God. This term occurs frequently in John’s Gospel. It is a part of John’s argument. A series of these “**I am**” statements will follow and we list them here.

I am ...

the bread of life	6:35
the light of the world	8:12
the door (or gate)	10:7
the good shepherd	10:11
the resurrection and the life	11:25
the way and the truth and the life	14:6
the true vine	15:1

This expression links back to Exodus 3:14, where the divine name is given, “**I AM that I AM**” and is also expressed in a shortened form, “**I AM**”. It is reflected in Revelation 1:8 (“He who is and was and is to come.”). We will see other important instances of the use of this divine name.

Bread was the staple diet for the poor. Rome would feed its captured people with bread and entertainment to keep them quiet, but of course it did not satisfy. Like the woman at Sychar they had to come again to draw. Even in modern times governments have made bread a priority to control the people they have oppressed. Christ would feed them the living bread. This verse makes it clear that by coming to Jesus and believing in him, they would be feeding on him, the bread of life.

Verse 36

But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.

The basis of our security is God himself. He saves us and secures us. That is the thread of these verses. The sovereignty of God is emphasised in these verses (6:36-40) by three references to the “will of God”. They had seen Jesus, but only as a man. Maybe they thought of him as a great man, a rabbi (Jewish teacher) but not as the Son of God. Remember that this is the object of this Gospel (20:31). It is through faith (believing) that a person gains everlasting life. They had not yet come to this point.

Verse 37

All that the Father gives me will come to me,

This expression refers to the elect² as a collective body. God the Father has given his chosen people to Christ and they will come to him.

and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

In the original text the wording is very emphatic. Christ is saying, “Whoever comes to me I will never – no, never – drive away.” This is a forceful way of saying the positive: “I will certainly welcome them.” God’s plan is not frustrated by their lack of faith; God’s will shall be done. They will come and he will preserve them. The Father promised this before the creation (2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2). Those the Father gives to the Son, the Son welcomes.

Verse 38

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

Indeed the Lord Jesus himself has come to do the Father’s will and not his own.

Verse 39

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

It is God’s will that no-one whom he has given to the Son shall be lost and that the Son will raise them up at the last day.

² The elect are those whom God chose from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).

Verse 40

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

The Father's will shall be done as they look to the Son who will give them eternal life and raise them up. Remember 3:14-15 concerning the look that saved their forefathers.

3. The reaction

At first people came seeking (6:25), but as Jesus taught it became apparent they were looking for the wrong thing. The main reaction to the teaching was grumbling (6:41), argument (6:52) and being offended (6:61). The action so far has been around the Sea of Galilee (6:1, 16, 25) but in 6:59 John states that Jesus taught these things in the synagogue in Capernaum. It is reasonable to assume that the break between the activities in and around the lake and the synagogue takes place at verse 41.

Verse 41

At this time the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

The Jews did not like their carefully constructed argument shattered by Jesus pointing to himself as the bread from heaven.

Verse 42

They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

They were confused and fixed their thoughts on his earthly parentage instead of his heavenly origin. Their knowledge of the family background suggests that they were probably the religious leaders of the local synagogue in Capernaum. Remember Nicodemus (3:4) and the woman at Sychar (4:15) who had the same problem.

Verse 43

"Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered.

The Lord told them to stop grumbling and turned the situation to their need.

Verse 44

“No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

The key to this is in the **sovereignty of God**. Without the action of God we will not come because we are unable due to our sinful nature, for which we are responsible. We need God’s grace. There is nothing in us that puts us in a position to be favoured by God. It is entirely of his kindness that any of us is drawn to Christ. God does not make us Christian against our will. He is not like a Roman emperor who imposes his imperial will over us regardless of what we want. He gives us a new heart and spirit, so we long for him to rule over us. He draws us; we are attracted to him by his Spirit (John 3).

Verse 45

It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’

Jesus then reminds them of the prevalent teaching of the prophets in the Old Testament, such as the words of Isaiah (Is. 54:13), that in the Messianic age (New Testament) all the true citizens of Israel (the church) will be taught by God.

Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.

The Bible, in emphasising the sovereignty of God in salvation, also stresses human responsibility. God through his Spirit draws people and no-one can come unless God acts. As people learn of God and his ways they will embrace Christ by a true and living faith. The Father and Son work in perfect harmony. A person listening and learning will never be able to grasp the fullness of God’s truth, for that complete knowledge belongs to the Son. Jesus identifies himself as the Word of God (compare with 1:1).

Verse 46

No-one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father.

Christ’s total understanding of God’s ways is explained further. No-one can come to a full knowledge and understanding of God’s ways unless they have seen God. Jesus, because he came from heaven where he was in communion with his Father, is the truth. Jesus says that he has come from the Father and so reveals him.

Verses 47 and 48

I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life.

Again Jesus emphasises the important truth that those who believe him have everlasting life. The reason why a person can have everlasting life is because Jesus is the bread of life.

Verse 49

Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died.

Everlasting life in Jesus (bread of life) is in contrast to the Jews' ancestors who ate the manna sent from God in the Sinai desert but died in the wilderness.

Verse 50

But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.

How exactly do they receive everlasting life? It is by partaking of him, the "bread of life". Jesus referred to himself (could he have pointed to himself when he said, "Here is the bread"?) as the one who is able to sustain life because being the living bread he has within himself the source of life. Keeping to the picture of bread, Jesus said that if anyone eats this bread they would not die.

Verse 51

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

The key to interpreting the meaning "the eating of this bread" is in verses 47, "He who believes in me has eternal life." The emphasis on eating the bread rather than tasting is to show that this belief in Christ has to be absorbing and dominating. It is not a whim for a short while.

This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

A new thought is added. Up to this point Jesus has been stressing that it is he who is the true bread and not the manna. Now Jesus defines the term bread, showing in which sense he is the bread by describing it as his flesh.

Verse 52

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

The people were confused as to how this bread of life could be

eaten if it were Jesus' "flesh". They were displaying their increasing ignorance and were not willing to enquire of Jesus further. They tried to interpret Jesus' words literally. As they tried to explain what Jesus had been saying they got themselves into a heated argument displaying their increasing ignorance and lack of willingness to enquire of him further.

Verse 53

Jesus said to them, "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.

Jesus repeated again that their only hope of eternal life was through him. If they were not willing to partake in his flesh and blood, there was no other way to life. Jesus did not tone down his earlier statements; rather he strengthened his teaching.

Verse 54

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Jesus now links the eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood with the raising up at the last day. This is a reference to verse 40 that anyone who looks at Jesus and believes in him shall have eternal life. It is the imagery of Moses lifting the serpent's head in the desert and of anyone who looked being healed of the snake bites.

Verse 55

For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.

In verse 35 Jesus said that it is coming to him that satisfies the hungry and thirsty. We partake of his flesh by placing our faith in him and so receiving eternal life. The Lord illustrated the coming and believing by speaking of eating and drinking (6:35). We receive him within, just as we receive food and drink.

Verse 56

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

Jesus is speaking of the cross. It was there that he became a sacrifice with his broken body and shed blood. Whoever eats of this spiritual food will remain in the closest and most vital union with Jesus Christ.³

³ Some have thought this refers to the "Lord's Table" where Jesus says, "This is My body" as he gives them the bread. But this is not the connection. The communion service is a service of remembrance (footnote continues on page 131)

Verse 57

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

The union between Christ and the true believer is a far greater and intimate union than that of our body and food. This is illustrated by a far higher and mysterious union which exists between God the Father and God the Son. The union between Christ and the true Christian is as real and as true and close and inseparable as the union between God the Father and God the Son.⁴

Verse 58

This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live for ever.”

Jesus sums up all that he has been saying. The Jews had begun by referring to their forefathers eating manna in the desert (6:31). Jesus affirms that he himself was the true bread which had come down from heaven. Their forefathers had died in the wilderness for their souls did not receive any benefit from the manna. By contrast anyone who eats of the bread Jesus had come down to give should live for ever; their souls would never die.

Verse 59

He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

John tells us that, whereas his miracle of feeding the crowd had been in the open air by the lake (6:1), this teaching had taken place in the synagogue at Capernaum.

Verse 60

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

Then there were others who were offended. The disciples mentioned here need to be distinguished from the “Twelve” (6:67). Because someone goes to church, reads the Bible and so

(Footnote 3 continued from page 130)

by those who *have* eternal life. The Lord’s Supper is for the saved, not in order to be saved. In fact, there is no presentation of the Lord’s Supper in John. The term “eating his flesh” points on to the cross (as does the rest of the Gospel). The Last Supper points back to the cross. The tense of the Greek verb here indicates a once and for all action, not something to be repeated. The communion service is repeated frequently; the cross was the once and for all event.

⁴ J. C. Ryle.

on, it does not mean that they are truly Christian. It is those who have come to the cross. How can we distinguish between them? The Lord challenges them further. These followers, of which there could have been many, had not merely found it difficult to understand but found the teaching hard to accept.

Verse 61

Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this,

Jesus' divine knowledge of what was taking place in the hearts of the people is demonstrated again (see 2:25). Not only was Jesus aware of their murmuring against his teaching but knew that the cause was their rebellious hearts. This is the context in which Jesus asks his question.

Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"

It was not the hardness of the sermon but the hardness of their hearts that was the problem. They were not willing to accept the evidence of the witnesses regarding Jesus (5:30-47). They were displeased with the teaching, especially when Jesus pointed out that it was not the manna they heard about but he himself who was the true bread that had come down from heaven. They interpreted literally what Jesus said about eating his flesh and drinking his blood for everlasting life. They failed to grasp the deeper meaning that his body was being represented as an instrument of the soul.⁵ The reference to his blood was his voluntary service to shed his blood as a sacrifice for man's sin. Therefore Jesus asked them if his teaching offended them. Other translations use the word "ensnare", picking up the meaning that Jesus' teaching was like a bait stick in a trap that caught the spiritually unaware listener.

Verse 62

What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!

Many of the followers would have known of Jesus' earthly parents. Not only was Jesus claiming to be the bread of life but that he had come down from heaven. How could this be? To answer this Jesus posed this suggestion: will not the ascension of Jesus to heaven prove that he had really come down from heaven?

⁵ William Hendriksen.

Verse 63

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

Jesus' flesh could do nothing for the people. He was not asking the people to literally eat his flesh or drink his blood. The Spirit gives life. In other words it is his Spirit, in the giving of his body to be broken and his blood to be shed, who confers everlasting life. This echoes what Jesus said to Nicodemus (3:8). He states his relationship with the Holy Spirit as he had previously done about his relationship with the Father (6:40).

Verse 64

Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.

But Jesus knew right from the beginning that some did not and would not believe, even though he spoke the words of God. This unbelief, while not excused, was nevertheless expected. Faith is a gift of God and it is not given to all men. The last clause is further explained in 6:70.

Verse 65

He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no-one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.”

He repeats what he had said in 6:37, 44 that they can only come to him as the Father enables them. We do not naturally respond.

Verse 66

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

As a result of Jesus' teaching about the bread of life more turned their backs on him. They proved by this action that they were not fit for the kingdom of God. What a blow, because it was those who had begun to follow Jesus who were turning away, not the one-off listener.

Verse 67

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

The desertion of so many was used by Jesus for his innermost circle of disciples to test themselves and to confess their faith. What conscious choice would they make after listening to Jesus referring to himself as the bread of life?

Verse 68

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go?”

Peter stated plainly where true security is to be found. He uses the plural showing that he was the spokesman for all (except Judas). It is within the make-up of the human being that he or she must go to someone. Peter declares that there is no-one else to go to who could satisfy the yearning of the heart.

You have the words of eternal life.

Peter refers to what Jesus himself said (6:63) for he knows that Jesus does not say things that are meaningless. He knows that all Jesus’ statements are important, full of spirit and life that brings life.

Verse 69

We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Here is another witness statement. Peter declares the Lord to be “the Holy One of God”. The term “Holy One” is used in the Old Testament of God Himself. Peter has been given insight by the Holy Spirit as to the Lord’s true nature. Peter is confessing that the group have begun to believe and are now convinced of who Jesus is. The people who left claimed to want to do the work that pleased God. That, Christ said, was to believe in him (6:29). Peter was conforming to Christ’s instructions and to John’s stated intention (20:31).

Verse 70

Then Jesus replied, “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!”

Jesus knows that this confession did not represent the inner convictions of every one of the group. He declares that there was a traitor even among the Twelve. He was the instrument of the devil, a slanderer, a false accuser. All who could not accept the teaching of Jesus left, but this one remained as if he were in full agreement.

Verse 71

(He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

John adds a footnote to say who it was to be, though the disciples did not know that until the betrayal took place. The naming of Judas as the son of Simon Iscariot was to distinguish him from another Judas who was one of the Twelve.

P Summary

The Lord Jesus was back in Galilee, about one year before the final Passover before his death. In view of this knowledge there was an increasing highlighting of the crucifixion in Jesus' teaching. In chapter 6 John sets out what is crucial and at the very heart of how everlasting life comes about. There are two miracles, the fourth and fifth of seven signs, which John uses to point to Jesus' power to change lives. In the first miracle Jesus fed a large crowd from practically nothing and satisfied the physical hunger of the people. In the second Jesus brought security to his disciples when they were struggling in a boat on the Sea of Galilee in the middle of a storm. Satisfying physical hunger is temporary and Jesus accused the people of following him because they wanted more temporary food. In his teaching following the miracles Jesus, linking with the Old Testament, pointed the people to bread that would satisfy for ever. The teaching angered the people and many turned away from him. With unbelieving hearts they could not grasp that it was through an intimate union with Christ that eternal life comes. The picture language of eating his flesh and drinking his blood that Jesus used to explain his teaching was repugnant to the spiritually dead. When Jesus challenged the twelve disciples about their loyalties, Peter responded clearly and on behalf of the group. Jesus has the words of eternal life - where else could they go? They believed that Jesus, as the bread of life, could satisfy the desire for everlasting life in the secure knowledge that he had power over all the elements of this world. There was one among the Twelve who did not believe the signs or the teaching and would betray his master.

P A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme – Feeding of the thousands

This suggested sermon gives three points which can be used to develop a message. It would need an introduction and summary relevant to the situation and occasion of the sermon being preached.

(a) A 'too small' view of God. (6:1-13)

There were probably about 20,000 people there; "We cannot possibly feed them," said Philip. The Old Testament miracles tell

us what to expect - for example, with the gift of manna in the wilderness. Also, as Jesus was the Creator who made everything out of nothing, a lad's lunch was a great start to feed this multitude.

Can God use someone like me? He used this lad. God has used many in the Bible record and many in history who have had "little". He has used a staff; he has used fishermen with a pen to write the Scriptures. What have you got? Give it to God.

Can God do it? Does a task seem impossible? This meal seemed that way. God can do the impossible (Matt. 19:26). The question is whether it is his will. We see that the Lord would not repeat this miracle on the next day (6:22-27). Avoid selfish desires - seek God's will.

(b) A wrong view of God (6:14-26)

Their only concern was physical food. Do we think that God is only here to provide us with our daily bread? Scripture says that we do not live by bread alone (Deut. 8:3). There is a danger of thinking only of our material needs, which, after all, are only temporal. Such people think that this life is all that there is - but consider eternity. This view sees God as only for our benefit. The ultimate result is that God is squeezed out of our lives because the world demands our all.

(c) A true view of God (6:28-59)

The focus is on Jesus Christ who said, "I am the Bread of Life." The key thought here is that Jesus does not say, "I will give you that bread" but that he is that bread! This bread gives us eternal life: this is a changed perspective from that which considers this life as all there is. He promises that he will never let us go (6:37-39). He gives us life by dying; on the cross he gave his flesh for the life of the world (6:51). We believe that action and so partake of his flesh. In him we have life.

Focus point

Notes on places mentioned in the study passage

Bethsaida.

The prefix "Beth" in many names means "house". Beth-saida means "house of fishing" which gives us a clue to its location. It is north of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeological remains suggest that it was a large town bordering on the lake.

Tiberias

This was a town built on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee by Herod Antipas around 10 years before the incident mentioned in

6:23. It was named after the Roman emperor, Tiberius. The town was built on a former graveyard and so was considered unclean by the Jews. Consequently it was a largely Gentile town.

Capernaum

This was a town located on the north-west shore of Galilee, close to the Jordan river. Today it is an archaeological site full of interest to the Christian visitor. There is a substantial synagogue ruin there and there are even some remains of the synagogue visited by our Lord and his disciples. It is here that Jesus preached his sermon on the bread of life. There is also a building that is reputed to be Peter's home. As one looks around the ruins of this town, one is reminded of the Lord's prophecy concerning the town (Luke 10:15).



Over to you

We noticed how God uses small things, whatever we have, to do his work. Can you think of other examples in Scripture, perhaps in history and in your own life in which this is true?

The people recognised that the Lord was a Prophet, but they wanted a King (6:14-15). What is the difference in function of these two God-given ministries? How do the people you minister to look upon Jesus and how can you help them in their understanding?

The Lord describes himself as the bread of life. Why did he choose bread as the specific description of himself? How would you explain this to a congregation?

Study 9



Christ and his power

John 7

To control

Introduction to the passage

The events of this chapter take place six months after the events of chapter 6 and six months before the crucifixion. The Lord is still in the Galilee region, but about to make his final, climactic visit to Jerusalem. It was the time of the **Feast of Tabernacles**. The tabernacles (booths) were dwellings the children of Israel constructed when they travelled through the wilderness following their “exodus” from Egypt. This feast was a celebration of God’s goodness to them at that time. It was also appropriate at this crucial time in the Lord’s ministry as he prepared for his own exodus and the spiritual deliverance of his people. The use of the booths reminds us of John’s earlier comment (1:14) speaking of our Lord as *dwelling* (camping) among us. In keeping with John’s theme, the key question is “Where is that man?” (7:11). Throughout the chapter this question becomes “Who is this man?” (7:26). There are several interlinked themes in this passage: the divine timetable, Christ as the fulfilment of the Old Testament teaching and public confusion about Jesus.

What these verses mean

We have already noticed the use of the term “the time” (2:4; 5:25), but the references to it now begin to reach their climax. The point of these opening verses is to remind us that God was in charge, not the family, not the followers and not the Jewish leaders.

1. The Jewish leaders’ intentions and the divine timetable

This is the first theme of the chapter

Verse 1

After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. The Jewish leaders sought to take Jesus’ life. As a direct

consequence Jesus stayed in Galilee to avoid confrontation. In due course he would go deliberately to the cross, but not now. The Jewish leaders would have to wait for God's time. For the world (as illustrated by his half-brothers, 7:3), "any time is right". It was not so for Jesus; it had to be God's time. His times are in the Father's hands (5:19). So it must be for the Christian also; we follow God's timetable (Ps. 31:15). We plan "if it is God's will" (James 4:13-15).

Verse 2

But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near,

This feast was held at the time of the harvest of crops, including grapes and olives (Lev. 23:34, 39). It was to remind the Jews of God's care for them before their entry into the promised land of Canaan. The celebration lasted seven days and occurred during September or October. They would construct tabernacles, which were temporary booths made of tree branches. On the last day of the feast the priests encircled the altar in the temple seven times chanting Psalm 118:25 ("O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success"). The *sophar* (a ram's horn) would be blown and the men would shake a spray of willow and birch twigs and citrus fruit, crying, "Give thanks to the LORD." It was nearly the time for celebrating this feast, which would take place in Jerusalem.

Verse 3

Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do."

Jesus' brothers were a sceptical bunch who did not believe,¹ though they probably revelled in the fame that came to the family. This is expressed by the Psalmist (69:8, "I am a stranger to my brothers; an alien to my mother's own sons"). If we come to faith in Christ in a non-Christian family we must not expect our family to believe us (though we will long for them to do so). But the Lord understands, as he experienced this himself. Jesus was being mocked because he wanted to restrict himself to

¹ The brothers referred to are the younger children of Mary and Joseph, born of natural descent. At this time they did not believe his claims (7:5), though later on they did (Acts 1:14) and one of them, James, became a church leader (Acts 12:17; Gal. 2:9) and the writer of the letter bearing his name (James 1:1). Their arguments at this time (7:3-4) were very humanly orientated. In contrast, our Lord seeks only the Father's glory (7:18).

Judea. Their argument was that it would encourage his followers in Jerusalem, the place where it was supposed the earthly seat of rule and power was located that Jesus had come to occupy.

Verse 4

No-one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.

The hearts and motives of his family are exposed - they wanted Jesus to be a celebrity. They recognised in Jesus a power that could be a great crowd-puller. Why was he wasting his talent with such a small group of people when it could be seen by so many?

Verse 5

For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

Their thinking, reasoning and motivation demonstrated that at this time they had no idea that God was working amongst them through their half-brother. Their relationship with Jesus was carnal, not through being born again, believing and trusting him as the Messiah.

Verse 6

Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right.

His reply to them was like that to his mother on a previous occasion (2:4), but very different in tone. They were free to go to the feast at any time. There was nothing to detain them in Galilee or cause them to be in a hurry to get to Jerusalem. For Jesus, however, time was precious for he was on his Father's business.

Verse 7

The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil.

We see the use of another word which is a distinctive of John, "world". In his Gospel (and letters) the term refers to the unbelieving world in rebellion against God. Any who are not Christ's are a part of that order and their refusal to believe leaves them in that group of unbelievers and haters of God.

Verse 8

You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come.

He told them to go on to Jerusalem, but it was not the right time for him yet. Jesus was not saying that he would not go, but that it was not the best time for him to go.

Verse 9

Having said this, he stayed in Galilee.

Jesus still had work to do in Galilee so he stayed on.²

Verse 10

However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret.

Jesus then made the journey to Jerusalem separately from his brothers. He went in secret. If he had gone with his brothers they would have made a loud noise about it, which would have contradicted Isaiah 42:2 (“He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets”).

Verse 11

Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking, “Where is that man?”

The Jews were puzzled because they had expected his arrival to be earlier in the festival. By asking where Jesus was they showed that they knew of him, as he had been to the festival before when he performed miracles.

Verse 12

Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, “He is a good man.” Others replied, “No, he deceives the people.”

They were divided: was he “good” or was he “a deceiver”? This is a serious charge under Jewish law (Deut. 13:1-11). There were many false prophets at the time.

Verse 13

But no-one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews.

Those Jews that thought well of Christ were afraid to speak out

² A harmony of the Gospels shows that the sending out of the seventy disciples recorded in Luke 10:1 was one of the tasks Jesus performed between his speaking with his brothers and setting off to Jerusalem. The ministry of the seventy had significant consequences.

because of the tyranny which the priests and scribes exercised over the people. Does fear hold us back from taking a stand? It seems unjust that they were afraid to defend him, but it is also eternally fatal. Many will spend eternity saying, "I wish I had believed."

2. Christ and the Old Testament

This is the second theme of this chapter.

Verse 14

Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach.

Part way through the feast Jesus arrived at the temple in Jerusalem and started to teach the people. Scripture does not make clear whether he came to the city at the beginning of the festival and lay low until the fourth or fifth day, or whether he arrived and went to the temple straight away. What is important to note is that Jesus did what the religious leaders should have been doing. When the Jews returned from exile there was a spiritual renewal of the people and when Ezra read the law to the people it was realised how much of the scriptural instructions had been neglected. These things happened at the time of the season when the Feast of Tabernacles should have been held. The feast was reinstated and observed, during which the book of the law of God was read daily (Neh. 8:18). By teaching in the temple courts Jesus was doing the same as Ezra and the priests did.

Verse 15

The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?"

The Jewish authorities were amazed that such an uneducated man was so learned. But they did not really want to know the source of his knowledge. Where did he get that knowledge from?

Verse 16

Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.

Jesus explained the source of his authority and knowledge. Jesus himself brought the teaching straight from God, who had sent him to earth. By being brought up as a carpenter's son and not being trained in some high religious institution, he could

show that the gospel originated from heaven and was not manufactured on earth by human wisdom. The prophets frequently introduced their messages with “This is what the LORD says” to demonstrate their authority. Similarly, Peter and John indicated their authority (Acts 4:13). The authority of preachers comes from God, not their “clever” ideas. Preaching should not be prefaced with “I think,” but with “This is what God says in his Word.”

Verse 17

If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

Being in the midst of those who were sceptical and wanted to get rid of him, Jesus set out the manner in which a person is able to discover the source of his teaching. Sound judgment flows from fear and reverence for God. It is by obeying God (doing his will) that a person’s heart is inclined to receive what is revealed as being God’s will.

Verse 18

He who speaks on his own does so to gain honour for himself, but he who works for the honour of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.

The doctrine of man’s being blinded to the truth of God because he is not governed by the fear of God is developed further. Everything that displays the glory of God is holy and divine. Everything that contributes to the ambition of men obscures the glory of God.³ Jesus declared that his purpose is to glorify the Father and thereby confirms his truthfulness.

Verse 19

Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?”

We see a continual conflict between the people and Jesus, because they failed to understand God’s plan. We noted in chapter 5 the conflict over the Sabbath laws. Now he asked about the law given by Moses. Jesus added that the people did not keep it. But Jesus brought the teaching of God in an even more personal way than did Moses. Jesus came to fulfil that which the law and the prophets had spoken about. If they had believed in what Moses had given them they would not be

³ J. Calvin.

seeking to kill him. We are seeing how fundamental those Old Testament writings are to the Gospel.⁴

Verse 20

“You are demon-possessed,” the crowd answered.

They accused Jesus of demonic powers. In 10:20 they again say he is demon-possessed and add that he was raving mad. Being mad is probably the sense of what is being said here. “The devil is in you” was a term of reproach when what was being said was interpreted as not being true.

“Who is trying to kill you?”

It was likely that the people whom Jesus was addressing were not aware of their rulers’ threat to kill Jesus (5:10).

(a) Christ, the fulfilment of the law

Verse 21

Jesus said to them, “I did one miracle, and you are all astonished.

The Sabbath issue arises again. The leaders were still upset by the events of chapter 5, which happened a year earlier. So the Lord drew attention to their willingness to break the law.

Verse 22

Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath.

Moses had given them the law of circumcision although it did not originate from him. It was given to their patriarchal father Abraham (Gen. 17:10), long before Moses’ time. By their own arguments, they broke the law in order to circumcise, if it should prove necessary. They were not actually breaking the law, they were obeying it.

Verse 23

Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath?

⁴ In his introduction to the Gospel John highlights the transition from law to grace (1:17), but it is from prophecy to fulfilment rather than a rejection of the law. The Old Testament *is* true, historically, morally, legally and so on, but it points forwards, just as the New Testament epistles point back to the coming of Christ. He shows that historically the Old Testament is accurate, but that the laws, sacrifices, and prophecies all look to him. As he says elsewhere (Matt. 5:17), “Do not think that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.”

So why should not he, and they, seek to make the whole body well on the Sabbath? He uses the traditional rabbinic approach of arguing from the lesser position (applying circumcision) to the greater (healing). The Jews considered circumcision as a perfecting of a part of the body, so how could they object to the healing (perfecting) of the whole body?

Verse 24

Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.

He challenged their superficial understanding of the law. Their position arose from the law itself (Lev. 12:3) which required circumcision to occur on the eighth day after birth. This would often coincide with the Sabbath. Jesus was not defending breaking the law, but showing them their inadequate understanding of it. Deeds of mercy were not inconsistent with the Sabbath law. Elsewhere he shows that the law goes deeper than deeds (Matt. 5:21-48). (See Focus Point on page 154 for a further discussion on the law and Christ.)

Verse 25

At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, “Isn’t this the man they are trying to kill?”

The people were confused at the attitude of their leaders. These were citizens of the city to whom the religious leaders had committed their desire to have Jesus killed.

Verse 26

Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ?

Knowing the hatred of their leaders the people wondered why Jesus was able to teach freely in the temple courts. They displayed their blindness to and ignorance of divine power at work.

Verse 27

But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no-one will know where he is from.

But their confusion continued as they claimed that no-one could know the origin of the Messiah. Since they knew where this man came from, they reasoned that he could not be the Messiah. We saw this same problem with Nathanael (1:46). Yet, they did know the answer from the Scriptures (Matt. 2:5-6; Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:23). The issue arises again in 7:41-42.

Verse 28

Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, “Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him,

Jesus was still teaching in the temple courts when he exclaimed with irony at their total ignorance. Contrary to what they thought, they had no idea of Jesus’ background. He had not come by his own decision, but through a divine commission. This is a constant theme of John’s Gospel. The one who sent Jesus was real, one whom the people did not know.

Verse 29

but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.”

The question Jesus now posed was not “Where is he from?” but “Who is he from?” The people’s view was that no-one can know where the real Messiah comes from, so Jesus cannot be the Messiah. They were deluded. Jesus made clear that he had come straight from God, sent by his Father to proclaim the truth. This truth is that he is the Christ (Messiah) and that he alone knows the Father intimately.

Verse 30

At this they tried to seize him, but no-one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come.

The enemies were constrained by the Holy Spirit. They tried to seize Jesus, but John reminds us again that this was not yet the right time. The right time was in God’s plan, which was the cross. We do not know why God chose the specific moment to be when it was, but it is clear that he had a purpose and these constant references to the timing emphasise that the cross was not a mistake, but God’s plan. This was for our salvation. It is remarkable to realise that it was planned from eternity (Eph. 1:4).

Verse 31

Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, “When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?”

A good number of people believed in Jesus. They were probably the pilgrims who had come for the feast from outside the city (as opposed to the locals who were aware of the religious leaders’ plot to kill Jesus). Their faith may not necessarily have been a true, living belief. They were probably ready to accept Jesus as a political Messiah. They were aware of his miracles, having

heard numerous reports of his ministry in Galilee. This would have tied in well with their expectations that the Messiah, at his coming, would perform many miracles and restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). Could anyone do anything greater than the miracles Jesus had done? The answer they expected to that question would have been 'No'.

Verse 32

The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

The Pharisees were becoming worried as the situation began to look serious. They heard the crowds murmuring about the possibility that this man Jesus could be the Messiah. Action was necessary. Opposition to Jesus increased as the rulers sent their guards to arrest him.

Verse 33

Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me.

God's plan has to be carried out. Calmly Jesus declared to all who were present that he would not be with them all that long. He knew that his time on earth was limited to a further six months (from the present feast to the following Passover). He would then return to the one who sent him, having completed the task that had been entrusted to him.

Verse 34

You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."

Jesus further adds that they will look for him but will not find him. The thought of being too late is to be found in a number of places in the Old Testament (Gen. 27:30-38; Amos 8:11-12; Prov. 1:24-28). The place where Jesus was going was to his Father. By rejecting Jesus, they were rejecting his Father. There is no room in the Father's presence for those who refuse and reject his Son.

Verse 35

The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?"

There is a sense of derision and mockery in the response of the

Jews. Were they interpreting Jesus' ministry as a failure so that as a result he was talking about going to the Jews who were scattered across the world? Their perspective was wrong again. Little did they know the prophetic utterance they made, for only a few years later the apostle Paul would travel amongst the scattered Jews and teach the Greeks. The word "Greek" in those times was a word that meant anyone who was not a Jew. A more general description would be "Gentile".

Verse 36

What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?"

Despite their anger and opposition they were puzzled by Jesus' comments that he was going to a place beyond their reach. He was in control, they were not.

(b) Christ, the fulfilment of prophecy

Verse 37

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

The relationship of Christ to the Old Testament is developed further by showing that he not only fulfils the law, but also the sayings of the prophets. This announcement Jesus made on the last day of the feast was a stunning claim. One of the exciting incidents of the feast was at its climax, with the pouring out of the water from Siloam before God and the people at the altar. It was as this event occurred that Christ invited the people to come and drink from him, just as he had in the case of the woman at Sychar (4:14). We see immediate links with what has gone before in the Gospel. John distinguishes between water for washing (the ministry of the Word, 3:5, 15:3 and Eph. 5:26) and water for drinking (the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, 4:14).

Verse 38

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

This event is the fulfilment of many Old Testament passages, in particular Nehemiah 8:5-18; 9:15, 19-20. Of special interest is Haggai 2:1-9 which links to this event and the greater temple (Heb. 12:26-29). Christ is the fulfilment of Isaiah 55:1 ("Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have

no money, come, buy and eat!"). Jesus confirmed his earlier teaching that the Spirit will be like "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (4:14). Now Jesus says that those who believe in him will be like "streams of living water that will flow from within him". To those who looked on and knew their Scriptures, this must have been a thrilling moment. The words of Jesus and the symbolism of the feast pointed to the rock from which the water flowed to provide drink for the people in the desert (Num. 20:11). That Rock, says Paul, was Christ (1 Co. 10:4).

Verse 39

By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

The gift of which Jesus was speaking is the Holy Spirit. He would be given through the "glorifying" of Christ. We note that the cross, together with his resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father, is to be his glory, though his hearers did not appreciate that yet. Peter recalls these words in Acts 2:33 ("This Jesus... exalted... he has received... the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out ...").

Verse 40

On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."

The reactions, as always, were mixed. There were those who were impressed. "The Prophet" refers to the prophecy of "the prophet like Moses" who would come (Deut. 18:15-18).

Verse 41

Others said, "He is the Christ."

There were some who were more definite and said Jesus was the Messiah (Christ).

Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee?"

A third group was convinced that Jesus could not be the Messiah, because he came from Galilee, which was not the place from where the promised Messiah would originate.

Verse 42

Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?"

Those that challenged him on his origins obviously did not

know of his birth in Bethlehem, David's town, despite Old Testament references such as Micah 5:2. Their premise that the Messiah would come from the seed of David was correct. Jesus was born in Bethlehem because of the Emperor's decree that a census was to be taken. Hence Joseph and Mary made their way to Joseph's family home, with Mary in the latter part of her pregnancy.

Verse 43

Thus the people were divided because of Jesus.

The crowds had been puzzled on the same issue (7:27). It was the question that Nathanael asked (1:46), "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" The result of these opinions led to a division in the crowd; division is another recurring theme in John.

Verse 44

Some wanted to seize him,

Within the division there were some who wanted Jesus to be arrested. The temple guards had already been dispatched by the Pharisees for this purpose (7:32).

but no-one laid a hand on him.

John emphasises again that nothing happens outside of divine control. There was a restraint placed upon Jesus' enemies. The division of opinion and the presence of many who were sympathetic towards Jesus may have been the divine constraining factor.

Verse 45

Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?"

The temple guards sent by the religious leaders would probably have been the men who guarded the tomb later (Matt. 27:62-66). They may have been descendants of the Levites appointed by King David as guards of the temple (1 Chron. 26:1-19). The guards returned without Jesus.

Verse 46

"No-one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared.

The guards returned empty-handed because they were affected by the way Jesus spoke. This was the Word who created the world and raised the dead, a Word of tremendous power (1:14, "The Word became flesh ...").

3. The public confusion

This is the third theme of this chapter.

We need to think about these comments carefully and appreciate them by a careful study of Scripture. Think what it must have been like for his hearers, such radically different teaching from that given by their teachers. There is a repeated reference in this passage to their confusion: disbelief, debate and division. Look back over the chapter and see the various reactions of his brothers (7:3-5), the crowds (7:12-13, 20-22), the Jewish leaders (7:15,32), the people again (7:40-44) and the temple guards (7:45).

Verse 47

“You mean he has deceived you also?” the Pharisees retorted.

We come to the end of this chapter and we see some of the exchanges between Christ and the religious people. John shows how the leaders accuse the Lord, the guards and the people and yet the truth is that they, the religious leaders, are those in the wrong. The leaders rebuked the guards for being unable to perceive the truth.

Verse 48

“Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?”

The guards had not studied the law so it was wrong that they should have a mind of their own. On the other hand who of the learned leaders believed the things that Jesus had said? They were not being led astray like these uneducated, unthinking guards.

Verse 49

No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them.”

The religious leaders then cursed the crowd for following Jesus. They were angry to see that their power was beginning to slip away from them. They despised their own people by calling them a “mob”, a classical attitude of authorities to the people who disagree with them. But it is to the ordinary people that God reveals himself.

Verse 50

Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their number, asked,

The division of the crowd now spreads into the Pharisees’ camp. Nicodemus asks a question. He was a Pharisee and was

the one who had come to see Jesus secretly at night (3:1-21).

Verse 51

“Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?”

Immediately after the Pharisees claimed that none of their number could possibly have been taken in by Jesus, one of their own number speaks up favourably about him. The question Nicodemus asked exposed the Pharisees’ own ignorance of the law or unwillingness to follow the law. They had made a judgment that Jesus was a deceiver (7:48), ordered his arrest (7:32) and wanted to kill him (5:18). They were breaking the law themselves (Ex. 23:1; Deut. 1:16-17), because justice must be impartial. All that Nicodemus did was to ask if they ought not to follow the due process of the law.

Verse 52

They replied, “Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.”

Nicodemus simply asked a question but was opposed bitterly. We see their bitter attack on their fellow-ruler. He is no longer a secret believer, though he may not have fully believed yet. But they were wrong again when they said a prophet does not come out of Galilee (7:52). **They** do not know the Scriptures. The prophets Jonah (2 Kings 14:25) and Nahum (Nahum 1:1) apparently did so and possibly Elijah too (1 Kings 17:1). The divisions are clear, just like the Lord has forecast for the final day, the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:32-33). Where would we have stood if we had been in Jerusalem on that day? Where do we stand today? Where will we stand?

PP

Summary

The Feast of Tabernacles provides the background to this study. Jesus’ family wanted him to accompany them to Jerusalem so that all could witness his miracles. Their motive was not right, for they wanted to make Jesus into a celebrity and benefit from it themselves. Travelling to Jerusalem at that time was not the right moment for Jesus, for he had to attend to

Summary continued on page 153

Summary continued from page 152

his Father's business. Yet Jesus did attend the feast and appeared publicly halfway through the week of the long celebrations, teaching in the temple courtyard. There was amazement in the crowd as well as confusion. The religious leaders, who had anticipated his coming from the start, were angry at the way many in the crowd were responding. Where had Jesus come from? How had he gained such knowledge? Many would not accept his answers as Jesus pointed out how their leaders did not understand the law and therefore interpreted it incorrectly. At the crucial point of the festival Jesus shouted out and invited the people to come to him to have their thirst satisfied. Jesus was fulfilling the Old Testament Scriptures. Those who would respond would also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The guards who had been sent by the religious leaders to arrest Jesus came back empty-handed. The Pharisees accused them of being taken in by Jesus. By contrast none of them, educated men, had been fooled. Not quite; there was one by the name of Nicodemus who enquired whether legally they were acting correctly. The leaders turned on Nicodemus and again showed their ignorance of the Scriptures. Jesus was not to be bullied by human pressure into doing things that were not in accord with his Father's will. He exercised full control; in timing, events, conversation and knowing the state of people's hearts and minds. He was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies and laws.

P A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme - Who is this man?

The people and their leaders were fascinated by this man, Jesus. They wanted to know where he was from so that they could find out who he was.

1. He is the fulfilment of the Law (7:21-24)

The leaders were confused about the Sabbath laws and so burdened the people. God's intention was to bless them with a day of rest and worship.

- John shows (1:7) that Christ's purpose was to reveal God's grace. We cannot keep the law perfectly and so are condemned by it. But Christ has kept it on our behalf (Matt. 5:17; Gal. 3:24-25).

- Christ says that the law points to him: he is the manna from heaven (John 6:58), he is like the brass snake in the desert which brought life to the people (John 3:14), he is the Rock from which the living water flowed (1 Co. 10:4).
- In the Old Testament the people had to keep the law to get to God (but could only fail); in the New Testament Christ has kept the law so that we might come to God.

2. He is the fulfilment of prophecy (7:37-39).

He claims that he is the one about whom the prophets had spoken (Luke 24:25-27).

- From the moment of man's fall into sin Christ's coming was prophesied (Gen. 3:15), but it had been planned even before the world was created (1 Peter 1:20).
- Gradually the family line into which Jesus would be born was revealed: Abraham, Jacob and David, for example. Even his birthplace was foretold (Micah 5:2).
- His death was prophesied (Is. 53; Ps. 22; Zech. 12:10).
- Many more prophecies were made - and he fulfilled them all.

3. The public reaction

We see the different reactions of the family (7: 3-5), the crowds (7:12-13,20-21), the leaders (7:15,32) and the temple guards (7:45). Consider each one and the significance of their comments; compare these reactions with those that we hear today.

Conclusion

The offer is plain (7:37-38).

The crowds were divided; then and now.

Many people today share the same fascination about Jesus as those of his time on earth, but they do not want to be his disciples. Why?

PP Focus point

Note on the law and Christ

The law was completed in Jesus Christ's coming upon this earth. His claim is that the law is pointing to himself. As we are seeing in this Gospel, the Lord continually points back to the law (e.g. the manna, the bronze snake) and shows that he is the greater fulfilment. So he exalts the law; he does not minimise it. Indeed, he says that if they believed Moses, they would have believed him (5:46; 7:19).

The law demands perfection of us. It demands absolute obedience. It shows how far short we have fallen. It demands death for the law-breaker (i.e. the sinner). It causes the sinner to cry out to God

for mercy (or it should). Sadly, this was not so with the Jewish leaders.

Christ not only kept the law himself, but fulfilled its requirements on our behalf. We cannot be saved by keeping the law; we are incapable of doing it. God's grace comes in, to say, "There is another way." We can be children of God by faith in Christ.

There is nothing wrong with the law. It still defines God's standards, but we cannot be saved by trying to keep it. No, we have to trust in Jesus Christ who was able to keep the law on our behalf, as our substitute. As our substitute he also had to take the punishment for our breaking of the law – death.

We must emphasise one other point. This contrast between the Old and New Testaments does not mean that grace is not shown in the Old Testament. On the contrary, God displays it whenever his people repented. The sacrificial system in the Old Testament was also a means of grace. God displayed his grace towards the ungodly nations that repented. He showed his grace in his day-to-day provision. In fact the law-covenant is an act of grace in itself. John 1:14 indicates that it is the Word who is the "grace and truth" which we receive (1:16). That same Word gave the law (Ex. 20:1). The new grace replaced the old (1:16). The difference is that the Old Testament sacrificial system was but a shadow pointing to the reality of the New Testament. People of the former era had to believe in the Christ who would come and keep the law. Faith in the Christ to come or faith in Christ who had come is the only way of rescue for all breakers of the law – that is, for everyone.



Over to you

The purpose of the John's Gospel is clear, but it divides the people. What divisions do we see in this chapter and how do they face us in our evangelism today?

The Lord's mission was unique, but he was very conscious of the Father's plan. How is this apparent in this chapter? How far can we apply this principle to our lives and in our preaching?

Find the various occasions in this study that indicate the Lord was in control of events. How does that help you as a pastor/gospel preacher?

Study 10

Christ and his power

John 7:53-8:11

To forgive



Introduction to the passage

This passage is omitted in some translations of the Bible, or it might be included with a note to say that it was not in the original versions of John's Gospel to which we have access. It is generally agreed by scholars that it was not in the earliest copies of the Gospel. In fact, none of the early commentaries on the Gospel even mention it. However, it is also generally agreed that this passage is a genuine account of the incident. When it did begin to appear in copies of the Gospels, it was included in different places such as at this point and in Luke's Gospel (after Luke 21:38) as an alternative. Scholars differ as to whether it should be considered as Scripture and should not be used as the basis for building any point of doctrine unless confirmed in Scripture. Some point out that the written style fits better with Luke's, but there is no reason to believe it was written by either Luke or John. It is almost certainly an oral remembrance passed on by the apostles and remembered particularly because it is a powerful incident. It does reflect the issues of law and grace that we have seen in chapter 7 (7:24) and shall see again chapter 8 (8:15-16). The introduction to this section (7:53-8:2) gives it continuity between the two chapters.

What these verses mean

Verse 53

Then each went to his own home.

After the previous incident at the feast the people dispersed, each to their own homes and with their own view on who this rabbi was.

Chapter 8

Verse 1

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, which was a favourite place of his for prayer. He could well have spent the night in Gethsemane or with Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany which was nearby.

Verse 2

At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.

In the morning Jesus returned to the temple to teach. The incident that follows is probably a reaction by the scribes and Pharisees to Christ's healing of the paralysed man on the Sabbath (chapter 5 and the discussions in chapter 7) in which he embarrassed them by his reply to their accusations of law-breaking. Now they present him with a situation in which there seems to be an unarguable case which will trap him and so discredit him.

1. The Challenge (8:3-6)

Verse 3

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees

After the confusion among the Jewish elders in the previous chapter, when Jesus demonstrated his lordship and authority, they needed to re-group and organise a counter-attack. They probably felt that their own authority (in the eyes of the people) had been weakened and so they could re-establish themselves by humiliating this rabbi. The temple guards had been overwhelmed by Jesus' authority (7:46-47); here was their leaders' chance, they thought, to undermine that authority.

brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group

They chose to confront Jesus with a woman who had committed adultery. There is no suggestion that they tried to fabricate the evidence for their purpose, but they did use this woman as their tool. Why had they not brought the woman before the court of the Sanhedrin? The woman was thrust into the midst of a staring multitude of people.

Verse 4

and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.

The woman had been caught in an adulterous relationship. The Feast of Tabernacles was a joyous festival and sadly it was not surprising that immoral acts occurred when so many people were crowded together in that atmosphere.

Verse 5

In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

The law was unambiguous: she must be stoned. Would the rabbi (Jesus) endorse this? Their real purpose for bringing the woman is about to be revealed.

Verse 6

They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

Though the sin was a serious matter, which Jesus acknowledged (8:11), their real concern was to trap the Lord. The law required death by stoning (Deut. 22:22). If he denied this death penalty, he would have undermined the law and so he would be discredited as a true teacher. If he supported the act of stoning and ordered it, he would be in conflict with the Roman authorities and would probably upset his hearers, who were used to a more liberal practice at this time. It would also undermine perhaps how some people saw their Messiah as one who was loving and forgiving. The law was clear on this issue, but did they actually apply the law themselves? Where was the man? The law specified that both the woman and the man must be stoned (Lev. 20:10). If, as they claimed, she had been caught in the act of adultery, the man must have been there.

℞ Further background note

The culture at that time had become very male-dominated and women were almost despised. In fact, as we have seen, the Lord was already breaking down this unbiblical attitude (as in chapter 4). The Bible makes it clear that the woman, like the man, was made in the image of God. It makes it clear that each of them was a special creation of God. Each of them was reflecting the divine nature (in their created perfection): the man as the head of the marriage and the woman as his helper (the same wording was used of the woman as is used of God as helper). They were different but complementary. They were equal before God. The apostles were to write in their epistles that Christian husbands and wives should submit to each other and love each other (for example, Ephesians 5:21, 22 and 25).

Their unbiblical attitude to women resulted in a cultural attitude that considered that the family honour was linked to the woman's sexual behaviour. This woman would have upset that social attitude and was the object of their contempt. The

man would not be judged by them. This woman, because of their attitude to her and to the Lord, was to be used as a weapon against him. But then, that is also how they used Moses. They cared less for the woman and for Moses than for their own esteem.

We must be consistent in the application of the law and not be selective. It does not apply to one gender alone or to one class of people alone. We are not to apply it differently to our friends from the way we apply it to other people. It is not to be applied liberally to ourselves and harshly to the rest of the world.

But the Lord knows man's heart; he reads our innermost, secret thoughts (2:24-25) and is wise. One is reminded of the incident in the early years of the reign of King Solomon. His wisdom was being tested by the people and two women were arguing over the ownership of a baby. His wisdom was a special gift from God and his answer reached to the heart of the situation and solved the problem (1 Kings 3:16-28). The Lord who gave Solomon that wisdom is going to be even wiser here when he is himself confronted by the schemes of man.

2. The response (8:6-9)

Verse 6 (*continued*)

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.

Often, when we are confronted, we respond aggressively and use harsh words. Jesus reacted by saying nothing. Silence can be a powerful weapon. Instead of arguing with them, he wrote with his finger on the ground in the dust. Many people have speculated on what he wrote, but we do not know and there is no indication that the elders knew either. The action itself is very telling. We read in the Scriptures of the finger of God and that speaks of his power and authority. The Lord Jesus used the expression in Luke 11:20 and applied it to his own actions (authority over the demonic powers). It was used by the Psalmist (Psalm 8:3) to describe God's power in the creation of the heavens and earth. But perhaps even more significantly in this passage it is used by Moses to report the action of God in giving the law (Ex. 32:16; 34:1). By writing in the dust he was bringing together his own authority and that of God as one and the same, the authority of the law-giver himself. He would have been emphasising the whole law. There is a sobering

perspective in Jeremiah 17:13 on this incident, “Those who turn away from God will be written in the dust.”

Verse 7

When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”

This silent act clearly annoyed his challengers and they persisted in their questions. So Jesus straightened up and responded. It was a powerful response which did not contradict the law but went to its heart. Another feature of the law, and this was going to hurt them, was that it required the witnesses to confirm the reported action (and totally agree in their testimony) and then to cast the first stones (Lev. 24:14; Deut. 13:9; 17:7). In effect he was saying that they needed to apply the law. Let the first person to stone her be one without personal sin. This may even have meant the person who has not committed this specific sin. Here were the religious elders who had brought the woman before the Lord. What would they do?

Verse 8

Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

Jesus bent down again and continued writing. He looked down and did not look them straight in the eye or note who was the first to respond. He could have done, but he was not copying their tactic by trying to humiliate them. In fact, he was treating them better than they had treated the woman, whom they had tried to expose publicly.

Verse 9

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.

The crowd gradually dispersed, starting with the elders who had accused her. He was saying that both they and the woman sinned. Many translations refer to the older ones going out first. The wording, which could be translated that way, can also mean the elders (in society, the Jewish community or the church). Clearly, from the context, it is referring to the scribes and Pharisees (8:3). This is illustrating another principle that the Lord taught (Matt. 7:3): we should not try and take a speck of sawdust out of another person’s eye when we have a plank of wood in our own.

3. The judgment (8:10-11)

This is a Gospel of miraculous signs. Here we see the greatest miracle that we can experience and it happened to this woman. The Lord is left alone with her. What will he do now? Isaiah prophesies the gentle nature of the Messiah (Is. 42:3). He will not break the bruised reed; he will not quench the smouldering wick. He will, says the prophet, bring forth justice. Looking back on Jesus' ministry the apostle Paul says that in him are hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We see this very plainly in this passage.

Verse 10

Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no-one condemned you?"

As we have seen, the law requires two or three witnesses to testify to a person's guilt. But the accusers had all gone. Where were they? Had no-one condemned this woman?

Verse 11

"No-one sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

No-one had come forward to condemn her. So the law could not be applied. Furthermore Jesus conforms to God's purpose in that he did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world (3:17). This woman was not declared unfit for the kingdom of God, for there is a place for such if they repent and turn from their adultery (Luke 7:47). As the one who is without sin Jesus **was** entitled to judge her and stone her. But he withheld condemnation. Only he can do that. We can forgive those who do wrong against us - and we should (Matt. 6:12), but only the "I AM", who gave the law, can forgive her sin against God and his law.

P Further comment

The Lord's mission was not to condemn the world but to be the Saviour of all who will put their trust in him (3:17; 12:47). He demonstrated it in this passage by forgiving the woman. But note his instruction to her, to sin no more (8:11). This is always his command when he forgives (5:14). He does not minimise sin. He does not treat it lightly. He does not say that sin does not matter: that is what the devil says. Our God is holy and cannot bear to look on sin, as he demonstrated at the cross. To

sin no more is to be repentant. That is what repentance means: turning away from sin and toward God. That is the heart of the gospel (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38).

Jesus declared that this woman's behaviour was sinful. Our Lord's forgiveness does not reduce the sinfulness of sin but, rather, highlights it. Why did the law require death? It was to purge the community of the sin (Deut. 22:22). This is what needed to be dealt with for this woman. The punishment of the law was dealt with by the Lord's death (3:17).

Forgiveness naturally leads to this "sin no more" position. In Romans 6:15 Paul has been writing about the wonderful grace of God that forgives our sins. Some of his readers were apparently thinking that they could sin freely since the grace of God covered their sins. In fact, they would argue, the more we sin, the greater is the grace of God. Paul comes back and says, by no means can that be true. If we are God's, we will obey him and we know that he hates sin (Rom. 6:16-18).

P Summary

We see in this passage a miracle of God showing his undeserved favour to those who do not deserve it. We always argue for justice. God is just but he is also merciful. He must judge sin - and has done. When we see how he feels about sin, we realise how great is his love to show such mercy. He could have thrown a stone in judgment at this adulterous woman; he had that right. There is the contrast between Jesus' attitude to this woman and that of the elders. Not only did they judge her, they tried to use her for their own ungodly purposes. They thought they had sprung a clever trap for Jesus by bringing this woman to him before a crowd of people. They even used Scripture to their own ends - just as Satan did (Luke 4:9-11). Their judgmental and legalistic hearts had not allowed for God's mercy and grace. They had not understood the purpose of Christ's time upon this earth. He had not come to condemn but to save. He offered this woman salvation but the reality of her faith would show in her turning from a sinful life in obedience to him. By now the accusing elders had slunk off when challenged about their fitness to carry out an execution under God's law. How do we respond to others? How do we use Scripture? The Scriptures are a means for us

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to show the love of God to sinners and assure them that there is forgiveness for the one who repents. If we do not repent of our sin, then one day we will face God's judgment.

P A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

The following is a suggested outline structure of a sermon based on this passage, setting out three points. It requires further work to develop the points, with illustrations and application to the listeners who will be present.

Theme – Springing a deceitful trap

Introduction

Set the scene (7:53-8:2).

(a) Testing the Lord (8:3-6)

This is a dangerous thing to do, to put the Lord to the test (Matt. 4:7; 1 Co. 10:9). The devil tried it (Matt. 4:1) and now the Pharisees and scribes try it. To do so is to ignore Christ's true identity (God), his wisdom and power.

He sees our hearts and knows our motives (Gen. 6:5).

(b) Testing the Pharisees (8:6-9)

Jesus turns the situation around and focuses on the Jewish elders. He does not highlight the woman's sin, but their true motives. We are reminded of his words about judging others (Matt. 7:3-5) without judging ourselves first. With these men there was their own failure to obey the whole law. When challenged to come forward and carry out the stoning, they left instead. The Lord's action of writing in the sand seemed to add to their sense of guilt; it would have reminded them of God, the law-giver (Ex. 32:16).

We are no different; we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

(c) Testing the woman (8:10-11)

Only God can forgive sins - and Christ does it. But he requires repentance, turning away from a sinful life..

Conclusion

The intention was to trap the Lord by judging the woman; the outcome was that the Pharisees were caught in their own trap and were judged for it. The eyes of the Lord search the very thoughts of our hearts; we are exposed by him. Do not look critically at others, but look to the Lord Jesus Christ for your own salvation.

PP Focus point

Repentance

Repentance is an essential part of conversion. Conversion involves turning **from** a sinful life and turning **to** God through Jesus Christ.

from is **repentance**

to is **faith**

Repentance cannot be separated from faith. You always have to turn away from something to something else.

Repentance then involves a change, which can be summed up in the following areas of our lives:-

A change

- of **mind** about sin. It is seeing sin as inward not just outward behaviour. Sin is not just breaking the law but an attitude of disobedience and the failure to worship God.
- of **heart** about sin: feeling sorry for sins done because they have dishonoured God and separated us from him.
- of **will** concerning sin: there is determination to cease practising it.
- of **behaviour**; abandoning the practices known to be sinful, especially the neglect of God

Repentance works through God's convicting sinners. Jesus taught the disciples in the upper room on the night of his betrayal and said, *When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin (John 16:8).*

Through the Word of God the Holy Spirit reveals God and his will and calls people to turn from their sin. It also involves man as he responds to God's call and turns to him from sin. Jesus said,

But unless you repent, you too will all perish (Luke 13:3).



Over to you

One commentator, though he recognises the woman's sin, sees the sin of the religious leaders as being more serious. What were the sins of these leaders and why are they so serious? Have you examined your own heart in relation to the people around you?

What do you learn about the Lord Jesus Christ from this incident? What relevance does this have for your preaching ministry?

From this passage, what do you understand by repentance? Does it feature in your teaching?

Study 11



Christ and his power

John 8:12-59

To bring light (1)

Introduction to the passage

Chapters 8 and 9 of this Gospel are linked through 9:5. Chapter 8 gives the Messiah's teaching on who he is and the inability of his enemies to see that. John 9 illustrates this with another miraculous sign, the healing of a blind man. In this study we are still at the Feast of Tabernacles, but focusing on the aspect of light. Because the festival was a celebration of the wilderness journey, the Jews remembered the special presence of God indicated by the pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21) which lit their way. The temple was lit up by four great lamps and the priests carried burning torches. The sight must have been spectacular. Those who were aware of the prophecies of the Old Testament would have noticed a link between these chapters and Isaiah 42-43 (e.g. Is. 42:6-7, "I will keep you and make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness"). John has already told us, "That life was the light of men" (1:4), speaking of the coming of Jesus among us. On the last night of the festival, the final lamp was lit. It was at this point (7:37) that the Lord spoke, declaring who he was.

What these verses mean

1. The Claim

(a) *To his identity*

Verse 12

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world."

The passage opens with another astounding but true claim, that Jesus was the "light of the world". Think of the impact of that statement to people who were remembering the wilderness journeys. God provided light in the desert; indeed, he was the

light. The psalmist wrote, “The LORD is my light and my salvation” (Ps. 27:1), so Jesus was making a direct claim to deity. The title “LORD” is God’s personal name, YHWH, and means “I AM”.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Then Jesus made further claims that no other would make. Firstly that whoever follows him would never walk in darkness. We get such claims frequently by our Lord (“never hunger”, “never thirst” and “never turn away”). We have already heard the Lord draw a distinction between light and darkness (3:19-21). The expression “light of life” occurs several times in the Old Testament (e.g. Ps. 56:13). John Stott, a Bible teacher, summed up this teaching in John’s Gospel as follows: “To know him was to know God (8:19; 14:17), to see him was to see God (12:45; 14:9), to believe in him was to believe in God (12:44; 14:1), to receive him was to receive God (Mark 9:37), to hate him was to hate God (15:23) and to honour him was to honour God (5:23).”

(b) *To his witness*

Verse 13

The Pharisees challenged him, “Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.”

Not surprisingly, the Pharisees challenged Jesus’ testimony. They were saying that Jesus was boasting about being the light of the world but no-one else was confirming this. On that basis it could not be true. Deuteronomy 19:15 mentions the need for two or three witnesses.

Verse 14

Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going.”

Jesus was making the point that his testimony is reliable and is spoken from knowledge, not human ideas. Jesus made his declaration of being the light of the world in the full consciousness of his origin (he came from heaven from God) and destination (he was going back to heaven to God).

Verse 15

You judge by human standards;

Their judgment was based on human reasoning; that Jesus was a mere countryman, from Galilee and the son of Joseph, the carpenter.

I pass judgment on no-one.

Jesus, because of his perfect knowledge, was able to judge. This, however, was not his mission for he had come not to judge but to save (3:17).

Verse 16

But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.

By contrast to the Pharisees, his assertion was not made on their basis of human reason, but arose from his relationship with the Father. Jesus was not alone in his judgment. He and his Father are one in this.

Verse 17

In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid.

Jesus then turned to the Mosaic law and pointed out the need for two witnesses under that law (Deut. 17:6). They claimed that in Jesus' case there was no-one to confirm it.

Verse 18

I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the one who sent me—the Father.

Christ responded by pointing to the Father, adding that God himself was the second witness. Jesus may have had in mind Isaiah 43:10 in his response. The fact that they did not hear the Father's testimony is a point of condemnation, of blindness on their part.

Verse 19

Then they asked him, "Where is your father?"

They did not know the Father. We are reminded of Jesus' earlier discussion on this point (5:32). The Lord makes the point again later on (14:7).

"You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also."

We often say that a son is a reflection of his father ("like father,

like son”). This was a concept accepted in Jesus’ day and so he applied it to himself (Heb. 1:1-3).

Verse 20

He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put.

This conversation occurred near the treasury in the temple. Chests were put out in which people placed gifts for various causes. It was here, on another occasion, that Jesus saw a poor widow putting in two very small coins (Luke 21:2).

Yet no-one seized him, because his time had not yet come.

Once again John makes reference to the fact that they could not arrest Jesus because his time had not yet come. The emphasis of this point (yet) is that the treasury was close to the hall where the Sanhedrin met. Jesus’ voice would have echoed around and been heard from within the hall. Despite the position and the hatred of the council towards Jesus, no-one was able to arrest him before God’s appointed time.

Verse 21

Once more Jesus said to them, “I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.”

The Lord then revealed his plan in a little more detail. The “once more” reveals his amazing patience with these people (and with us and our unbelieving hearts). He is going away. In the previous chapter he had indicated that this would be “in a little while” (7:33). He also reminds us of his previous comments in which he said they would not be able to follow him. They are doomed because of their rejection of Jesus. In their death they will find no comfort or peace. They will not be able to go where Jesus was going, to his Father. Instead they would be condemned to everlasting hell.

Verse 22

This made the Jews ask, “Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, ‘Where I go, you cannot come’?”

As John wrote about these serious matters in his later years what did he think? Was he smiling at their foolishness? The Jews had somehow missed Jesus’ point that they would die in their sin and instead wondered at whose hands Jesus would die. Would it be his own? Yet it was they who had been trying to

seize him and would shortly cry out for his execution. Of course the truth behind it all was that the Father had sentenced the Son on our behalf, as Peter would show in a few months' time (Acts 2:23).

Verse 23

But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world."

The Lord repeated what he had just said in verse 21 pointing out his heavenly origin, whereas they were of the earth. His thoughts were heaven-inspired, theirs were hell-inspired.

Verse 24

I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins."

He repeated that if they would not believe in him (showing that they were "born from above" - chapter 3), they would die in their sins. His challenge is to believe that he is God, the I AM. Death in sin will be the result of not believing that Jesus is all he claimed to be. The words "the one I claim to be" are not in the original text and are shown in parenthesis.

Verse 25

"Who are you?" they asked.

The things that Jesus was saying provoked the question, "Who are you?" Had they not been listening to what Jesus had just been saying about who he was and what his work was?

"Just what I have been claiming all along," Jesus replied.

Martin Luther was a great spiritual leader who lived in Germany 500 years ago. One of his achievements was to translate the Bible from Latin into the German language. A Christian asked Luther to put a personal message on his copy of this Bible. Luther quoted from this passage. He wrote,

"John 8:25, 'Who are you?' 'Just what I have been claiming all along.' It was a claim on the part of Jesus Christ to divinity."

Then Luther added, "They desire to know who he is and not to regard what he says, while he desires them first to listen, then they will know who he is. ... If, however, you do not listen, then you will never know anything. ... Therefore, let this book, in which he speaks to you, be commended to you; for he did not cause it to be written for no purpose. ... We are to read it, to think and speak about it and to study it, certain that he himself (not an angel or a creature) is speaking with us in it."

Verse 26

“I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.”

Jesus was not going to be sidetracked by their derisory question. After giving them a quick answer in verse 25, he tells them that he is not finished with them yet. They had argued about his right to judge. Jesus had plenty to say in judgment of them because he was speaking the mind of another, his Father, the one who had sent him. The sender is totally reliable and what he says is true. What Jesus has been saying is that which he has passed on, that which his Father has declared.

Verse 27

They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father.

Again, they did not understand who Jesus was speaking about. He had frequently told the Jews that the one who sent him was his Father, yet they had failed to understand. Their prejudice and self-pride had blinded them and they were ignorant of the real truth.

Verse 28

So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man,

Jesus explained that they did not understand that he was referring to his crucifixion, though they had queried whether he was referring to his death (8:22). Isaiah predicted that the Messiah (God’s Servant) “will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted” (Is. 52:13). We see the double meaning of “lifted up” – the crucifixion and glorification (exaltation). This is another common theme in this Gospel. He clearly predicted that his crucifixion would be at their demand.

then you will know that I am he

They would be responsible for his death, but there will ultimately be a shock in store for them. They would one day realise that the one they had despised was in fact who he claimed to be. It will then be too late, as this truth will come suddenly upon them in their hour of death and at the final judgment.

and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.

The Jews will finally acknowledge that all the things Jesus said

and did are a demonstration of his relationship with the Father. Jesus was not making things up and acting by himself, but was under the direction and teaching of God, his Father.

Verse 29

The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.

Jesus continued emphasising the relationship. He always did what pleased the Father. Eventually he will testify to completing the task the Father had given him (17:4; 19:30). The Father who sent him is with him because he is doing his Father's will. This will be Jesus' consolation when even his disciples abandon him (16:32). Even when Jesus was on the cross the Father did not abandon him. The Son's being forsaken (Matt. 27:46) means that he had to bear alone the burden of God's wrath against sin and for that period had to forgo the sweetness of God's fellowship. The Father never rejected or cast off his Son.

P Further comment

We see four questions followed by Jesus' comments arising from the questions.

- a. Where does he come from?** From above (8:23); but they are of this world.
- b. Where is he going?** They cannot go there (8:21).
- c. Who is the Father?** They do not know him (8:19).
- d. Who is the Son?** (8:25). In answer to this, we see that his relationship with the Father is one of obedience, even to the cross. His divine nature is specified, "you will know who I am" (8:27). This claim is reinforced in 8:58. Such a claim is idolatry if it is not true. This is the charge that Isaiah makes against Babylon (Is. 47:8).

2. The Responses

Verse 30

Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.

As usual Jesus' words provoked various responses. An encouraging response was that many of the people put their faith in him. Was this genuine faith? There is a difference between a mental persuasion and a wholehearted personal surrender.

Verse 31

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

As we have seen, the faith of the Jews could be very fickle (as subsequent verses will show), so Jesus identified the nature of true discipleship: it is remaining loyal, holding to his teaching. This means making the Word of Christ the rule of one’s life. This characterises the true disciple of Christ and leads the person to a genuine and progressive knowledge of the truth.

Verse 32

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

The fruit of true faith is freedom. The person is free because sin no longer rules over him; instead it is the Word of Christ that dominates the heart and life. The freedom then relates to the person’s doing what he should do, when he wishes to or can do it.

Verse 33

They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”

In the minds of some confusion followed the statement about the truth setting them free. “We are no-one’s slaves,” they claimed, “We have never been slaves to anyone!” Their mindset was clearly religious because at that time they were under Roman occupation. In their history they had come under the yoke of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians and so on. Religiously they considered themselves as descendants of Abraham with whom God made a covenant. They enjoyed a unique religious standing, being a chosen race, a people for God’s own possession. Heathens were the ones in bondage to their idols, but not they; how then could Jesus say that they could become free?

Verse 34

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

No wonder the Lord will be calling them blind (9:41). He points out that they are slaves to sin anyway. They have been overcome and taken captive by their master, sin. They are unable to deliver themselves from this bondage. Jesus is saying

that whoever is continuing to commit sin has not seen the Lord and does not know him. Their delight is in breaking God's laws. Such a person is a slave to sin, unable to break the chain of bondage. The one who has trusted Christ (who is born again) is not without sin in this life but their one desire is to please their God and not to sin.

Verse 35

Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it for ever.

The picture Jesus is using is that of the situation of a slave in a family, a common occurrence in the then Roman world. The slave could enjoy the conditions of his master's household but that could change at any time; there was no permanent guarantee. At any moment the slave could be dismissed or sold on. The relevance to the Jews Jesus was addressing was that the old system was coming to an end and their privilege of being physical descendants of Abraham would no longer apply. It would be Abraham's true children (spiritual) who would remain in the household and have the permanent privileges (Gal. 4:21-31). The reference to the son's being "for ever" is a fulfilment of the prophecy of 1 Chronicles 17:13-14. The writer to the Hebrews identifies this son as Christ (Heb. 3:6).

Verse 36

So if the Son sets you free,

Jesus then pointed out the nature of the freedom he will bring. The freedom he brings is a gift, not something we earn by our religious or social background. Christ brings freedom from sin (8:34-36), from the devil (8:37-50) and from death (8:51-59). The reference to freedom is also significant in this feast. It is celebrating the movement of Jacob's descendants from slavery in Egypt to freedom in Palestine. Christ brings true and lasting freedom. Such freedom has been a comfort and a source of strength to persecuted Christians throughout the last 2000 years.

you will be free indeed.

Christ does not just set a person free as an accused man is declared not guilty or a slave receives emancipation. The phrase "free indeed" is adding something else to being made free. The accused who is innocent and the emancipated slave walk away as free persons, but when Christ sets the sinner free

he adopts the forgiven sinner as a son. The freedom to be enjoyed is in his sonship, which is forever glorious (Gal. 4:6-7).

Verse 37

I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word.

Though they are Abraham's descendants through natural birth, they seek to take Christ's life because they object to his teachings. There is a deteriorating progression through John's Gospel in the opposition and hatred of Jesus. The point being made is that the physical seed of Abraham is trying to kill the very one to whom Abraham looked forward in joyful anticipation. Jesus is beginning to show them that spiritually they are not the real children of Abraham.

Verse 38

I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence and you do what you have heard from your father."

Jesus contrasts himself with the Jews again. The contrast is between his Father and their father, who are not the same. Jesus has been in the presence of his Father since eternity, hearing all the Father had said and seeing certain things. He had therefore come as the great Prophet to reveal the Father's will. They at their father's side had heard certain things, such as to plot and kill Jesus. They were ready to act on what had been whispered to them by their father.

Verse 39

"Abraham is our father," they answered.

Jesus had not stated whom he had in mind when he referred to their father. They thought of themselves as Abraham's children both physically and spiritually. They did not require to be rescued from captivity and set free.

"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did.

If they were Abraham's children, they would act in the same way as Abraham did, obeying God's commands. They would trust that God would make all things well. They would have welcomed God's messengers and rejoiced at the thought of seeing the Messiah on the great day.

Verse 40

As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things.

They were seeking to kill Jesus, which Abraham would not do. Jesus was contrasting their behaviour with Abraham's. Would Abraham have sought to kill the angel strangers who came as messengers from God? (Gen. 18)

Verse 41

You are doing the things your own father does."

Now comes the "sting in the tail": they were doing exactly what their father was seeking to do. Having first mentioned their father in verse 38, Jesus is moving closer to defining who the father of these Jews is. Although he is not specific about who this father is, it brings an immediate reaction.

"We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself."

They still did not see. In their outburst they claimed that the only Father they had is God himself. It is very likely that they were born of parents who were married when they were conceived. The legitimacy of their parentage was not being questioned. Were they insinuating, by referring to illegitimate children, that Jesus' legitimate parentage was under question?

Verse 42

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.

The answer Jesus gives dismisses the claims of the Jews. The true disciples are those who believe in the Son of Man (1:12). They are marked by **love**. John reinforces this in his letter, "Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; neither is anyone who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10). And, says John in that same passage, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16). Therefore if God were their real Father they would show that by loving Jesus, God's Son. They looked upon Jesus as being self-appointed, whereas Jesus had come from God as one sent. He is being very plain with them; God's children are marked by love to our Lord Jesus.

Verse 43

Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say.

Throughout the discourse the Jews had been showing their spiritual ignorance by the type of questions they continued to ask. Their spiritual dullness was because they were spiritually deaf. Their questions and insults showed their biased attitude, which was the cause of the deafness. They did not want to hear Jesus because they could not bear what he was saying.

Verse 44

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Jesus spoke out openly and identified who their real father is; he is the devil. The identity of the devil is made clear: he is a murderer and a liar. There is a direct allusion here to the Fall of Genesis 3 by the reference to “the beginning”. The Lord is very blunt and says that lies are the devil’s “native language”. Jesus knows that the devil exists and exerts a tremendous influence on earth.

Verse 45

Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!

The fact that they do not believe in the Lord Jesus, who tells the truth, shows who their father is. The truth relates to spiritual matters; such as man’s total depravity, his inability to rescue himself, the plan of God’s salvation, the sending of his Son as the rescuer, the punishment of those who reject the Son etc.

Verse 46

Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?

The reason they do not believe the Lord is because they do not belong to God. They were prepared to believe the devil’s lies, but they would not believe Christ’s words of truth. So Jesus challenged them, if they could prove that he was guilty of sin. He will issue the same challenge at his trial (18:23). Even then they could not prove it (Mark 14:57-59; John 18:38). If they cannot demonstrate that he is a liar, why do they not believe him?

Verse 47

He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.

The answer Jesus gives them to his question is that it is because they are not children of God. In the same way that those who belong to the devil take on his attributes (lying, murder etc.), so those who are of God follow his commands.

Verse 48

The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

Their response is a vicious insult. This is so often how the world reacts to the truth of the gospel. So much for their Abrahamic "faith"; they now hurled the ultimate insult that was in their vocabulary. They called Jesus a Samaritan, the group of people who were most despised by the Jews. They further added that Jesus was demon-possessed.

P Note

Watch how you speak: it gives you away! Their tongues are set on fire by hell itself (James 3:6). A person who uses swearing, bad language, gossip, lies and so on, shows that he is not Jesus' disciple. Such a person will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 49

"I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honour my Father and you dishonour me.

The Lord had made it plain that he was doing what his Father desired. He had denied the Jews' claim that they had a true knowledge of God. This pronouncement was not inspired by Satan but arose from his zeal for the honour of the Father. They had just hurled insults at his Son and so were showing dishonour to the Father, the very one they claimed was their own.

Verse 50

I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge.

Jesus was not on a mission to please himself. The one who sent him on this mission will be the one who will vindicate him. God his Father is the judge and his judgment will be perfect and right. Jesus therefore does not need to defend his own honour.

Verse 51

I tell you the truth, if a man keeps my word, he will never see death.”

Here we have another mark of true discipleship. Jesus has said that his disciples will hold to his teaching, the truth (8:31). Now he says that again. (He will return to this truth in 15:4-7). In the first case Jesus told them that the truth will set them free. In this verse the consequence of the truth is that the person obedient to Jesus’ instructions will never see death. Here death means separation from the love of God. The person who keeps the word of Christ will have everlasting life.

Verse 52

At this the Jews exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death.

The statement of the previous verse was remarkable. However, to his hearers, it was obviously so ridiculous that they considered that Jesus must be mad. All the great men of God (including Abraham and the prophets) died. Again they forgot their Scriptures: Enoch and Elijah did not die (Gen. 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11). They were interpreting death as the physical end of life, so when they quoted back to Jesus his own words they were applying a completely different meaning. By rejecting Jesus’ wonderful promise, they were proving the truth of verse 43.

Verse 53

Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”

The words “Are you greater than ...” echo the words of the Samaritan woman in 4:12. The difference was that the woman soon after affirmed that Jesus was greater, he was the Messiah (4:29). By contrast their questioning of Jesus’ status was a further hardening of their hearts.

Verse 54

Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me.

The implication of what they were saying was that Jesus was trying to bring glory to himself as a pretender. He agrees that if this were so these claims were empty and had no substance. But his Father, the one they had the audacity to call “our Father”,

glorifies his Son continuously. He does this by enabling his Son to perform mighty works (11:4). Jesus himself commented about providing the living water and bread. God spoke with a direct voice from heaven about his Son (1:34). We tend to think of the grave as final, and death as the end. Christ identifies it as a door into heaven and the fuller dimension of eternal life. These are all ways in which the Father glorifies his Son.

Verse 55

Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word.

The reason that they could not accept Christ's words was because they did not know God. They knew plenty about him, but did not have the personal relationship implied by "know". The Lord could not deny his relationship with the Father, for he knew him, having come directly from heaven. At the heart of the gospel is the personal relationship a person has with God through Jesus Christ. The religious Jews were just like the religious people today, who observe all kinds of ritual but have never placed their personal trust in Christ as the one who died for their sins.

Verse 56

Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.

Though they made claims about their descent from Abraham, they had never met him. But Christ had. Abraham knew the Lord and rejoiced in that. If they were really Abraham's descendants, they too would rejoice in seeing the Lord. This was the day Abraham yearned for and looked forward to with eager anticipation. How disapproving Abraham would have been of his physical descendants.

Verse 57

"You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

Again they thought they had the unanswerable charge: Abraham died nearly 2000 years earlier and this rabbi was nowhere near 50 years old, so he could not have seen him. It was an absurdity to them that Jesus could have seen Abraham. They showed their earthly and materialistic minds and had no awareness that Jesus was the eternal Son of God, made flesh.

Verse 58

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”

The Lord responded with another truth: he preceded Abraham. This is probably the most unambiguous statement about his deity: “Before Abraham was, I am.” If it were not true, the statement would be ungrammatical. Jesus was taking to himself the very name of God, the “I AM” (YHWH). If it were not true, it would be blasphemy. It was the very claim of God himself (Is. 41:4).

Verse 59

At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

The opposition of the Jews reached a new scale. They were no longer able to contain themselves and in their anger sought to stone Jesus (see Deuteronomy 13:1-10). They wanted to put him to death without a trial by court. Such was their fury against the blasphemy, which it would have been if Jesus had not been speaking the truth. The Lord slipped away; his time had not yet come. It is clear then, contrary to what is said by some modern critics, that he did claim to be God and come from God.

PP

Summary

The prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament spoke of the Messiah’s coming, “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Is. 49:6). This speaks of the gospel age which Christ was ushering in at the Feast of Tabernacles. His audience in the temple consisted of a multitude of people; citizens of Jerusalem, pilgrims for the festival and hostile religious leaders. Jesus made clear his identity as the light of the world and the consequences for those who would follow him. This provoked a challenge to the validity of his testimony based upon lack of witnesses. The discourse that followed veered from Jesus’ claiming that he had come from heaven and had been sent by his Father, to the Jewish opposition of slanderous insinuation, sarcasm and disdain. As Jesus explained the basis of his relationship with his Father in heaven, which meant total obedience, even death on the cross, many put their faith in Jesus. The

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Summary continued from page 181

reality of this faith was challenged as Jesus showed the people that mere mental acceptance of him as the Messiah was not enough. They had to surrender themselves to him as their personal rescuer and be freed from bondage to Satan and to sin. The attitudes even of this group professing faith changed, and some no longer believed in him. They joined in the increasing hostility that culminated in the people picking up stones to attack Jesus. It was not yet his time and he slipped away among the crowd.

P A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Suggested sermon 1 (outline structure based on the whole of the passage John 8:12-58)

Theme: Who is he?

(a) Christ's identity

He claims to be God: the "I AM" statements;

He and the Father witness to his identity (8:13-16).

He is the "Light of the World" (8:12; Is. 49:6).

In what ways is he light to this world?

- He reveals his plan: his crucifixion (8:21-24).

(b) The non-believers' reaction

They have a false sense of freedom (8:33) in contrast to true freedom (8:35-36).

They have a false sense of relationship (8:53) in contrast to their true descent (8:41) and that of God's true children (8:42).

They have a false sense of Christ's identity (8:48) in contrast to his true nature (8:56- 58).

Conclusion

Listen (8:25) and act on it.

Suggested sermon 2 (In depth notes for passage John 8:48-58)

Theme – The Great I AM (8:58)

Jesus Christ tests the people's faith with his awesome claims.

Aim

The people should respond to Jesus' claims as divine rescuer with renewed worship, joy and trust.

Introduction

Why is this claim recorded? They looked like disciples – but they were fakes.

This section is teaching us about who Jesus is, but it goes further. It is applied to our lives. Beware, make sure that your faith is genuine. Is my trust in Jesus genuine?

We all have to answer verse 53, who do you think you are?. Our response shows the state of our hearts. So what does Jesus claim?

1. I have the greatest offer you'll ever hear (8:48-51)

(a) It is the most far-reaching (v51)

It is an incredible claim. It was not the first time Jesus said this (John 5:24).

What does he mean, “Never taste death”?

Clearly Jesus is not referring to physical death (John 11:25, 26).

- The taste of death is bitter, because it comes as a result of our sin.
- To die in sin is to die under the judgment of God.
- But, for Jesus' disciples death is the doorway into resurrection life.

Application: death is a terrible thing – but you need not fear it. Jesus, our High Priest, has seen death and defeated it (Rev. 1:18). Worship Jesus for his majestic power over death. It is Jesus who claims to hold power over death. What a claim this is.

(b) It is the most generous

This offer was made to evil men (8:48). The “anyone,” (8:51) includes these Jews (see their description of Jesus).

- “Demon-possessed” – often accused – “you are in league with evil.”
- “Samaritan” – why? “Only an enemy of God's people could say this.” You must be a Samaritan – despised enemy of God's people.

It was even worse because Christ was sinless (8:46, 49-50).

- “Which of you convicts me?” There's no sin in my life at all.
- “I honour my Father in heaven.”
- “There is one who seeks and judges.” Jesus submits himself perfectly to the will of the Father. They insult him!

Application: The wonder of the gospel; it really is amazing grace. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). Is that you?

(c) It is the most searching (8:51).

Today some preach, “Once saved, always saved”. This is not a false statement but it is not the whole truth. Saying “If you give your life to the Lord, you will be saved, no matter what you

Christian life is like” is simplistic and misleading. Jesus shatters this shallow view of discipleship. Look at the words Jesus uses: holds to, keeps (8:31, 51). True followers of Jesus (those who hold to his teaching, keep his word) will be secure in him.

2. I am the greatest person you’ll ever know (8:52-56)

The Jews are staggered and there is increased hostility and stubbornness – they misinterpret what he is saying in a crass, literal way – “you will never physically die”.

They argue that Abraham, the great Old Testament believer physically died, and so did all the prophets, those great men of God. How then can Jesus promise to spare us from the taste of death? Is he greater than Abraham? This question expects the answer to be no.

(a) I’m closer to God than Abraham (8:54-55)

- God honours Jesus more than Abraham – with his miracles, with the voice from heaven – these are God’s ways of honouring Jesus. Abraham didn’t have this (v54).
- Jesus knows God personally – that is why he was able to do these miracles; that is why he says the things he does. In fact if Jesus did not make these claims he would not be true to himself – he would be a liar (8:55).

(b) Abraham saw Jesus as the Messiah (8:56)

- Heb. 11:13 tells us that Abraham saw the promises from afar.
- Gen. 22:18, “*In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*”

Abraham knew that Messiah would come to bless the nations through his seed, Isaac.

Application: Jesus is greater than the most godly man on the earth. Jesus demands absolute and exclusive loyalty. We cannot trust anybody else to make us right with God. With the Jews it was their blood relation with Abraham. With us it may be our heritage, or our family name, or our traditions. Do you claim to follow Jesus?

- Jesus believed in the historical accuracy of all the Old Testament – including the bits that scientists would laugh at today.
- Jesus calls us to moral purity
- Jesus calls us to purity of worship – not just copying the traditions of the past or the fads of today.

There is no part of life over which Jesus Christ does not stamp his authority and say, “This is mine!”

3. I am the greatest (8:57-59)

Did the Jews deliberately misunderstand Jesus with their question about his age and seeing Abraham?

(a) I am God over all (8:58)

This is a clear reference to the name of God (Ex.3:14). Jesus Christ is the eternal God of the universe.

Application: Trust this faithful and eternal God. Perhaps the thought of death is not the great problem for you. Perhaps it is life that is a worry, frustration at your own limitations, a feeling of helplessness or powerlessness. Maybe there are demands made on us that we cannot keep. In all the storms and changing circumstance there is one eternal truth - Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. (See Heb. 13:5-6, 8).

(b) I am Judge over all (8:59)

Finally they decide that Jesus is a blasphemer. He must die, he fails their test, they stand as judges above him. But they cannot kill him; Jesus is Lord even of his enemies.

Application: Beware of putting your opinion above Jesus' opinion; this applies to both Christian and non-Christian.

- You who set yourself up as judge of Jesus.
- You who want to weigh him up, to see if you will accept him.
- You who question Jesus, as if he should give account to you!

Conclusion

Who then is this Jesus?

- He has come with the power to give eternal life. He holds the keys to death and Hades.
- He is the greatest man that you will ever meet. Follow him before all others, or you are not worthy to be his disciple.
- He is the great God and judge – yes, even yours!

Our response to Jesus' claims reveals our true character.

Will you worship him or reject him?

Pp

Over to you

Chapter 8 speaks of family relationships. What can we learn from this passage about the blessings and warnings of our spiritual relationships? Do your people look upon Christianity in these terms or just as another religious faith?

The Lord says that true disciples keep his Word (8:31,51). How do your people receive the Word? In what ways can they keep it? How does this differ from the nominal Christian or religious person?

From this passage what are the marks of a child of God? Does this help you in how you can preach to people you discern do not have those marks?

Study 12



Christ and his power

John 9

To bring light (2)

Introduction to the passage

Having presented Christ's claim to be the light of the world, John now records a miracle ("sign") which illustrates the principle. This does not interrupt the teaching, but reinforces it dramatically. If the Christ is the light of the world, the Creator (1:3-4), then it is reasonable to consider if he can bring sight to a blind man. That is the message of this chapter. Christ had been threatened by the Jews (8:59) and now turns aside to help one man, a blind beggar. The enemies had no power to stop his compassion. This truth will be seen again as we move on to the cross and the resurrection.

What these verses mean

1. The miracle (1-12)

Verse 1

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.

It is not certain whether the events of chapter nine occurred on the same day as the events of chapter eight. We are not told where the blind man was located; presumably he was in his normal place of sitting and begging (verse 8). He had been born blind.

Verse 2

His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

The disciples, seeing the blind man asked, a question, one that in some form often concerns a Christian. Was this as a result of his sin or that of his parents? The theological puzzle for the disciples was the fact that this man was born this way. In their minds they could easily relate a person's physical affliction to a sin, but that way of thinking could not apply to a defect formed at birth. In this case were the parents to blame in some way?

Verse 3

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

All sickness is an indirect result of sin and God’s judgment of man and his world (Gen. 3). However, specific illnesses are not always the result of specific sin. Jesus, in answering his disciples, does not look backward to the root cause but forward, giving a purpose for the sickness. In this case it was for God’s glory, giving the opportunity to demonstrate the kindness of God. Other purposes can be for chastisement, even in a Christian (1 Co. 11:30; James 5:15-16). It can also be a result of persecution because the person is a Christian.

Verse 4

As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no-one can work.

The moment is coming when Jesus’ mission will be fulfilled. He is here to do the Father’s work. Night-time represents the time when most of us rest from our labours. That moment was approaching for the Lord Jesus Christ, when his particular work on earth would be finished. In his reply Jesus said that “we” must do the work. The day for his work would conclude on the cross when he said, “It is finished” (19:30). The “we” means that the day for his disciples to do the work Jesus started continues and will end only when he returns. For the individual disciple the day will finish when his life on this earth comes to an end.

Verse 5

While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

While he is still with them, Jesus is the source of true light to this world. This is to repeat what Jesus told the people in the temple courtyard (8:12) and is the key to the interpretation of what follows.

Verse 6

Having said this, he spat on the ground, made some mud with saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes.

Jesus then proceeds to do God’s work on this man. He worked as Creator in using his hands. He took mud as he did in Genesis 2:7. As we see with these miracles in John’s Gospel, only the Creator can do these things. There were no special medicinal qualities in the mud nor in the mixture with the saliva. The test

for the man will now come in obeying what Jesus tells him to do.

Verse 7

“Go,” he told him, “wash in the pool in Siloam” (this word means Sent).

The man is told to go and wash in the pool of the water system that included a tunnel to carry the water to the pool from the spring located outside the city wall. The system was constructed to provide the city with water in case of a siege. The name Siloam probably stems from the original name of *Shiloah* that was given to the constructed system, including the pool. This in Hebrew means “sent” as the water was directed from the spring to the pool. The point John is making is that there is a deeper significance than the man’s literally washing his eyes in the pool; for spiritual cleansing one has to go to the true Siloam, the one sent by the Father to save sinners.

So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

The man did not protest but immediately obeyed. He washed the mud off his eyes and came away seeing. It again demonstrates who Jesus is. Isaiah had prophesied, “Out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.” (Is. 29:18) and “Then will the eyes of the blind be opened” (Is. 35:5). How blind the opposition was. This was the fulfilment of their Scriptures. When the Lord healed this man, he could not only see physically but could understand what he was seeing. We know that while the light enters our eyes, the effect has to be interpreted by our brains for us to understand what we see. Not only had the Lord healed his eyes but he had enabled the man’s brain to instantly recognise things he had never seen as he was born blind.

Verse 8

His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?”

Not surprisingly this man went home healed and no doubt with much joy, even possibly singing. In keeping with the custom in the culture, he would have been calling his friends together to share in the joy of the event (see Luke 15 for similar reactions). The people were confused. He had been a blind beggar. Now he could see and manage for himself. The miracle had changed his appearance and demeanour.

Verse 9

Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”

Opinions were divided. Some recognised him as the one who had been the blind beggar. Others, unable to believe that such a change could take place, said that surely this could not be the same man.

But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”

The healed man put an end to the speculation and assured his neighbours that he was one and the same.

Verse 10

“How then were your eyes opened?” they demanded.

The neighbours seemed to have accepted the identity of the healed man and now wanted to know how this remarkable transformation came about. This is often the experience for born-again Christians,¹ not with physical blindness, but having their former spiritual blindness lifted. When people see the transformation in the Christian’s life, they want to know what has happened.

Verse 11

He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

The man briefly described to his neighbours what Jesus had done. He told them the name of the one who had healed him. Someone must have told him that the one who cured him from his blindness was called Jesus. He did not yet realise that the miracle-worker was the Saviour of the world. He went and washed just as he was told to do and he received his sight.

Verse 12

“Where is this man?” they asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said.

When asked where this Jesus was the man had no idea of his whereabouts. Jesus was not there when the man washed at the pool because the encounter between the two of them was not at

¹ It is important to understand that a person is not naturally born a Christian, even if the parents are practising Christians. The whole emphasis of chapter 3 is that a person has to come to trust in Jesus Christ as being the one who died particularly for their sins. This is a spiritual experience which Jesus described to Nicodemus as being born again.

the pool. Jesus had instructed the man to go to the pool to wash. In the meantime Jesus had slipped away as he had before (8:59).

2. The reactions (9:13-34)

The next section reads like a court trial; indeed, that is what it was. Though it was an examination by the Pharisees of what happened to the man, they were in effect putting the Lord Jesus on trial in his absence.

Verse 13

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind.

We are not given the circumstances of how the cured man was brought before the Pharisees. Who were the “they” who brought him and was this man being summoned by the Pharisees? Were the Pharisees acting under the instructions of the Sanhedrin court? It may well have been that some of the information John now unfolds to his readers was known to the religious leaders. We will see in this section some of the threats made to those who wanted to become disciples of Jesus. It could well have been that this is how they looked upon this man and why they wanted to interrogate him.

Verse 14

Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath.

The crucial piece of information to this whole episode is given by John: the healing of the blind man took place on the Sabbath. This would be the immediate cause of the Pharisees’ interest in getting at Jesus. It was already in their hearts to kill him (5:18; 8:58).

Verse 15

Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight.

The religious leaders ignored the discussion they had had with Jesus following the healing of the man on the Sabbath at the Bethesda pool (5:16). Jesus had contravened their traditions again (not the law). For them there must be no Sabbath healing (except to save someone’s life), no kneading (of the clay i.e. the mud) and no anointing (of the eyes). They were so divorced from God in their thinking, that they could not join the man and his family in the excitement and giving of thanks to God.

“He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.”

The man had already answered a similar question about receiving his sight when first asked by his neighbours. In his reply to the Pharisees he omitted naming Jesus and the pool of Siloam, but described the mud, the washing and the result – he could now see.

Verse 16

Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.”

We begin to see an interesting point developing in this account. The Pharisees were now divided among themselves. One group was adamant that people who are from God keep the Sabbath. The outcome of their thinking was that Jesus did not keep the Sabbath and therefore could not be from God. The problem in their reasoning was that they had confused their own man-made regulations with the law of God and consequently their conclusion (this man is not from God) was wrong.

But others asked, “How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?” So they were divided.

The other group could see the significance of this miracle. However they are not emphatic in their position but are only offering a suggestion by asking a tentative question. The problem for them was how a sinner could perform such signs. Their minds were working in a typical Pharisaic way of reasoning. The outcome was that there was a division amongst the Pharisees.

Verse 17

Finally they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.”

As if to solve their dilemma they questioned the man again for his assessment of the one who had supposedly healed him. The Pharisees were not admitting that a miracle had been performed but asking on the basis of the man’s claiming his blindness had been healed.

The man replied, “He is a prophet.”

The healed man’s response was perceptive showing that he was advancing in his knowledge. He knew that through this miracle God had revealed himself to him. Since Jesus was the one

whom God used in such a remarkable manner, he must have been a prophet.

Verse 18

The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents.

In the division the majority of the Pharisees were in the first group who were convinced that Jesus could not be from God because in their view he did not keep the Sabbath. The healed man had not supported their stance with his answer. So they called in his parents in their effort to produce the result they wanted.

Verse 19

"Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

The Pharisees thought that this was some kind of trick, someone pretending to be the blind man. Someone must have pretended to have been healed in order to boost Jesus' reputation. Although Jesus' name had only been mentioned as the one who put mud on the man's eyes, it is clear from the way John is writing that the Pharisees knew who it was who healed the blind man (see verse 22). They asked the parents questions to establish two facts; was the man before them their son they had been telling people was born blind? If the answer to the first question was yes then how is it he could now see? They wanted to know how the cure came about.

Verse 20

"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind.

The parents confirmed that the man was indeed their son and that he had suffered from congenital blindness. Their answer was causing an uncomfortable situation for the Jews. How did they handle a situation where a man standing before them, who was born blind, now had full vision? Were they prepared to accept what really happened?

Verse 21

But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself."

The parents did not answer truthfully. The Pharisees were trying to establish beyond doubt who had done the healing.

Back in verse 11 the healed man had told the people in his neighbourhood that Jesus had healed him. The parents, having known the identity of the healer, did not offer this information to the Pharisees but instead passed the responsibility back to their son. The reason for this cowardice is given in the next verse.

Verse 22

His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue.

The parents refused to say more in case they were punished for supporting this man, the Messiah (Christ). It had already been decreed by the Jewish rulers that anyone who followed Jesus as the Christ would be excommunicated. To be put out of the synagogue could affect family relationships and their livelihood. The synagogue was the centre of communal life as well as worship.

Verse 23

That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

Many people in the community would not deal with them if they were rejected by the Pharisees. So the parents told the Jewish leaders to ask their son; he was an adult and could speak for himself. Though the parents would not identify the healer, their testimony concerning the congenital blindness of their son had made the situation for the Pharisees difficult because they could not easily deny that a miracle had taken place.

Verse 24

A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said, "We know this man is a sinner."

Attention then passes to the man who was healed. The Pharisees' approach to the man was hypocritical and undoubtedly designed to trap him into either dismissing Jesus as a sinner or forcing the man to side with Jesus against them. Their words, "Give God the glory" sound like a cracked bell. They were trying to make the man not give credit to Jesus for his healing but only to God. They totally denied that this was one and the same thing.

Verse 25

He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know: I was blind but now I see!”

As we read this section of the chapter, we see something of the humour in the man’s conversation with the Pharisees. We have seen this in other passages in the Gospel. John is showing the foolishness of the unbelievers. The man is clear in his answer. There is one thing he definitely knows (he was blind and now can see) and one thing he does not know (the one who healed him was a sinner). The thing he knew was based on fact. This contrasts with the “we know” of the Pharisees, which was a matter of opinion.

Verse 26

Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

The Pharisees asked the man yet again (see 9:15) how his blindness had been cured. They had not received the information they wanted to hear from his parents and their questioning of the son was also proving fruitless. Were they in their desperation now trying to weary the son? Would he in an unguarded moment say something they could use for their twisted purposes?

Verse 27

He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?”

The man’s answer was ironic in its skilfulness. He could see through their deafness and blindness. Why had they not listened to his earlier replies? He then antagonised them by suggesting sarcastically that maybe the reason for their repetitive questioning was because they were thinking of becoming Jesus’ disciples. He knew the answer.

Verse 28

Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple!”

The Pharisees retaliated in anger. They were being humiliated by a mere beggar. They could not even mention Jesus’ name when they accused the man of being his disciple. Categorising someone as being a disciple of Jesus was in their view an insult with which they could put down a person. Little did they

realise that they were bestowing upon this man the highest possible honour.

We are disciples of Moses!

Their arrogance was exposed when they claimed they were disciples of Moses. They had totally ignored what Jesus had previously pointed out to them, that they were not really Moses' disciples (5:45-47).

Verse 29

We know that God spoke to Moses,

The Jewish leaders knew the divine origin of the laws and ordinances that Moses instituted. What they failed to understand was that the one they were now vilifying, Jesus, was the one of whom Moses spoke.

but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

In the context of God's speaking to Moses, the Pharisees challenged what Jesus was teaching and doing by stating that they did not know from what source his authority came.

Verse 30

The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.

We see further this man's perception. Firstly there is his boldness in rebuking them. These leaders' continuous boast is that they know everything. Their constant refrain had been, "We know." Now they were admitting ignorance on a matter that was plain for all to see. It was astonishing that they did not know from where this miracle-worker, who had opened the man's eyes, received his authority.

Verse 31

We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will.

The healed man continued his amazement at the Pharisees by saying that only people who are God-fearing and do his will are heard by God.

Verse 32

Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.

This man, Jesus, was heard by God, so that he opened the eyes of one who was born blind. This was a great miracle because no-one had ever heard of such a thing taking place since the world began.

Verse 33

If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

The healed man's conclusion was that the one who had healed him was from God. If he were not then he could do nothing. The healer was not a sinner. What these Jewish leaders had been saying did not make sense. He was amazed, not at his own belief, but by their unbelief. After all, is this not what was prophesied about the Messiah (Is. 42:7; Luke 4:18-19)?

Verse 34

To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

The Pharisees were effectively humiliated by one of the "people of the land" as they sarcastically called the ordinary people (7:49). This man had outmanoeuvred them. At the beginning they did not believe that the man had been born blind (9:18). Unable to deny the miracle, unable to accept what it meant they resorted to the Pharisaical arrogance which condemns others as sinners (see Luke 18:11) and hold themselves above this. How dare such a sinful person (born blind) start to teach them? The Jewish leaders excommunicated him from the religious fellowship of Israel.

3. The application (35-41)

The man now has a face-to-face contact with the Lord, who reveals himself to him. This is one of the lovely things in this Gospel: the way Jesus shows individuals who he is. Often they are those despised by the religious leaders. See 1 Corinthians 1:27-31 where Paul outlines this principle.

Verse 35

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

Jesus, having heard that the man had been expelled from the synagogue, sought and found him. He asked the man if he really trusted in Jesus as a true disciple. Jesus was speaking about true faith, a total reliance upon him for life and death. The expression Jesus used about himself was the title "Son of Man". Jesus used this title about himself a number of times. It was based on the prophecy of the Messiah in Daniel 7:13 and emphasised both that he had come from heaven and that he had been given eternal rule over the whole world.

Verse 36

“Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

Before being able to answer Jesus' question the man wants to know more about who exactly is this Son of Man. At this moment the man does not fully know the identity of the one he is conversing with because he addresses Jesus as “Sir”. This will change in verse 38. This is the first time he had set eyes on Jesus.

Verse 37

Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

Jesus revealed himself to the man as the Son of Man. With his sight restored the man has seen the Messiah and is now speaking with him.

Verse 38

Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshipped him.

The man is now fully aware not only of the fact that he is speaking with the one who had healed him. He is able to fully gaze on Jesus with his new sight and recognise him as the Son of Man, the Son of God and therefore the proper object of worship. The man now addresses Jesus as Lord.

Verse 39

Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

Jesus has this once blind man worshipping him, whilst by comparison he faces the hostility and stubbornness of the Pharisees. His coming to this world has two diametrically opposite effects. Some receive him with joy and are rewarded. Others reject him and are punished. The reward and punishment are his judgment. He came for that purpose, to pronounce and carry out the verdict on two sharply contrasting groups.

Verse 40

Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”

The Pharisees did not “see” their own state of sinfulness. Instead they challenged Jesus. Was he really putting them in the same category as those who did not know the law of Moses?

They were in a separate class of people who were devout disciples of Moses and therefore could not be blind.

Verse 41

Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.”

They needed to acknowledge their blindness to be forgiven. If it had been a matter that they were without the light of the knowledge of God and were yearning for God’s salvation, that would be one thing. But, because they claimed to see, they remained guilty before God. Their sin remained for they had rejected God’s salvation.

RP Summary

Each of the miracles in this Gospel shows man’s inability to help himself. This incapacity is contrasted with Christ’s power which can help helpless people. In this study we have a man who had been born blind. He had never seen anything in this world: plants, animals, birds or people. He had not seen the magnificent temple in Jerusalem. He did not understand colours or beauty. When the Lord opened his eyes, he would have been amazed. This was a sign confirming the declaration Jesus had made that he was the light of the world. Not only could the man now see with his eyes, but he believed and he worshipped his Saviour. This spiritual sight was what Jesus had earlier described to Nicodemus as the new birth. Conversely the religious leaders who had physical sight did not “see” their own state of sinfulness. They were angered and did not want to accept that a miracle had taken place. Their interrogation of the man and his parents led to the man’s being expelled from the community after he had exposed their contradictory position. John concludes by showing the contrasting situation of the blind man and the religious leaders. The two positions are those which Jesus came into the world to judge. One will be rewarded and the other will be punished. Being the light, Jesus brings that light to spiritual blindness and such eyes are opened. Then they see the loveliness of Christ and his Word (Psalm 119:18).

P A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Here is an outline structure of a sermon based upon the blind man's experience and the stubbornness of the religious leaders

Theme – Total dependence on Christ.

Introduction

The blind man represents man's natural spiritual state until Christ comes to him.

a. Man's hopeless state

He cannot see the Lord. To such a person the Bible is meaningless. The Church is strange. Prayer is pointless. Belief in God is futile (1 Co. 2:14). If we are to see God, God himself must open our eyes.

Spiritually blind men cannot seek the Lord. The blind man would be dependent on others to go anywhere. If he wanted to meet the Lord, he would not be able to find him (Rom. 3:11). We are dependent on the Lord's coming to us.

b. The Lord came to the blind man

The Lord found him and healed him. When the Lord anointed his eyes he had to obey the Lord and wash in Siloam's waters. This was an act of faith. When the Spirit opens our eyes, we too have to act in faith and follow him.

c. The man worshipped the Lord.

What happens when the Lord gives us spiritual sight? The Bible becomes full of good news about God. The Church is a loving family we want to meet with. Prayer is a blessed conversation with God. Belief in God is the source of salvation and peace and joy. People then saw the transformed beggar and asked why and how he had been changed.

Conclusion

There were some who were angered by the healing of the blind man. They reckoned he was blind because of some sin. They would not accept Jesus' miracle nor the teaching of Jesus. They thought that their adherence to religious ways would make them right with God. They were spiritually blind. There are many church-goers today just like these religious leaders and they are blind to their hopeless situation from which only Jesus can rescue them.

PP Focus point

Synagogue

After the conquest of Judah and the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the Israelites were taken into captivity. There they had no access to a place to worship God. For centuries they had been travelling to Jerusalem to the temple to worship God. After the Babylonian exile only a minority of Jews returned to Jerusalem. The rest settled in different parts of the Persian and then Greek empires. The synagogues were built wherever the Jews went to provide a place for prayer and instruction in the Scriptures. Sacrifices could not be offered in them; that was possible only in the temple. The meaning of the name is a place of assembly of the people. In some ways it is the model used later by Christians when they constructed buildings for the same purpose.

In Jesus' day, and up to AD 70 when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, the synagogue was the religious and social life of the Jewish community. After the temple's destruction the synagogue emerged as the central Jewish institution. The New Testament records both Jesus' use of the synagogue and that of his disciples and that early Christians. Paul made use of synagogues as part of his missionary strategy when first visiting a place.

PP Over to you

We noted that the Lord reveals himself very often to individuals who are despised by society. Is this your experience with the people you minister to? Why do you think the educated and powerful often find it so hard to trust God?

We must count the cost of following Christ and also the cost of not following him. What would the cost be for people in your society? How do you address this in your preaching and teaching?

The presence of disability and pain is a difficult subject, but what does this passage (especially 9:1-5, 35-41) teach us about it? How relevant is this to your situation?