

30 APRIL

John 7:1–13

For even his brothers did not believe in him

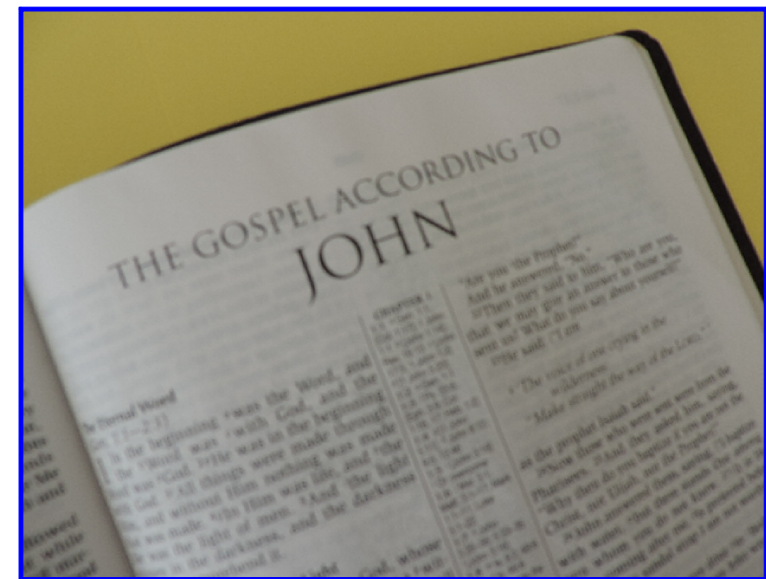
The Jews celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles from the fifteenth to the twenty-first day of the seventh month (October). They made booths from trees to remind them of God's care for Israel during their forty years wandering between Egypt and Canaan (Leviticus 23:33–34). It was also a harvest festival.

Jesus had been staying away from Judea because the Jews there were plotting to kill him (1; cp. 5:16–18). Mary had other children (by Joseph) after the birth of Jesus (cp. Mark 6:3) and they urged Jesus to go to Judea and to show himself and his mighty works to the pilgrims attending the feast. They knew about his miracles, but we read, *For even his brothers did not believe in him* (5). He told them that his time had not yet come (6). The time for him to die would be the following Passover (March/April AD 30) whereas it was now October AD 29. Jesus did go to Jerusalem later but he did not show himself until the middle of the feast. People were talking about him between themselves; some thought him to be good but others were convinced that he was a deceiver. They looked out for him, but were afraid to speak about him openly *for fear of the Jews* (the Jewish leadership, 10–14).

The enemies of the Lord Jesus hated him and *sought to kill him* (1). Isaiah prophesied: *He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief* (Isaiah 53:3). The unbelief of his own (half) brothers must have hurt him very deeply but after his resurrection and ascension into heaven they were in the upper room praying with the other disciples (5; Acts 1:13). Two of their number, James and Jude, wrote two books found in the New Testament and James became a leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:19; 2:9,12). **Let us persevere in our prayers for loved ones who are not believers. The Lord is able to save the most stubborn unbeliever. Nothing is too hard for him to do – be encouraged.**

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



April 2018

Bible readings from The Gospel of John chapters 1 to 7

Commentaries on Gospel of John recommended for further reading:

William Hendriksen: Commentary on the Gospel of John, published by Banner of Truth Trust.

Daily Readings From J.C. Ryle compiled by Robert Sheehan, Volume 2, JOHN, published by Evangelical Press

Mark Johnston: Let's Study John, published by Banner of Truth Trust.

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the whole Bible (3 volume edition).

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The notes for 1 and 2 April are included with those for March

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life

Jesus had been rejected at Jerusalem (5:16–47) and now the Jews in Galilee also began to reject him (41–42, 52). There were many who had professed to follow Christ who were offended by his words concerning the need to eat of his flesh in order to have eternal life. They said, *'This is a hard saying; who can understand it?'* and they refused to accept what he had to say and so deserted him (60–66). Many begin well and appear to show great promise, but their profession of faith in Christ is very shallow. There are *'hard sayings'* in God's holy Word, but do not reject Christ because you do not yet understand them.

Jesus said, *'It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life'* (63). He is pointing out that the literal eating of his flesh or any other flesh cannot nourish the soul which is spiritual and not material. Our souls are fed by Christ's words and by his teaching. Daily Bible reading, meditation on the things we read from Scripture, and hearing the faithful preaching of God's Word are vital to a healthy Christian life. Let us look to the Holy Spirit to apply God's Word to our hearts.

Jesus said to the twelve disciples, *'Do you also want to go away?'* Peter's magnificent answer echoes the sentiment of every true Christian, *'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life'* (67–68). He confessed that they all believed that Jesus was *'the Christ, the Son of the living God'* but the Lord corrected Peter by revealing that one of their number was not a true believer. He was referring to Judas Iscariot (69–70). Judas was deceiving the disciples, but he could not deceive Christ who knew from the beginning that he would betray him (64). **The Lord Jesus is most wonderful in his love and perfection. No other person or religion can save us. He alone has the words of eternal life (68).**

*Jesus, thou Joy of loving hearts,
Thou Fount of life, thou Light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to thee again.*

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life

The crowd at Capernaum would not accept that Jesus was any more than a man (42). They denied that he was the Son of God who came down from heaven. The Lord Jesus again said, *‘I am the bread of life’* (48; cp. verse 35). He pointed out that this *‘bread’* is quite different from physical bread such as the manna miraculously provided by God for the Israelites in the wilderness (48–50). He was also showing them that he had far more to offer them than the loaves that he had miraculously multiplied. He said that the bread that he gives is his flesh (27,51).

The Jews misunderstood Jesus and they quarrelled among themselves (52). They thought he was saying that they should eat his flesh and drink his blood; this outraged them because such a practice is forbidden in the Bible (Leviticus 17:10,12,14). Jesus did not mean anything of the kind! Roman Catholics go wrong at this very point believing that at the Mass Christ is actually sacrificed again by the priest. This denies the truth that the one sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient to atone for all our sins (Hebrews 7:27; 9:28).

What does Jesus mean when he says, *‘Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life’*? He is stressing the need to accept his substitutionary sacrifice as the only basis for salvation. J.C. Ryle writes that it *‘means that reception of Christ’s sacrifice which takes place when a man believes on Christ crucified for salvation. It is an inward and spiritual act of the heart and has nothing to do with the body. Whenever a man, feeling his own guilt and sinfulness, lays hold on Christ and trusts in the atonement made for him by Christ’s death, at once he “eats the flesh of the Son of man, and drinks his blood”. His soul feeds on Christ’s sacrifice by faith just as his body would feed on bread’* (DAILY READINGS FROM J.C. RYLE compiled by Robert Sheehan, published by Evangelical Press).

Are you feeding on the *‘living bread’* and rejoicing in Christ, our wonderful Saviour?

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

John, his brother James and Peter were the closest of the twelve disciples to the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). In his Gospel John does not refer to himself by name, but calls himself, *‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’* (13:23; 21:7–20). He became a leader in the church at Jerusalem, being described as a *‘pillar’* in that church (Galatians 2:9). He spent his later years at Ephesus and was exiled to Patmos during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian. It was there, while *in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day* (Revelation 1:9–19), that he had his vision of the Lord Jesus in all his splendour and glory. John survived all the other disciples, dying in approximately 98 AD.

John was an eye-witness of the great miracles wrought by the Lord Jesus (21:24). He did not record as many of the miracles of Jesus as the other Gospel writers and none of the parables are found in his Gospel. He wrote his Gospel to introduce us, his readers, to the most wonderful Person who ever lived on this earth *that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name* (20:31).

Key words: *‘Light’ ... ‘Life’ ... ‘Love’.*

Outline of the Gospel of John**1. The Public Ministry of Jesus (chapters 1 to 12)**

Introduction	1:1–18
Testimony of John the Baptist	1:19–36.
The first disciples	1:37–51
The first miracle	2:1–11
Ministry in Judea, Samaria and Galilee	2:12 – 4:54
Rejection in Jerusalem	5:1–47
Rejection in Galilee	6:1–71
Increasing opposition	7:1 – 10:42
Raising of Lazarus, withdrawal to the city of Ephraim	11:1–57
Ministry in Bethany and Jerusalem	12:1–50

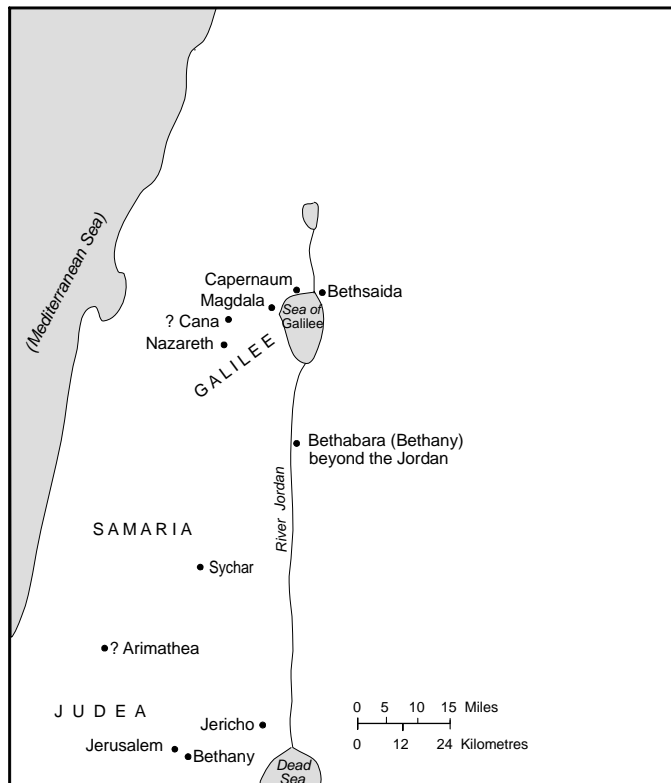
2. The Private Ministry of Jesus to his Disciples (chs 13 to 17)

The Last Supper	13:1–30
Words of instruction and comfort	13:31–16:33
The great prayer of Jesus	17:1–26

3. The Suffering and the Glory of Jesus (chapters 18 to 21)

The betrayal and arrest of Jesus	18:1–14
Trial before Jews and then Pilate	18:15–19:16
The crucifixion and burial of Jesus	19:17–42
The resurrection	20:1–31
The risen Christ in Galilee	21:1–25

Sketch Map of Judea, Galilee and Samaria



27 APRIL

John 6:37–47

The one who comes to me I will by no means cast out

How is it that people can see Jesus and witness his miracles and yet remain in unbelief (36)? The Saviour himself provides the answer with some very important truths about those who come to him in true faith:

- They are given to Christ by God the Father (37, 39; cp. 17:9–11), having been chosen in Christ before the world was made (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Only the elect, those given by the Father to his beloved Son, will come to him.
- They can never lose their salvation. The Lord Jesus came down to earth to do the will of God the Father. He explains that it is the Father's will that he should not lose any of those whom the Father has given to him (38–39). Christians are in the loving, but infinitely strong hands of our almighty Saviour (10:28–30). They are saved and can never be lost.
- He gives everlasting life to all those who believe (trust) in him and he will raise them up *at the last day*, when he comes again (40). This is also the Father's will.
- They are drawn to Jesus by God the Father. Jesus said, '*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day*' (44; see also verse 65).
- They are taught by God the Father (45).

The truths set forth in these verses encourage us to persevere in our work of evangelism. Some evangelicals use entertainment to attract the outsider to their meetings but such methods do not draw the sinner to repent of his sin and to come to Christ. We have a most important and solemn message to sinners who are lost and need to be saved from their sins. They will not take us seriously if we seek to make them laugh or entertain them.

We know that all whom the Father draws to Christ will surely come to him but Jesus also said, '*The one who comes to me I will by no means cast out*' (37). **He never rejects anyone who sincerely comes to him to be forgiven and saved.**

Bread from heaven

The people who had been fed knew that the disciples had departed alone in the boat. Failing to find Jesus in their area the following day, they crossed the sea to Capernaum. They were amazed to find Jesus there knowing that he had not been in any boat (22–25). They asked him, ‘*Rabbi, when did you come here?*’ He did not answer their trivial question but spoke of the reason that they had come to him (25–26). He knew that their motive for seeking him was not from a sense of spiritual need, but to have a provider of food. He told them that they should be seeking him for the food that brings everlasting life. They completely misunderstood him (as had Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman; 3:4; 4:15), thinking that they had to produce some works acceptable to God. Jesus told them that the work of God was to believe in him whom God the Father had sent (28–29). They were not, however, prepared to believe in him (28–29, 36).

They demanded another sign before they would believe that Jesus was the Son of God. J.C. Ryle observes, ‘Fresh from the miracle of the loaves and fishes, one might have thought they had a sign sufficient to convince them ... But, alas! there are no limits to man’s dullness, prejudice and unbelief in spiritual matters. It is a striking fact that the only thing which our Lord is said to have “marvelled” at during his earthly ministry was man’s “unbelief” (Mark 6:6)’ – DAILY READINGS FROM J.C. RYLE, Volume 2, Compiled by Robert Sheehan.

They reminded Jesus of the miraculous daily supply of manna given by God after Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt. Jesus told them about the ‘*bread from heaven*’ which gives life to the world. They asked him for this bread, thinking of it in physical terms (30–34). Jesus replied, ‘*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst*’ (35). This is the first of the seven ‘*I am*’ statements of the Lord Jesus which John records. **Jesus gives lasting satisfaction to those who trust in him and obey him.**

In the beginning was the Word

John introduces us to the Lord Jesus Christ by describing him as ‘*the Word*’ (1,14): *In the beginning was the Word*. This title is given to Jesus because God the Father reveals himself through Christ and speaks through him (18; Hebrews 1:1–2). John leaves us in no doubt concerning the identity of the Lord Jesus. *The Word was with God, and the Word was God*. He was with God before the universe was made and he has always been with God because he is God. *He was in the beginning with God* (1–2).

These verses also inform us that the Lord Jesus made all things. *All things were made through him* (3; cp. Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:10). Creation is the work of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:1–2; notice the word ‘*us*’ in Genesis 1:26; 3:22). This world did not come into existence by accident. Human life did not evolve from simple, primitive cells over millions of years. Our great Saviour created the whole universe and all life in it.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The Lord Jesus is also the Giver of life who brings light to men who are in darkness because of sin (3–4). ‘*Life*’ here and in much of this Gospel refers to spiritual life, and ‘*light*’ is spiritual light or understanding (cp. 5:40; 9:39–41). Jesus is ‘*the Life*’ who alone gives spiritual life and he is ‘*the Light*’ who gives spiritual understanding. There is no way of salvation from our sin except through trusting in him. The word ‘*comprehend*’ (5) can also be translated ‘*overcome*’. The darkness of this world cannot defeat the light of Christ. **He is altogether glorious. Let us now worship our great Saviour and bring to him our grateful praises!**

*Thou art the everlasting Word,
The Father’s only Son;
God manifestly seen and heard,
And Heaven’s beloved One:*

*Worthy, O Lamb of God, art thou
That every knee to thee should bow.*

(Josiah Conder)

The true Light which gives light to every man

The Lord Jesus is described as *'the Light'* (6–9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46) and God sent John the Baptist *to bear witness of the Light*. John came to announce the arrival of the promised Messiah *that all through him might believe* (7). John the Baptist had a great ministry, but the Gospel writer is at pains to emphasize *that he was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light* (8). There is no 'inner light' in us to clear away the fog of ignorance and sin within the human heart. Enlightenment comes from Someone outside of ourselves, from the Lord Jesus who is *the true Light which gives light to every man* (to all types of people from all nations as they hear the gospel, 9).

J.C. Ryle comments, 'Christ is to the souls of men what the sun is to the world. He is the centre and source of all spiritual light, warmth, life, health, growth, beauty and fertility. Like the sun, he shines for the benefit of all mankind — for high and for low, for rich and for poor, for Jew and for Greek. Like the sun, he is free to all. If millions of mankind were mad enough to dwell in caves underground, or to bandage their eyes, their darkness would be their own fault and not the fault of the sun. So, likewise, if millions of men and women love spiritual darkness rather than light, the blame must be laid on their blind hearts and not on Christ' (DAILY READINGS FROM J.C. RYLE compiled by Robert Sheehan, Volume 2, JOHN, 5 January, published by Evangelical Press).

The Lord Jesus came into the world that he had made and was not recognised; his own Jewish nation did not receive him (10–11). They had been waiting for the promised Messiah for centuries and John the Baptist pointed them to him. They witnessed his mighty miracles and heard his wonderful teaching, but their understanding was darkened (cp. Ephesians 4:18). They despised the Light of the world, rejected him and killed him. **How is it with you?** Are you rebelling against the light that God has made known to you through his holy Word, or do you gladly own Jesus as your Saviour and Lord?

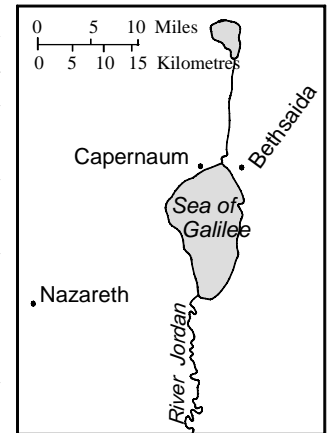
It is I; do not be afraid

The Sea of Galilee is a lake about thirteen miles long and up to seven miles wide. It lies some seven hundred feet below the level of the Mediterranean Sea. When cool currents of air sweep down from the surrounding hills, they collide with the warm air above the lake, whipping up fierce storms.

After the Lord Jesus had sent the crowds away, he told the disciples to cross the lake in the direction of Capernaum, while he went to a mountain to pray (15–17; Mark 6:45–46). A storm suddenly arose and the Lord Jesus approached the disciples walking on the water. They were terrified, believing that they were seeing a ghost. He encouraged them, saying, *'It is I; do not be afraid'* and as he got into the boat the wind dropped and the storm was stilled (19–20; Mark 6:49–51). There are three miracles here that show the greatness of our Saviour:

- He walked on the water.
- He calmed the storm.
- The boat which was in the middle of the lake (Mark 6:47) was immediately at the shore after Jesus entered it (21).

The Greek for *'It is I'* (ego eimi) is literally, 'I am' which is the covenant name of God (Exodus 3:14). The Jews recognised this when the Lord used the expression of himself on another occasion, and attempted to stone him for blasphemy (John 8:58–59). **The disciples had no need to fear when their Lord and God was with them, but, oh, the dullness and hardness of their hearts!** Why should they fear when they had such a Saviour and Friend? Why should we fear? Jesus said, *'It is I; do not be afraid.'*



But this he said to test him

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle of Jesus which is recorded in all four Gospels. This miracle occurred between six months and a year after the healing of the man at the pool. This period, on which John is silent, is covered in Luke 6:1 to 9:10 and Mark 3:1 to 6:30. During the same period the Lord Jesus taught ‘The Sermon on the Mount’ (Matthew 5 to 7).

Jesus had gone to the mountain to be alone with his disciples but the crowds followed him, attracted by the miracles which he had performed (2; cp. Mark 6:30–33) and they became hungry. The Lord asked Philip where they could buy bread *But this he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do* (5–6). Though Philip had already seen great miracles such as the turning of water into wine, he did not have miracles in his thinking. He could not see how such a huge crowd could be fed (7). We may be critical of Philip for his lack of faith, but we too sometimes fail when the Lord tests us. We may find ourselves in very difficult situations when we should instinctively turn to the Lord in prayer trusting to see him work, but we do not. **Oh, let us be more prayerful and more conscious of the Lord’s presence with us! He will never let us down.**

Andrew introduced to Jesus a lad who had five barley loaves and two fishes and Jesus performed the miracle. Every person in the crowd was fed with plenty to spare (10–13). The crowd responded to this miracle by acknowledging that Jesus was ‘*the Prophet*’ (or the Messiah; cp. Deuteronomy 18:15–18). They wanted to make him their king but he slipped away from them to be alone on a mountain (15). They did not realise that his kingdom is not political or earthly. They wanted a miracle-worker to meet their needs (26), but they were not willing to follow him in obedience to his Word and in self-denial. Does the Lord Jesus have the sincere love and devotion of your heart or are you lukewarm in your devotion to him?

The right to become children of God

The Lord Jesus came to his own people, *and his own did not receive him. But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name* (11–12). Those who do not receive Christ also reject the greatest privilege that any human can possess, that of being taken into God’s family.

Think about this; every Christian is a child of God. We are precious to him and can come to him in prayer as our heavenly Father. When God saves us, he brings us into his family. *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!* (1 John 3:1). We are children of God because of his great love which he has lavished so freely upon us. To know God is a priceless privilege. We have fellowship with him and he is with us wherever we go (1 John 1:3; Hebrews 13:5–6). He hears and answers our prayers (1 John 5:14–15) and has given us eternal life (1 John 2:25). Are you feeling discouraged or fearful? Christian, take heart. You are precious to God and he is working all things together for good on behalf of his children (Romans 8:28).

We cannot become children of God unless we receive Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. True Christians gladly acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and they obey his commandments (14:21–24; 1 John 5:1–3). They also *believe in his name* (12), trusting in him alone to save them from their sins. If you have done so, rejoice in God for the great privileges that he has given you. **Man’s will and nationality have no bearing on our new birth into the family of God; it has nothing to do with human procreation, but it is a supernatural, sovereign work of God himself (13).**

*Children of the heavenly King,
As ye journey, sweetly sing;
Sing your Saviour’s worthy praise,
Glorious in his works and ways.*

(John Cennick)

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us

There are truths here which should cause every Christian to praise and to adore our Lord and Saviour. *The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us* (14). Just think about this for a moment. The Lord Jesus took human flesh with all of its limitations and weaknesses, except that he was sinless (cp. 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26). He knew hunger, thirst, weariness and pain. He is described as ‘*a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*’ (Isaiah 53:3). The truth of the incarnation (Christ’s taking human flesh) is essential to the Christian faith (1 John 4:2–3). **We must always remember, however, that the Lord Jesus did not cease to be God when he took human flesh. He is both God and man.** No one has ever seen God, but the only begotten Son has revealed God to us (18; 14:9).

John the Baptist was a great prophet and was born before Jesus, but he testified that Jesus existed before him (15). The Lord Jesus, the eternal Word, has always existed. The apostle John and his fellow disciples saw the glory of Jesus which was the glory of the only begotten Son of God (cp. 2 Peter 1:16; 1 John 1:1–2). He is full of grace and truth and through him come all the blessings of God’s grace (14,16). *The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ* (17). That grace is truly amazing! The Lord Jesus came into an ungrateful world which did not receive him (11) and he showed his love to the same world when he died on the cross. *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us* – and that flesh was torn apart to save us poor sinners.

*Give me a sight, O Saviour,
Of thy wondrous love to me,
Of the love that brought thee down to earth,
To die on Calvary.*

*O, make me understand it,
Help me to take it in,
What it meant to thee, the Holy One,
To bear away my sin.*

(Katherine A. N. Kelly)

You are not willing to come to me that you may have life

When the Lord Jesus said, ‘*If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true,*’ he was not suggesting that he was an untruthful or an unreliable witness. He is the truth (14:6) and he is sinless (Hebrews 4:15). What he means by this statement is that if he bore witness of himself, his testimony would not be true in their estimation. This was shown later in the attitude of the Pharisees on the occasion when he said, ‘*I am the light of the world.*’ They responded, ‘*You bear witness of yourself; your witness is not true*’ (8:12–13).

The Lord Jesus went on to speak of the threefold witness to his claim to be the Son of God, the Messiah:

- The witness of John the Baptist (32–35). The religious authorities had sent a delegation to John who had testified to the truth concerning the Lord Jesus (1:19–28).
- The witness of his own mighty works which the Father had given him to do (36). Among these miracles was the healing of the man at the pool (1–15).
- The witness of God the Father (37–39). God spoke from heaven at the baptism of Jesus saying, ‘*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*’ (Matthew 3:17). The Father had testified of him through the Old Testament Scriptures (39, 46–47).

Jesus said to these religious Jews who searched the Scriptures, ‘*But you are not willing to come to me that you may have life*’ (40). They stubbornly rebelled against Christ because they did not have the love of God in them (42). They claimed to be disciples of Moses (9:28) who wrote about Christ in the first five books of the Old Testament. If they did not believe the writings of Moses, how would they believe the words of Christ (45–47)?

Those who refuse to come to Christ will have no excuse to plead on the day of judgement. They have refused the eternal life that is only to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

All who are in the graves will hear his voice

The Lord Jesus now gives further teaching on his power to raise the dead and on his authority to judge the world (cp. 21–22). He speaks in these verses of two resurrections – the bringing of dead sinners to spiritual life, and the resurrection of all mankind at his second coming.

When we are born again, we are brought out of a state of spiritual death into life (24; cp. Ephesians 2:1, 5). God freely forgives us our sins and we no longer fear judgement. Spiritual life comes through hearing the voice of the Son of God through his Word. Jesus said, *‘The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live’* (25; cp. Romans 10:17). Preaching is very important for us and must never be neglected in our churches or despised.

*He speaks, and, listening to his voice,
New life the dead receive,
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
The humble poor believe.*

(Charles Wesley)

The Lord Jesus went on to speak of his second coming when he will come with a great shout (1 Thessalonians 4:16) and when all the dead will be raised. He said, *‘All who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation’* (28–29). Everyone who has ever lived will hear his voice, even though they have returned to dust. That voice brings forth life and this is a great miracle (Lazarus, four days dead, heard Christ’s voice and was raised, 11:43–44). **For the Christian Christ’s coming will be glorious indeed!** We shall see our blessed Saviour and we shall have new resurrection bodies that will never know pain, illness or death (Philippians 3:20–21; 1 John 3:2–3). What a wonderful salvation! Can we help but love and praise the Lord?

Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

The ministry of John the Baptist was so powerful that it attracted huge crowds. Many people wondered if he were the Messiah (*‘the Christ’*). John was very careful to point out to the priests and Levites sent by the Pharisees that he was not the Christ; he also denied that he was Elijah or the coming Prophet (19–21, 24). The Jews were expecting Elijah to return to earth (Malachi 4:5). The *‘Prophet’* is another term for the Messiah (Deuteronomy 18:15–18). This great preacher was a very humble man who pointed men away from himself to Christ (15,23, 26–27). When an eastern king visited one of his provinces, a herald would go ahead of him to give the people time to prepare for the coming of the king. John was the herald who called on the people to prepare for the coming of Christ among them.

Bethabara, where John was baptising (28), was also known as Bethany (not to be confused with the better known Bethany by Jerusalem where Jesus often stayed; 12:1). Bethabara beyond the Jordan was about thirteen miles south of the Sea of Galilee on the east of the Jordan. The Lord Jesus came the next day to be baptised and John pointed him out as *‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’* (29). Why did Jesus submit to baptism if it is for sinners who have repented? Baptism is a symbol of identification. Jesus identified himself with sinful mankind by taking human flesh and this is symbolised in his baptism. His baptism also represented the baptism of terrible suffering which he was to suffer in his death as our sacrificial Lamb (cp. Luke 12:50).

John also testified that Jesus *is ‘the Son of God’* who baptises with the Holy Spirit (33–34). This title of Jesus is very significant and proves his equality with God the Father. The Jewish leadership recognised his claim to be equal with God and they hated him for it (5:18). **The almighty Son of God died as a sacrificial Lamb to save sinners. That was John’s message and it is ours too.** The message does not change. Sinful men and women still need to be saved and the only Saviour is the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

We have found the Messiah

John the Baptist pointed his own disciples to the Lord Jesus. Andrew and the other disciple (probably John, who refrained from naming himself throughout his Gospel) then followed Jesus (35–40). An excited Andrew just had to share the news with his brother, Simon, saying to him, ‘*We have found the Messiah*’ (41). Personal testimony is a vital part of witness and though Andrew was not as eminent as his brother among the disciples, it was through his witness that Peter came to Christ.

Jesus found Philip and said to him, ‘*Follow me*’ (43). Philip felt compelled to tell his friend Nathaniel about the Lord Jesus. The new convert’s theology was very defective at this point in time and he described Jesus as ‘*the son of Joseph*’ (45), which he was not. The Lord Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in order to take human flesh (Matthew 1:20). New converts have much to learn and we must be patient with them, but they are still used by the Lord. When Nathaniel expressed his doubts about Jesus, Philip did not argue but said to his friend, ‘*Come and see.*’ Nathaniel was amazed to discover that Jesus knew all about him and his doubts disappeared as he confessed that Jesus was the Son of God (45–49). Nathaniel is called Bartholomew by the other Gospel writers. He is described as one of the disciples (21:1–2) and is linked with Philip in the list of the twelve (Matthew 10:3).

We often say that we have found Christ as our Saviour, but it was Jesus who first found us (43,45). Have you found Jesus? Then follow him (43) in joyful obedience and tell others about him. The closing words of an obituary in a daily newspaper said that a certain man ‘was a good Christian but preferred not to talk about it’. That is surely strange. **If we really love the Lord and have a concern for the lost, we will want to make him known, not only by godly living, but by sharing our good news.**

Making himself equal with God

When the Jews discovered that it was Jesus who had healed the man, they were determined to kill him because he had done these things on the Sabbath (15–16). The opposition to Jesus became more intense after this incident, especially when he spoke of working in partnership with God the Father, as an equal (17).

The Jews clearly understood that Jesus claimed to be equal with God but refused to believe him. *Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was his Father, making himself equal with God* (18; cp. Philippians 2:6). The Lord Jesus answered his enemies by explaining his equality with the Father:

- He has the authority to do all that he sees the Father do (19).
- The Father loves him and shows him all that he does (20; this refers to the work of the Father in his plan of redemption).
- They would see greater works (than the healing of the man at the pool) which would cause them to marvel when he raised the dead (20–21).
- The Father has committed all judgement to the Son who is the Judge of mankind (22).
- All should honour him just as they honour the Father (23). God will not give his glory to anyone else (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11). The implications of this verse are clear.

The Holy Spirit inspired John to write his Gospel so that we would know who Jesus is, and that, believing, we might have life in his name (20:31). **If we honour God the Father then we must also honour his Son, because he is equal with God.**

*Immortal honours rest on Jesus’ head;
My God, my portion and my living bread;
In him I live, upon him cast my care;
He saves from death, destruction and despair.*

(William Gadsby)

Do you want to be made well?

Jesus went to Jerusalem when there was a religious feast and came to the pool of Bethesda (1). A great crowd of sick people were sheltering under the five porches around the pool. They were hoping for a miracle when an angel stirred the waters (2–4). The Lord Jesus singled out a certain man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. He knew all about this man and he asked him, ‘*Do you want to be made well?*’ (5–6). The man recognised his own helplessness (7). Jesus told him to take up his bed (a mat which could be rolled up like a sleeping bag) and to walk. The man was instantly healed (9).

The Jews (probably Pharisees) were angry that Jesus healed the man at the pool on the Sabbath day (9–12). They saw the man carrying his bed and this broke their man-made Sabbath laws. The law against carrying burdens was to do with trading on the Sabbath (cp. Jeremiah 17:19–27). These people lacked compassion and did not share the man’s joy on account of his healing. He did not know that it was Jesus who had healed him until the Saviour sought him out in the temple (14).

There are some important principles to learn from this passage:

- Jesus knows all about you and your needs (6). *We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses ... Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:15–16).
- Just as the man was unable to heal himself we cannot save ourselves from our sin. We are enslaved by our sin (8:34) and can do nothing to save ourselves. We are dead in our sins until God works mightily in our lives through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:1,5,8; Titus 3:5–6). How this should fill us with joy and thanksgiving for the grace of God in our lives (1 Timothy 1:12–14)
- We have no need to be enslaved by sin (8:34–36; Romans 6:14). If you are struggling with sin in your life, do you really want to be delivered from its bondage (6)? Some love their sin and refuse to submit to the Lord Jesus (cp. 3:19). *Do you want to be made well?*

Whatever he says to you, do it

Nathaniel was from Cana in Galilee (21:2) and on the third day after he met the Lord Jesus, there was a wedding in his home town (which was about eight miles north of Nazareth). The presence of the Lord Jesus at this wedding is often mentioned at church wedding ceremonies, but the point of this passage is that it was at this wedding that Jesus performed his first miracle (11). You may have heard fanciful stories about the boy Jesus making birds out of clay and bringing them to life. They are not true; his first miracle was at Cana. John had already written about seeing the glory of the Son of God (1:14) and through this first miracle he *manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him* (11). They began to understand that this was no mere man or prophet that they were following, but the almighty Son of God.

Mary told Jesus that they had run out of wine and Jesus responded by saying, ‘*Woman, what does your concern have to do with me? My hour has not yet come*’ (4). He was not showing any disrespect to Mary in the manner of his response. The way he used the word ‘*woman*’ was tender and loving (cp. 19:26). What does the Lord Jesus mean by the words, ‘*My hour has not yet come*’? He used this expression in relation to his death on the cross and his victory over death. His resurrection was the greatest of all his miracles (cp. 12:23–24,27; 13:1; 17:1). He never lost sight of the fact that he had come to earth to suffer and to die on the cross in order to save sinners.

Mary pointed people to her Son and said to the servants at the wedding, ‘*Whatever he says to you, do it*’ (5). Those servants obeyed Jesus and drew from the waterpots as he had instructed and found that a wonderful miracle had taken place (8–9). Blessing comes through obedience to his Word. Is God challenging you as you read the Bible or through a sermon you have recently heard? *Whatever he says to you, do it*. The glory of Jesus was revealed to his disciples and to the wedding guests through this miracle (11). They needed to see that the Son of Mary was no mere man, but also the Son of God.

But Jesus did not commit himself to them

Jerusalem was crowded at Passover time with up to 2½ million Jews. Every male Jew from the age of twelve was expected to attend the feast which was celebrated to remember God's great deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. A lamb was sacrificed and eaten in the evening (poor people sacrificed two doves) and the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread followed. Those selling sacrificial animals in the court of the temple were rogues who charged outrageous prices. The cheating money-changers also enjoyed a thriving trade because Roman coins were not accepted to pay the temple tax which had to be paid in Jewish currency (Exodus 30:13).

The Lord Jesus was angry at such wicked practices taking place in the name of religion. He drove the animals from the temple and turned over the tables of the money-changers (13–17). This incident which occurred at the beginning of his ministry should not be confused with the cleansing of the temple at the close of his ministry (Matthew 21:12–13). When challenged to give a sign that he had the authority to take such drastic action, the Lord Jesus said, '*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*' (19). The Jews thought that he was referring to Herod's temple which had taken forty-six years to build, but he was speaking about his resurrection. Some of the Jews recalled this saying of Jesus after his death (18–21; cp. Matthew 27:63).

Jesus was challenged to give a sign and he did work miracles that Passover week. *Many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself to them, because he knew all men* (23–24). Jesus knew that the faith of those who believed in him at this Passover was not genuine. The greatest faith does not come through observing miracles or other sensational happenings (cp. Matthew 12:39). True faith is seen in those who recognise their need for forgiveness and who trust in Christ alone to save them. They then forsake their sin and follow the Lord Jesus in glad obedience to his Word. **Does this describe you?**

So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him

If *a prophet has no honour in his own country* (44), why did the Lord Jesus return to Galilee? He was born in Judea, but Galilee was recognised as his country (cp. 1:46). We cannot be certain why he went to Galilee but it was probably to avoid the crowds at this stage of his ministry. William Hendriksen suggests that 'Jesus went to Galilee because here he did not need to fear such honour as would bring him into immediate collision with the Pharisees, creating a premature crisis' (COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, page 179). The Galileans welcomed Jesus as a miracle worker but they did not truly honour him (45,48).

He returned to Cana where a nobleman (perhaps a member of the court of Herod Antipas) came from Capernaum, some twenty miles distant, desperately seeking help (46–47). He may have heard of the miracles of Jesus at Jerusalem (John 2:23) and he needed a miracle for his son. The response of Jesus to the nobleman may have seemed harsh as he pleaded with Jesus to return with him to Capernaum (48–49) but the Lord wanted this man to trust in him. He told him to return home where he would find his son alive and well. *So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him* (50). He had no evidence that his son was well, but he took Jesus at his word, trusting in him. Travel was not easy in those days, and it was the next day before he reached home. His servants met him to announce that his son was indeed well, having recovered the previous evening. The nobleman found that it had been at the precise time that Jesus had said that his son was alive. He and all his household came to faith in Christ (51–53).

It is not easy to take the Lord at his word in times of deep anxiety but we must learn to do this, casting all our care upon him because he does care for us (1 Peter 5:7). Christian, are you beset by doubts or tormented by fear? Are anxious thoughts robbing you of your joy in Christ? Come now to the Lord Jesus and unburden your heart to him. **Trust in him; he cannot fail because he is God.**

Lift up your eyes and look at the fields

The disciples had gone to Sychar to buy food (8) and on returning, they were amazed to find Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman (27). They urged him to eat but he told them that he had food of which they did not know. This food was to do the will of the Father who had sent him into the world, which at this time was to bring the Samaritan woman to salvation. This food gave him nourishment and satisfaction (31–34). The disciples had been in the Samaritan city with their minds set on obtaining food rather than on evangelism. Jesus challenged them, ‘*Do you not say, “There are still four months and then comes the harvest”? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!*’ (35). The harvest for grain may have been four months away but the harvest of precious souls was ready for gathering in now.

The Samaritans came to hear Jesus and many believed in him as ‘*the Christ, the Saviour of the world*’. They urged him to stay with them and he remained at Sychar for two days (39–42). The Lord Jesus had sent his disciples to reap but they did not see the ripened harvest (38). Like them we often miss opportunities to witness to those we meet as we go about our daily business. Let us prayerfully look on the ripened harvest fields and speak to needy souls around us. We will be surprised to find people whose hearts the Spirit of God has prepared to receive our message. The most unlikely people (humanly speaking) are often those who respond to our witness. That is reward enough but there will be eternal rewards not only for those who reap, but also for those who sow and at present see little reward for their labours (36). **Are your eyes on the fields which are ready to be harvested? Are you praying that God will use you to lead sinners to Christ? Do you know how to lead a soul to the Lord Jesus?**

*Lord, speak to me, that I may speak
In living echoes of thy tone;
As thou hast sought, so let me seek
Thy erring children, lost and lone.* (Frances R. Havergal)

You must be born again

The work of the Trinity is displayed in the salvation of sinners. In John chapter 3 we see the love of God the Father (16–17), the sacrifice of God the Son (16) and the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing us to new birth (5,8; cp. Titus 3:5).

Nicodemus, a respected Jewish teacher, came to see the Lord Jesus at night to find out more about him. He discovered some very important truths that night. He learned that being religious does not guarantee a place in heaven. Jesus told him that to enter the kingdom of God a person had to be born again. Why must we be born again?

- Because of our sinful human nature. We are *born of the flesh* (6) and we are all sinners by nature; *those who are in the flesh cannot please God* (Romans 3:23; 8:8).
- Because of our spiritual blindness. *Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God* (3).
- Because our eternal destiny depends upon it. *Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God* (5). To be in the kingdom of God means to have eternal life and inexpressible joy. To be out of the kingdom means to perish, having the wrath of God upon us (16,36). **On the day of judgement those who are not born again will wish that they had never been born at all!**

There is good reason to believe that Nicodemus became a follower of Christ. His attitude to the Lord Jesus in the face of hostile Jewish leaders (7:50–52) and the fact that he assisted Joseph of Arimathea in the burial of Jesus (19:38–42) indicate that he became a Christian.

The new spiritual birth is vital for salvation (‘*must*’, 7). Have you been born again? *You must be born again* (7).

NB. Some Bible commentators believe that ‘*born of water*’ (5) refers to baptism, but they do not suggest that baptism is essential to salvation. They point out that the expression ‘*born of the Spirit*’ stands alone in verses 6 and 8. I believe that water is used here as a symbol of the Word of God (see Ephesians 5:26).

Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up

The Lord Jesus used the wind as an illustration of the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in bringing sinners to new birth (regeneration). We can hear the wind, but we cannot see it nor handle it. Just as *the wind blows where it wishes*, the Holy Spirit works as he sovereignly pleases (8). Nicodemus could not understand this though he was a great teacher in Israel (10; *‘the teacher of Israel’*). The Bible declares, *The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him* (1 Corinthians 2:14). A man may be very religious or he may have a great intellect, but unless he is born again, he is in spiritual darkness. Nicodemus twice asked, *‘How?’* (4,9). He did not understand the Old Testament prophecies which speak of the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation (Jeremiah 31:33–34; Ezekiel 36:26).

Nicodemus did not believe because he lacked understanding (10–12). The new birth is vital for salvation (*‘must’*, 7) and so is the death of Christ for sinners. *Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up* (14). Jesus reminded Nicodemus of the time when Israel rebelled against Moses and against God in the wilderness. The Lord punished them by sending poisonous serpents among the people and many died from the venom of these snakes. The others confessed their sin and begged Moses to pray for them. God told Moses to make a serpent of brass and lift it up on a pole in the camp of Israel. All those who had been bitten were told to look at the serpent and those who did so were saved from death (Numbers chapter 21).

Our sin is like deadly poison which will bring death and destruction to us (Romans 6:23). The Lord Jesus came down from heaven and was lifted up on the cross in order to save us. There can be no salvation without the new birth and without the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ for sinners. Are you trusting in Jesus alone to save you from your sins?

Those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth

The Samaritan woman misunderstood Jesus (just as Nicodemus had done) and thought that he had some kind of water that once taken would quench her thirst for ever and do away with the need to draw and carry water (15). People often misunderstand our message but we must persevere. The Lord Jesus now told the woman to fetch her husband. When she denied having a husband, Jesus amazed her by revealing that he knew all about her immoral lifestyle (16–18). This embarrassed the woman and she started to talk about religion in general. Was he a prophet? Where should we worship God, *‘on this mountain’* (Gerizim, cp. Deuteronomy 27:11–12) or in Jerusalem (19–21)?

The Lord Jesus told the woman, *‘You worship what you do not know’* (22). The Samaritans did not know God and were ignorant in their worship of him. There are many millions of worshippers in the world who do not worship the only true God who is revealed in the Bible. Though salvation is of the Jews, God the Father seeks true worshippers (19–23). Jesus said to the woman, *‘God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth’* (24). Spiritual worship does not require special places of pilgrimage or magnificent temples; it comes from a heart which loves and adores God, and is obedient to his Word. Spiritual worship is in truth as it is set forth in Scripture. We can only come to God the Father through Jesus Christ (14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5). There are no other ‘mediators’ such as Mary or the saints. We are not at liberty to worship with those who claim that there are other ways to come to God apart from Jesus, our great Mediator.

The astonished woman confessed that she knew that the coming Messiah would tell them all things (and Jesus had done this in her case). Jesus replied that he was that very Person (25–26). She forgot about water and on the arrival of the disciples hurried back to Sychar, saying to the men, *‘Come, see a man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’* (27–30). **She discovered the surpassing greatness of our Lord and Saviour. Have you?**

Living water

The ministry of Jesus was having a great impact in Judea and the reason that he left for Galilee (1–3) may have been to avoid further conflict with the Pharisees (this was to come later, according to God’s timetable). Moreover, *he needed to go through Samaria* (4). The most direct route to Galilee from Judea was through Samaria but Jesus had another reason for going through Samaria. There were people in that city to bring to faith in himself. Most Jews despised Samaritans who were a mixed race of Jew and Gentile. Their religion was mixed too, though they acknowledged the first five books of the Bible; they also looked for the Messiah (25). When the enemies of Jesus wanted to insult him, they called him ‘a Samaritan’ (8:48).

We tend to complain that people are very unresponsive to the gospel. They are completely indifferent to our ‘good news’. We soon become discouraged and remain silent, excusing ourselves that personal witnessing is ‘not our ministry’. Never lose sight of the fact that the Lord often works in wonderful and surprising ways. Who would have imagined that this immoral Samaritan woman would respond to the gospel?

We often struggle to open up a conversation so that we can bring the gospel with sinners, but Jesus was so natural. Resting from his journey, the Lord asked the woman for a drink of water (6–7). This surprised the woman, for no Jew would drink from a container used by Gentiles. Jesus then aroused her curiosity by speaking of the ‘*gift of God*’ and of ‘*living water*’ (which the woman took to mean fresh spring water). She wondered how he could obtain such ‘*living water*’ from such a deep well; could this stranger be greater than Jacob (9–12)?

Jesus told the woman that the water from the well could only satisfy for a time, ‘*but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst*’ (14). **There can be no lasting satisfaction in this restless world apart from that given by Christ, and with it, he gives everlasting life.**

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son

Nicodemus may have been very surprised to hear that he, a devout Jew, needed to be born again. He must also have been puzzled that the Son of Man, the Messiah from God, must be lifted up to die in order to save sinners (14–15). He was now to learn about the amazing love of God.

In his first letter John makes a statement about the nature of God: ‘*God is love*’ (1 John 4:8). Here in his Gospel he makes a statement about the love of God in action. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life* (16). This is often the very first Bible verse that we memorise after we are saved. God did not spare his beloved Son, but punished him for our sins (Isaiah 53:4,10; Romans 8:32). What wonderful love!

The Jews were expecting Messiah to come to punish all their enemies, but Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but to bring salvation (17). God’s love was not restricted to the Jews. He loved the world and gave his Son to save sinners from all nations. What a glorious message we have to declare! Whoever believes (trusts) in the Lord Jesus, whether he is a Jew or a Gentile, has everlasting life.

Verse 18 contains a very solemn statement: Jesus said, ‘*He who does not believe is condemned already.*’ Why do so many refuse to trust in Christ? It is because they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil and they hate the light (19–20). Men and women refuse to believe in Christ because they love their sin. If you have not come to the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness, if you have not repented of your sin, if you have not trusted in him to save you, may these solemn words drive you to call upon the Saviour. *He who does not believe is condemned already.* **Why choose condemnation when in Christ you can enjoy everlasting life? Come to the Lord Jesus and you will be able to sing with rejoicing in your heart:**

*No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him is mine!*

(Charles Wesley)

He must increase, but I must decrease

After leaving Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples went to the Judean countryside where they baptised new disciples (22; cp. 4:1–2). John the Baptist was at the same time baptising near Aenon which was a few miles south-west of Bethabara on the west bank of the Jordan (23). The ministry of John the Baptist continued to run parallel with that of the Lord Jesus until it was brought to a close by his imprisonment and death (24). We are not told why some of John's disciples were arguing with the Jews about purification (25). It may have been that the Jews were taunting them about the disciples of Jesus baptising more people than John. They were upset to see the ministry of their leader eclipsed and they went to him and complained (26).

John told his disciples that no one can receive anything unless it has been given him from heaven; in other words, he had been given his ministry by God. He again reminded them that he had testified that he was not the Christ, but had been sent ahead of him (27–28). When the Bridegroom (Christ) calls the bride (his people) to himself, the friend (John) rejoices. John knew that his ministry was coming to its end, but he rejoiced at the fulfilment of his mission (29). He declared, '*He must increase, but I must decrease*' (30). In using the word '*must*' John was indicating that the increasing success of the ministry of Jesus was according to God's eternal plan. He knew that he would fade into the background and that the work of the Lord Jesus would far surpass his own ministry.

Let us learn not to murmur when others are blessed in God's service, while we struggle with discouragement. When God gives us work to do, let us persevere, and trust him to bless that work. We must always seek to glorify Christ in our lives and in our work for him. **We should have the same aim as John the Baptist: *He must increase, but I must decrease.***

He who comes from above is above all

John told his disciples concerning the Lord Jesus, '*He must increase, but I must decrease*' (30). He rejoiced that the multitudes were now following the King whose way he had prepared. He said of Jesus, '*He who comes from above is above all*' and again he said, '*He who comes from heaven is above all*'. (31; cp. verse 13). The Lord Jesus is more than a prophet, he is the holy Son of God who came down from heaven. He is above the herald who told the people of his coming. John had an earthly origin and spoke '*of the earth*'. John was frail and sinful, though God did speak through him. The Lord Jesus, by contrast, is perfect and sinless.

The message that we must proclaim is that Christ *is above all*. He is '*the only begotten Son of God*' (18). He is described as being '*the brightness of his (God the Father's) glory and the express image of his Person*' (Hebrews 1:3). We have already seen that *he was in the beginning with God* and that *all things were made through him* (1:1–3; cp. Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:10). Christ *is above all* because the Father loves him and *has given all things into his hand* (35; cp. Matthew 28:18). Christ *is above all* because he is *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (1:29). The message of the love of God, who gave his beloved Son to die for sinners is wonderful (3:16).

John testified about Jesus who came down from heaven, *and no one receives his testimony* (31–32). John did not mean that everyone rejected his testimony, but that most people did so. The vast majority today continue to reject Christ and they do so at their peril. This chapter, which contains perhaps the most wonderful verse in Scripture concerning the love of God (3:16) closes with a solemn warning about the wrath of God. *He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him* (36). **Only the Lord Jesus is able to save sinners. Those who refuse to trust in him have the wrath of God hanging over them. They are condemned and have no hope (19)!**