

31 MAY

John 15:1–17

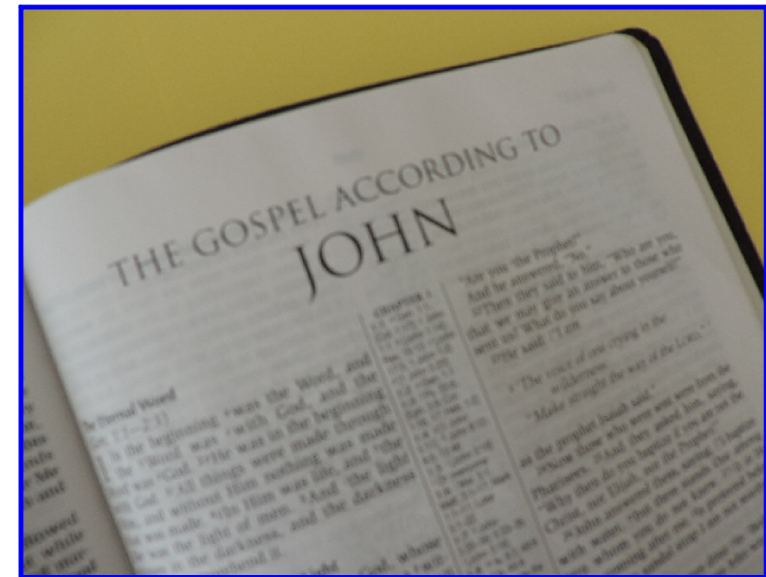
You are my friends if you do whatever I command you

The vine was used as a symbol of Israel by the Old Testament prophets (eg. Isaiah 5:1–7; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 19:10–14), but Jesus here describes himself as the *'true vine'* and the Father as the *'vine-dresser'* (1). Remember, Jesus was speaking during or immediately following the Last Supper when the fruit of the vine was on the table (cp. Matthew 26:29). Christians are described as *'branches'* (5). Just as branches derive their nourishment from the tree, we must abide (dwell) in Christ. The wonderful consequences of abiding in the Lord Jesus are:

- Bearing *much fruit* to the glory of God (8). He nourishes us and without him we can do nothing (5). Fruit trees need to be pruned and the Father prunes the branches so that they bear *more fruit* (2). He does this through his Word which we must receive by faith and apply to our lives (3). God also uses testing and trial to cut away the dross in our lives and it is a painful process. If you are being tried or tested, be encouraged that God is preparing you for greater fruitfulness in the Christian life.
- The blessing of answered prayer (7,16; see notes on chapter 14:12–24).
- Great joy from the Lord Jesus (11; cp. Romans 14:17; 1 Peter 1:6,8).
- Love for Christ and for one another (9–12,17; cp. 13:35). He expects us to love one another as he has loved us. How has he loved us? He laid down his life for his friends in order to save them (13). Jesus says, *'You are my friends if you do whatever I command you'* (14). Are you eager to obey the Lord and prompt to follow his Word? The One who created the universe is our precious Friend. His friendship gives us confidence in prayer because the Father delights in his Son's friends as they glorify him by fruitful lives (7–8,16). **His friendship also brings us lasting joy (11) and this joy glows in the darkest night of trial and suffering.**

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



May 2018

Bible readings from The Gospel of John chapters 7 to 15

You will seek me and not find me

When Jesus began to teach at the feast, he became involved in debate with three groups of people:

- *The Jews* (the Jewish leaders) who included the Pharisees and chief priests (11,13–19,21–24,32–36). Most of the chief priests were Sadducees. They marvelled at the knowledge of Jesus, but despised him because he had not studied in any of their great seats of learning (15). They rejected Christ's teaching and since the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath, they had sought to kill him (1; cp. 5:16). Jesus showed here just how inconsistent they were; they circumcised their male children eight days after their birth, even if that day was a Sabbath (Leviticus 12:1–3). If circumcision was permitted on the Sabbath, why not healing (22–23)?
- *The people* who were pilgrims visiting Jerusalem for the feast. They were divided in their opinion of Jesus (12,31–32) and were unaware of the plot to kill him. Some of them thought that Jesus was demon-possessed (20).
- *Some of them from Jerusalem* who rejected Christ because they could see no further than his humanity and would not accept that he had come from heaven (25–27).

Jesus taught in the temple and many believed in him, being convinced that he was the promised Messiah (28–31). The Pharisees and chief priests sent officers to arrest Jesus, but this failed because his time had not yet come (30,32). Jesus uttered solemn words to the unbelieving Jews, '*You will seek me and not find me, and where I am you cannot come*' (34). They misunderstood his words; he was of course speaking of his going to be with the Father (cp. 14:3) but they wondered if he were intending to preach to the Jews scattered throughout the Middle-East ('*the Dispersion*'). **There are many who misunderstand the message of the gospel, but others do believe and respond to the Word of God; this should always encourage us in our work and witness for the Lord.**

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Peace I leave with you ... let not your heart be troubled

The Lord Jesus promised the disciples that the Father would send the Holy Spirit in his name. The Spirit would be their Teacher and he would bring to their remembrance the things spoken by Jesus (25–26). How were the Gospel writers able to accurately record all that Jesus had said and done? The Holy Spirit brought these things to their remembrance. Humanly speaking, they could not have possibly have recalled all these things. When Jesus said, '*My Father is greater than I*' (28), he was not implying that he is inferior to God. He is fully equal with God the Father as the only begotten Son, but as Man he is the Mediator between God and men. He became the obedient Servant to the Father, obeying his will (4:34; Philippians 2:6–11).

Jesus again encouraged the disciples with a promise of peace, '*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*' (27). The word '*troubled*' means 'agitated' and is the same word translated '*stirred up*' concerning the water at the pool of Bethesda (5:7). When a person dies, he may leave his possessions to relatives or friends. A large legacy could bring financial security, but what is that compared to the legacy that Jesus has left? He has left us his precious peace which surpasses all human understanding. 'The smile of the world cannot give it, nor the frown of the world take it away' (Matthew Henry).

We have peace with God *through the blood of his cross* (Colossians 1:20). Having peace with God (Romans 5:1) leads us to knowing the peace of God in our lives (Philippians 4:7; Colossians 3:15). Satan will do everything possible to rob us of our peace because he wants us to be miserable and miserable Christians do not glorify God. **Are you troubled and fearful? Read Philippians 4:6–7 and trust in God. He will never fail you.**

*O what peace we often forfeit!
O what needless pain we bear!
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.* (Joseph M. Scriven)

If you love me, keep my commandments

There are some wonderful promises in our reading today but we also face problems associated with understanding them. Jesus is quite emphatic in his promises (*'most assuredly, I say to you, etc.'*), but is he really saying that we will have the ability to perform outstanding miracles such as raising the dead, or that he will give us anything that we ask for in prayer (12–14)? The disciples were full of fear, wondering what would happen to them when Jesus went away. He assured them that he would continue his work through them. Miracle-working was a sign of apostleship (2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3–4) and was not open to every Christian in the early church. Prayer must always be according to God's will to be answered (15:7; cp. 1 John 5:14). God said, 'No' to a request of the apostle Paul because he had greater purposes for him (2 Corinthians 12:7–10).

Jesus was going away, but he promised that he would not leave the disciples as orphans. He would pray to the Father for them and he would give them another *Helper*, the Holy Spirit (16–18). Though the world would not be able to see Jesus after his ascension to the Father, he promised that the disciples would see him (spiritually) and that he would be in them and they in him (19–20). Christians are described in the New Testament as being *'in Christ'* (eg. 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Jesus challenges us, *'If you love me, keep my commandments'* (15). Our obedience to the Word of God is an evidence that we love him (21). There is a wonderful promise here, *'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'* God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, dwell within all who love him and obey him (18, 23). **How is your life before God? Are you doing everything to make him feel at home in your heart?**

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink

On each of the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, a priest filled a golden pitcher with water taken from the pool of Siloam. He then led a solemn procession to the temple where he poured out the water onto the base of the altar of burnt offering. The people sang, *'Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation'* (Isaiah 12:3). The tragedy of the Jewish religion was that it had degenerated into a barren, lifeless affair. We have already seen how many of those at the feast scorned and rejected the Lord Jesus, but on the last day he stood and cried out, *'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink'* (37).

When Jesus offered *'living water'* (38; cp. 4:10,14), he was speaking about the Holy Spirit who was to be given to every believer after he was glorified (risen and ascended into heaven, 39). Notice that every believer receives the Holy Spirit. He *helps in our weaknesses* and prays for us (Romans 8:26). He empowers us for our Christian life and witness (Acts 1:8) and guides us into all truth (John 16:13).

The people were divided in their opinion of Jesus and some wanted him to be arrested (40–44). How sad that they failed to recognise their own spiritual need, that they refused the living water which alone could give lasting satisfaction. **You may be very religious and yet know nothing of the reality of Christ in your life. Do not be like those who here rejected the Saviour. Come to him, trust in him to save you from your sins, drink, and live!**

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Behold, I freely give
The living water — thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live!'
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in him.*

(Horatius Bonar)

No man ever spoke like this man!

Those who rejected Christ knew that the promised Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. They were ignorant of the fact that this was the birthplace of Jesus because he had spent most of his earthly life in Galilee (40–42). The Pharisees and chief priests were most annoyed when the officers sent to arrest Jesus returned empty-handed and they asked why this was so (32). The officers replied, ‘*No man ever spoke like this man!*’ (45–46; cp. Matthew 7:28–29; Luke 4:22). They recognised that Jesus was more than a mere man. They had been so captivated by his gracious words and the authority with which he spoke that they were powerless to arrest him.

The hardened Pharisees asked if they too had been deceived, pointing out that none of the rulers or Pharisees had believed in Jesus. Little did they know that the Lord was dealing with Nicodemus. In their pride, they referred to the visiting pilgrims as being ignorant of the law and said that they were accursed. Nicodemus pointed out that it was unlawful to *judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing* (47–51). They turned on him, scornfully asking if he too were a Galilean (52). God was graciously working in the heart of Nicodemus who had not forgotten his visit to Jesus at night (3:1–2). He later assisted Joseph of Arimathea in the burial of Jesus (19:38–39). Most of the other Pharisees had closed minds. **There’s none so blind as those who refuse to see, but God is able to give them spiritual sight.**

*O what amazing words of grace
Are in the gospel found,
Suited to every sinner’s case
Who knows the joyful sound.*

*Come, then, with all your wants and wounds,
Your every burden bring:
Here love, unchanging love, abounds,
A deep, celestial spring.*

(Samuel Medley)

Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known me?

The eleven disciples were full of foreboding and fear, though Peter in a fit of bravado had indicated his willingness to lay down his life for his Master. Jesus warned Peter that he would deny him three times (13:36–38). Though Gethsemane and Calvary were only hours away, the Lord Jesus was more concerned for his troubled disciples than for himself. He reassured them, urging them to believe (trust) in him (1). He told them that he was going to prepare a place for them in his Father’s house and that he would come again and receive them to him so that they would be with him for ever (1–3).

Jesus had told the disciples, ‘*Where I am going, you cannot come*’ (13:33). He was going back home to the Father and he was leaving them to serve him here on earth. He reminded them, ‘*And where I go you know, and the way you know*’ (4) but Thomas misunderstood him. He claimed that he did not know where Jesus was going and how could they know the way? Jesus said to him, ‘*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*’ (6). We must have this verse fixed in our hearts in these confusing days. Jesus is the only way to the Father, the only way to heaven. No other mediators are acceptable, whether Mary or saints (1 Timothy 2:5). No other religion will do. There is no salvation apart from Jesus (Acts 4:12).

Philip wanted to see the Father, but Jesus gently rebuked him, ‘*Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father*’ (8–9). Jesus is God! He spoke on the authority of the Father and his works were done by the Father who dwelt in him (10–11; cp. 10:38). **Some of us may have been Christians for many years and yet have little experiential knowledge of the Lord. We must never be satisfied with a second-rate Christianity, but be determined to seek to know him better (cp. Philippians 3:8–10; Colossians 1:9–10).** Do you hunger and thirst after God and his righteousness (Matthew 5:6)?

As I have loved you ... you also love one another

The Lord Jesus told Judas Iscariot, ‘*What you do, do quickly*’ (27). Once Judas had left on his deadly errand of betrayal, Jesus said, ‘*Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in him*’ (31). He said that God would glorify him *immediately* (32). Jesus was shortly to go to Gethsemane where he would be arrested, then to Calvary the next day, when he would be crucified. He tenderly addressed them as ‘*little children*’, telling them that he would only be with them *a little while longer* and that they could not go where he was going just as he had told the Jews on a previous occasion (33; cp. 7:34). He was going to heaven; the Jews could not go with him to the Father and the disciples could not go with him. They had work to do on earth until he called them to be with him in glory.

At the Last Supper Jesus told the disciples that the cup represented his blood of the new covenant shed for many for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28). The new covenant also brings a new commandment. Jesus said, ‘*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another*’ (34). The New Testament repeats this commandment again and again (15:12,17; Ephesians 4:32 to 5:2; 1 John 2:9–11; 3:10–23; 4:7–11,20–21). It is a sad fact that Christian love is often lacking in our lives. We must love all Christians, not just those whom we find easy to love.

We must not pay mere lip service to loving one another. Love is patient and shows itself in practical deeds of kindness. Love in action means taking on the humble, the unnoticed, the self-sacrificing tasks. 1 John 3:16 is as important as John 3:16! The Word of God urges us, ‘*Love one another fervently with a pure heart*’ (1 Peter 1:22). Read and think about 1 Corinthians, chapter 13. Ask the Lord to give you grace to love every believer known to you. Repent of any proud, awkward, selfish or thoughtless attitudes that make it difficult for other Christians to love you. **Love is the badge of Christian discipleship (35). If Christian love is absent from our lives, our religion is a sham.**

Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more

Some Bible scholars cast doubt on the authenticity of this passage of John’s Gospel because it is not found in some of the early New Testament manuscripts. I agree with William Hendriksen who argues that this is indeed inspired Scripture which ‘fits very well into the present context’ (COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, volume 2, page 34).

The day after the end of the feast Jesus returned to the temple to teach. The scribes and Pharisees brought to him a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They reminded him that according to the law of Moses, she should be stoned to death (2–5). We may wonder why they did not also bring the man, because the law required that both guilty parties be put to death (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22). If Jesus had said that she should be spared they would have accused him of denying the law of Moses (6).

Jesus pretended not to hear them and stooped down to write on the ground (we have no idea what he was writing; any speculation is futile). His agitated enemies pressed him for an answer and rising up, he said, ‘*He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first*’ (7; the law required the accuser to cast the first stone – Deuteronomy 17:7). Jesus returned to his writing and his enemies, smitten in conscience, crept away one by one (8–9).

Seeing that there was no one left to accuse the woman, Jesus said to her, ‘*Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more*’ (11). Some people use this verse to justify their sinful ways, conveniently forgetting that though Jesus freely forgives repentant sinners, they must also cease their sinful lifestyle. We must also guard ourselves from hypocrisy (Luke 12:1) and remember that we too are sinners. Those proud Pharisees were heartless but Jesus said on another occasion, ‘*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*’ (Matthew 5:7). **Are you as ready to forgive those who have sinned against you as you may be to condemn them?**

I am the light of the world

Pilgrims to the Feast of Tabernacles lived in booths made from tree branches to commemorate God's care of their forefathers in the wilderness journey when they were guided by the pillar of fire. The temple was also illumined by large candlesticks to remind them of this guiding light. They failed to recognise that there was a far greater light among them at this feast. Jesus said, *'I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life'* (12). To follow Jesus is to trust in him and to obey him.

The Pharisees rejected the claims of Jesus who told them that his witness was true and that the Father also bore witness of him. When they asked, *'Where is your Father?'* they were probably thinking of Joseph. They were in darkness and did not know Jesus or God the Father (13–19, 27). Jesus told them that they could not come to the place where he was going (heaven), but they again misunderstood him and thought that he was going to kill himself. They knew that suicide is sinful and they could not imagine going with Jesus to judgement (21–22). They wrongly presumed that they were right with God.

The Lord Jesus told the Jews that he was from above and not of this world, whereas they were from beneath and of this world (23). He told them, *'If you do not believe that I am he, you will die in your sins'* (24). The word *'he'* is shown in italics (AV and NKJV) indicating that it is not in the original Greek. *'I am'* is the covenant name of Jehovah (see notes on verse 58). Jesus was again claiming to be God when he said, *'If you do not believe that I am.'* If we refuse to believe this we will die in our sins. To die in our sins means to be shut out of heaven and to go to that dreadful place of everlasting darkness known as hell. (cp. Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 2 Peter 2:17). Jesus said that he would be lifted up, speaking of his crucifixion (28). He died to save us from our sins; it is foolish to reject him. **If you do not follow the light of the world, you are walking in darkness and everlasting darkness will be your destiny. Oh, trust in him now! Choose light; choose life; choose heaven.**

He then went out immediately. And it was night

The disciples were shocked to hear Jesus say that one of them would betray him (18–21). They looked at each other in amazement and perplexity before Peter whispered to John who was reclining next to Jesus. He asked John to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking (22–24). Jesus indicated that it was the one to whom he offered a piece of bread after dipping it into one of the vessels which contained bitter herbs, vinegar and salt, or one containing a sauce made from mashed fruit (which was used in the Passover feast).

Sin begins in the human heart (cp. Matthew 15:18–20) which the devil seeks to use as a garden in which to sow all manner of wicked deeds. Satan put it into the heart of Judas to betray his Lord (2). Judas was a willing recipient of the devil's wicked whispers and we read that after Jesus gave Judas the bread, *Satan entered him* (25–27). Having received the piece of bread, Judas *went out immediately. And it was night* (30). What frightening words! It was also night in the soul of Judas!

If *Jesus knew from the beginning ... who would betray him* (6:64), why did he choose Judas to be one of the twelve? Dr. Joseph Parker, a famous preacher in the 19th century, replied to that question, 'I have a greater puzzle than that: it is why did Jesus choose me?' Judas had been a close companion of Jesus and he had preached and healed the sick (Mark 6:12–13), but he was not a genuine believer. He was a lost soul who took his own life. **Appearances may deceive men but they do not deceive God!**

*Pause, my soul! and ask the question,
Art thou ready to meet God?
Am I made a real Christian,
Washed in the Redeemer's blood?
Have I union
With the church's living Head?*

(William Gadsby)

If you know these things, happy are you if you do them

The roads in Palestine were covered in thick layers of dust in dry weather which became muddy in wet weather. The sandals worn by most people did not protect the feet from the dirt picked up when they walked on these roads. In wealthy homes a slave washed the feet of guests. There was no slave at the Last Supper and none of the disciples volunteered to undertake this demeaning task. They were more interested in arguing about which one of them was the greatest than in doing the work of a slave (Luke 22:24–27). Jesus, who had all authority from the Father, rose up and put on the slave's apron and washed the feet of each of his disciples (3–5). We can be sure that Peter was not the only disciple to be embarrassed (6).

Why was Jesus so willing to wash his disciples' feet? He knew that he was about to go home to the Father who *had given all things into his hands* (1,3). He had all authority but he willingly performed the menial task of washing the feet of his disciples because *he loved them to the end* (1; Hendriksen translates this verse, 'he loved them to the uttermost.'). They were about to sit at the Last Supper which pointed to an even greater and more amazing act of his love, his death on the cross to save sinners.

He loved us so much that he humbled himself, taking the form of a servant (a slave). He was obedient to the Father's will, even to going to his death (Philippians 2:7–8). If he has won our hearts, we will want to obey him (14:15). He has given us an example which he wants us to follow. He wants us to humbly serve one another (12–16). **Are you willing to work in the church without seeking attention? Are you willing to serve faithfully without fuss or complaint? Will you deny yourself to help and to serve your fellow Christians and the unsaved?** We must *through love serve one another* (Galatians 5:13). Jesus said, '*If you know these things, happy are you if you do them*' (17). How are you doing?

If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed

Some of those who heard the Lord Jesus professed their belief in him, but he told them that their discipleship would be proved by abiding in his word (in other words, being obedient to his word). They would know the truth and the truth would make them free. Their attitude changed as they retorted that they were Abraham's descendants who had never been in bondage to anyone. How then could Jesus say, '*You will be made free*' (30–33)? They had forgotten that Abraham's descendants had suffered bondage in Egypt and in Babylon, and that they themselves were at that time under the yoke of Rome. The Lord Jesus was speaking of spiritual bondage, however, slavery to sin.

The sinner believes that he is free, but he is enslaved by sin. Jesus told them, '*If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed*' (34–36). One of the Christian's great privileges is to be free from the bondage of sin. He will not be perfect until he reaches heaven, but sin is no longer his master (Romans 6:14).

Jesus acknowledged their descent from Abraham, but those who desired to kill the Son of God could hardly claim spiritual descent from that great man of faith (37–40). Jesus said that they were doing the deeds of their father and they retorted that they were not born out of wedlock (some Jews considered Jesus to be the illegitimate son of Mary). They then claimed that God was their Father but Jesus told them that this was not true because they did not love his Son nor did they believe in him. Their father was the devil who was *a murderer from the beginning* and the father of lies (41–45). They were showing the family likeness. The Bible does not teach the universal fatherhood of God. We can only call God our Father if we are born again; we will then love the truth as it is revealed in his precious Word. **If God is our Father, we will want to please him. Do we love him? Are we aiming to please him each day?**

Before Abraham was, I AM

The Jews listening to Jesus were unable to grasp spiritual truth and they hated him. They insulted him by calling him ‘a Samaritan’ (a terrible insult to a Jew) and even more by suggesting that he was demon-possessed (48). The Lord Jesus replied, ‘*I do not have a demon; but I honour my Father, and you dishonour me.*’ He further angered them by telling them that those who kept (trusted and obeyed) his word would never see death. In other words they would have eternal life (49–51). They retorted angrily that he must have a demon to make such a claim. Abraham was dead and so were the prophets; who did he think that he was? Jesus replied that the Father, whom they claimed to be their God, honoured him (52–54).

He told them that Abraham rejoiced to see his day (God had told Abraham that from the line of his son Isaac, would come the One through whom all nations would be blessed; 56; cp. Genesis 22:18; Revelation 7:9–10). The puzzled Jews asked (probably in a sarcastic manner) whether he, who was less than fifty years old, had seen Abraham (57).

The Lord Jesus began his reply by saying, ‘*Most assuredly*’ (AV – ‘*Verily, verily*’ found twenty-five times in the Gospel of John). The Greek words are ‘Amen, amen’ and are derived from the Hebrew word meaning ‘truth’. They are used to confirm and emphasise the truth of what is being said. When the Lord Jesus uses this expression, we must sit up and take notice! He told his astonished listeners, ‘*Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM*’ (58). He applied the covenant name of God to himself (see Exodus 3:14). He was claiming to be no less than the eternal God, the self-existent Being-One. The Jews realised the implication of these words and took up stones to throw at him as a blasphemer (which he would have been, had he been any less than God).

Jesus is God – Let us worship him!

They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God

The Greeks wanted to see Jesus (21) but their great need was for spiritual sight. Though he had done many miracles, many people rejected him because of their spiritual blindness, of which Isaiah had prophesied (37–41). Spiritual sight is necessary if we are to trust the Lord Jesus, accept his teaching and walk in God’s light (44, 46). If we reject Jesus, the word we scorned will accuse us in the day of judgement (47–48). John again points us to the fact that Jesus is God. Isaiah’s vision of the glory of the Lord (Jehovah; Isaiah 6:1–5) was a vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus (41).

Who were the rulers among the Pharisees who believed in Jesus (42)? Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were secret believers (3:1–10; 7:50–52; 19:38–40) and there were others. They may have been John’s source of information about the discussions which took place among the Jewish leaders (eg. 11:47–53). The action of Nicodemus and Joseph in burying Jesus would have identified them as his followers. They did not remain secret believers.

Why are so many of us secretive about our faith in Christ at our place of work or among our neighbours? Why are we so reluctant to share the best news in the world? Is it because we are like those early secret disciples who *loved the praise of men more than the praise of God* (43)? We all want to be accepted; that is natural. Only fanatics delight in antagonising people, but we must never seek the praise of men at the cost of denying Christ. Joseph and Nicodemus stood to lose far more than most of us when they confessed Christ (42). **Are we ashamed of Jesus who loves us and died for us? That should be unthinkable!**

*Ashamed of Jesus! that dear Friend,
On whom my hopes of heaven depend?
No! when I blush, be this my shame,
That I no more revere his name.*

(James Grigg)

Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say?

The Lord Jesus was deeply troubled as he approached his death on the cross. Many martyrs have calmly faced death but his death was far more than the death of a martyr. He felt the massive burden of the guilt of the sins of his people which were imputed to him (put to his account) in order for him to save them through his death. He said, ‘*Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? “Father, save me from this hour”? But for this purpose I came to this hour*’ (27). The same anguish was also apparent in Gethsemane (Luke 22:39–44). Jesus did not ask to be saved from suffering but that the Father would glorify his own name. The name of the Father reveals his character and in giving his beloved Son to die for sinners, he shows the greatness and the marvel of his wondrous love. He is worthy of honour and worship.

The Father answered him from heaven saying, ‘*I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.*’ Those around Jesus thought that they had either heard thunder or the voice of an angel (28–29). Jesus told them that God had spoken not for his own sake, but for their sake. They had yet more evidence that Jesus had come from the God the Father to do his holy will (30).

Jesus went on to speak of his death, signifying that he would be crucified. He said, ‘*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to myself*’ (31–32). People from all nations (such as the Greeks who had requested to see him) would be drawn to him, and Satan, the ruler of this world, would be cast out. He died a wretched death in shame, weakness and intense agony but his death was a great victory.

The people listening to Jesus were puzzled. They could not understand how the Christ (the Messiah) could die. They were expecting a conquering King, not a dying Saviour (34). He urged them to believe in the light while they had the opportunity so that they would become *sons of light* (35–36). **Are you walking in light or in darkness?**

So I went and washed, and I received my sight

When the disciples saw the blind man they speculated on the cause of his blindness (2). We know that the reason for suffering and sickness is sin, either:–

- The consequences of Adam’s sin (Genesis 3:17–19; Romans 5:12–19; 8:20–23; 1 Corinthians 15:21).
- Sins of parents (Exodus 20:5; 34:7).
- Our own sins (Deuteronomy 28:15–68; Jeremiah 31:30).

The disciples were influenced by Jewish thinking which tended to look for the causes of suffering in the last two areas rather than as a result of the fall of Adam (cp. Luke 13:2–5). The man’s condition prompted a theological debate, but where was their compassion?

The Lord Jesus was moved by the poor man’s plight and healed him, sending him first to wash the clay from his eyes at the pool of Siloam. Water from the pool had been taken each day in solemn procession to the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles, but the pool now had a greater significance for the beggar. It was there that he had received his sight *and came back seeing* (7). His neighbours and others who had known the man were amazed to see him with his sight and asked him how this had happened (8–10). He replied that it was ‘*a Man called Jesus*’ who had made clay and had anointed his eyes, before telling him to wash in the pool of Siloam. He had a clear testimony of obedience to the Lord – ‘*So I went and washed, and I received my sight*’ (11). Many of us rejoice as we look back to that time when we first went to the Saviour and washed away our sins through the virtue of his blood shed at Calvary. We received spiritual sight from him who is ‘*the light of the world*’ (5; cp. 8:12).

We owe so much to the Lord! He has had mercy on us and has saved us at tremendous cost. **Can we, dare we, be harsh in our attitude towards those lost in sin or to those who suffer? Do we have compassion for needy people?**

One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see

The Pharisees saw the man after he was healed, but they did not rejoice at the healing. They asked the man how he had received his sight and he told them his story. They were furious that Jesus had again been healing on the Sabbath, though some of them questioned how Jesus could do such miracles if he were a sinner (13–16). They then asked the man his opinion of Jesus and he replied that Jesus was a prophet. This was all too much for the Pharisees who refused to believe that the man had been blind and then healed. They sent for his parents who confirmed that their son had been born blind, but were fearful of saying any more. They knew that a confession of Jesus to be the Christ (the Messiah) would bring excommunication which would make them social outcasts (17–22).

The man was not intimidated by the enemies of Jesus, however. When they again asked him how he had been healed, he answered in response to their doubts about Jesus, ‘*One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see*’ (25). The proverb that ‘an ounce of experience is worth a ton of theory’ is quite true. The Pharisees had plenty of theories, but this man had experienced the power of God in his life. Seeing their persistence in asking questions, he asked them, ‘*Do you also want to become his disciples?*’ (27). He was not intimidated by their hostility.

The angry Pharisees, convinced that Jesus was a sinner, refused to acknowledge that he had been sent by the Father (29; cp. 5:36; 8:23). They could not silence the man who bravely acknowledged that Jesus was from God and so they excommunicated him (30–34). **It does cost to follow Jesus, but we shall see tomorrow that it is a price well worth paying.**

*Lord! I was blind, I could not see
In thy marred visage any grace;
But now the beauty of thy face
In radiant vision dawns on me.*

(William T. Matson)

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies ...

A group of Greeks sought an interview with the Lord Jesus. They may have been proselytes who had come to Jerusalem to worship at the feast of the Passover (20–22). They had perhaps seen the crowds acclaiming him as the Messiah when he rode into Jerusalem and they may have heard others speak of the raising of Lazarus from the dead (12–19). They approached Philip to ask him to introduce them to Jesus and he in turn told Andrew about their request.

The Lord Jesus did not speak to them privately but made a public response which may appear strange. He said that the hour had come for him to be glorified, not to be crowned as King over Israel, but to die on the cross (23). ‘*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain*’ (24). As a grain of wheat had to die to produce a new plant and much fruit, he had to die if there were to be spiritual fruit – a harvest of souls saved for eternity. The Messiah came to die.

Jesus shows the same principle to all who would follow him. If we are to be fruitful in our Christian lives, we must die to selfish ambition and desire, and follow him (25–26; cp. Matthew 16:24–26). This is not easy but great blessing is the portion of those who have the right spiritual priorities. **We all want to see success in our work for Christ, but are we prepared to pay the price?**

*There is no gain but by a loss;
You cannot save but by a cross.
The corn of wheat to multiply,
Must fall into the ground and die.*

*Wherever you ripe fields behold,
Waving to God their sheaves of gold,
Be sure some corn of wheat has died,
Some soul has there been crucified;
Someone has wrestled, wept and prayed,
And fought hell’s legions undismayed.*

(Arthur S. Booth-Clibborn)

Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming

Jesus went into Jerusalem the next day and was hailed by an excited crowd as the Messiah. The raising of Lazarus was now widely known and the people probably reasoned that a man who could raise the dead could surely save Israel from serving Rome. They shouted ‘*Hosanna*’ which means ‘Save, now’ (13, quoting Psalm 118:26). Though they were right in addressing Jesus as ‘*King*’, they were wrong in their expectations. They were wanting a political earthly king, but Jesus came to die, to save from a far greater bondage than subjection to Rome. He died to save us from sin and its eternal consequences.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9: ‘*Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt*’ (15). Jerusalem was to reject her King and as he neared the city, he wept over it (Luke 19:41). In rejecting Christ as their King they had every reason to fear. Forty years later the city was destroyed and more than a million Jews were slaughtered by the Romans. Those who have embraced Jesus as their Saviour and King will have nothing to fear when he returns, but those who have rejected him will have everything to fear (Revelation 6:15–17).

The Jewish leaders had tried several times to arrest Jesus, but had failed to do so because his *hour* had not yet come (7:8; 8:20). They hadn’t any plans to arrest Jesus during the Passover feast for fear of provoking a riot (Mark 14:1–2). God’s intention was that his Son should die during the feast as our Passover Lamb and the events of Palm Sunday forced the hand of the Pharisees. Those who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus were spreading the news and Jesus was being greeted as a hero. This could provoke the rebellion that they feared and the Pharisees felt that they must act; waiting would fail to accomplish anything (19). **God’s purposes are fulfilled in his time, whatever the intentions of wicked men (23,27).**

Are we blind also?

The Lord Jesus knew all about the rejection and suffering of the man he had healed. His great compassion is seen in the way he sought, found and encouraged him after his excommunication from the Jewish religion (34–35). The casting out from the synagogue would have been very painful for the man, but could he have remained among the enemies of Christ? Moreover, the harsh treatment he received at the hands of the Jewish leaders made him more receptive to the grace of God in his life. Jesus asked him, ‘*Do you believe in the Son of God?*’ (35). He did not know the Son of God, but Jesus revealed that he himself was the Son of God. The man received spiritual sight as he worshipped not just a man (11) nor a prophet (17), but the Son of God (35–38).

Jesus said that he had come into the world for judgement so ‘*that those who do not see may see*’ and that those who claimed to be able to see would be made blind. The Pharisees asked, ‘*Are we blind also?*’ Jesus replied that because they claimed to see (when in reality they were spiritually blind) their sin remained (39–41). They rejected the light of the world because they loved the darkness of sin (3:19). Spiritual blindness is a terrible thing. How dreadful to be blind to our own need of Christ to save us!

The man knew the loneliness of rejection, his own parents fearing to stand with him (20–22), but he discovered the surpassing worth and greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ. **He had a Friend who would never fail him nor forsake him. Christian, you have the same Friend. Be encouraged and rejoice in him.**

*One there is above all others,
Well deserves the name of Friend;
His is love beyond a brother’s,
Costly, free, and knows no end:
They who once his kindness prove,
Find it everlasting love.*

(John Newton)

I am the door of the sheep

Those listening to the Lord Jesus were well acquainted with shepherds and sheep-folds. The sheep-fold was an area which was fenced off by a wall made of rocks. A gap in this wall served as a door which was guarded at night by the shepherd (or a door-keeper), who lay across the opening. It was common practice for several flocks to shelter in the same fold which was guarded by one of the shepherds. When the shepherds came the following morning, the door-keeper would admit them to the fold. They would then call their own sheep, each sheep recognising his own shepherd's voice (2–5). The sheep will not follow a stranger but rather flee from him. In the same manner those who are Christ's sheep will know his voice and follow him. **How do you respond to the Lord Jesus when he speaks to you through his Word?**

The Jews did not understand what Jesus was teaching them in this illustration (6). This was an evidence of their spiritual blindness (see 9:40). He went on to say, *'I am the door of the sheep'* (7). Those who seek to shepherd God's people but bypass him are thieves and robbers (8). What did Jesus mean by the expression, *'All who ever came before me are thieves and robbers'* (8)? He was not speaking of the prophets nor of John the Baptist, whom he commended (eg. Luke 7:28). He was almost certainly referring to the Jewish religious leaders who used threats and intimidation to steal the people (9:22). They had come before Jesus in the sense that they were exercising their malign power and influence before the Lord Jesus came into the world. They did not heal but destroy; they did not bring life but death (10).

Jesus is also the door for the sheep to enter the sheep-fold (the kingdom of God). When we enter by him, we are saved and find pasture to feed our souls. (9). In this sheep-fold we are secure and have abundant life through the Lord Jesus (7–10).

The house was filled with the fragrance of the oil

Jesus returned to Bethany where a supper was prepared in his honour at the house of Simon the leper (who had probably been healed by Jesus; Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9). Martha, true to character, was busy serving (1–2; cp. Luke 10:40). We see four different attitudes to the Lord Jesus among the people we meet in today's reading:

- Curiosity: Some wanted to see Lazarus as much as Jesus because he had returned from the dead through the mighty power of Jesus. Many of these people came to faith in Christ (9,11).
- Treachery: The chief priests plotted to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus because many believed in Jesus through his witness (10).
- Hypocrisy: Judas Iscariot was horrified at such 'waste' when Mary anointed Jesus with the precious oil (Matthew 26:8). He was a mean-minded, thieving hypocrite who pretended to have a concern for the poor (4–6). He loved money more than he loved God.
- Devotion to Jesus: During the supper, Mary anointed Jesus with very precious *oil of spikenard* (3). The word 'spikenard' indicates that the oil was pure 'nard' (M.R. VINCENT, WORD STUDIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT on reference in Mark 14:3). This 'nard' was obtained from a herb grown high up in the pasture land of the Himalayas on the India/Tibet border. Judas Iscariot estimated the value of the oil to be three hundred denarii (about three hundred days' pay for a labourer – a year's wages on a six-day working week). Mary loved Jesus so much that she gave to him with cheerful abandon. She also grasped that Jesus was soon to die and anointed him in anticipation of his burial (7).

Jesus came to Mary's defence when she was criticised (7–8). He said that she had done *'a good work'* for him (Matthew 26:10). The Greek word translated 'good' in the verse in Matthew's Gospel means 'beautiful'. When Mary anointed Jesus, *the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil* (3). When we, like Mary, are determined to give him our best we will know great blessing on our lives. **There is a great attractiveness and fragrance about the life of the person who loves the Lord. How much do you love him?**

He prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation

The rich man had argued from Hades that if one returned from the dead, then his brothers would repent (Luke 16:30). While it is true that God sometimes uses miracles to bring some to faith in him (45), others are hardened in their sin and in their rejection of Christ. After Lazarus was raised from the dead, some came to genuine faith in Christ (cp. 12:17–18), but the chief priests and Pharisees were all the more determined to kill Jesus (53,57). At this time the chief priests were of the Sadducees, a Jewish sect which denied the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. They had a deserved reputation for being rude in their behaviour (Josephus the famous Jewish historian describes them as being ‘rather savage in their conduct’).

The Jewish leadership feared that if Jesus continued to attract the crowds the Romans might consider him to be a threat. They would then take away their place (Jerusalem and the temple) and end their existence as a nation. Caiaphas was quite rude in this discussion and *he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation* (49–50). Caiaphas did not understand the proper meaning of his prophecy and John points out that Jesus would die not only for Jews but also for Gentiles (51–52). Jesus knew that he was in danger at Jerusalem and went with his disciples to Ephraim, a city some fourteen miles to the north (53–54). The Feast of the Passover was approaching and the Jewish leaders were left wondering whether Jesus would come to the feast or not (55–57).

Jesus was to attend the feast and to die as the Passover Lamb of God for all his elect (cp. 1 Corinthians 5:7). **He did not die because of the plotting of his enemies, but because God the Father had determined even before he made the world to send his Son into the world to die for sinners (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:19–20; Revelation 13:8).** Let us come to the Lord with heartfelt praise and thanksgiving for his great love for us.

I am the good shepherd

Jesus went on to say, ‘*I am the good shepherd*’ (11). The two main Greek adjectives translated ‘good’ in the New Testament are ‘agathos’ and ‘kalos’. The word used here is ‘kalos’ which means beautiful, noble, excellent and attractive. Jesus is all that to the believer. He is ‘the good shepherd’ of his sheep because:

- He loves them and gave his life to save them (11,15–18).
- He knows them and cares for them (13–14).
- He gives them abundant life (10).
- He gives them eternal life (28).
- He keeps them secure for eternity (28–30).

The Lord’s people (his ‘*sheep*’) are always in peril from false shepherds who are not appointed by God and who care little for them. A gospel minister has the solemn and awesome responsibility before God to guard the ‘flock’ against false teaching. They are in constant peril of ‘wolves’ who come with their heresies to destroy and scatter them (12–13; cp. Acts 20:28–30). The Jews again argued about Jesus. Some thought that he was mad and demon-possessed (19; cp. 7:20; 8:48,52), but others strongly disagreed (21). His enemies just could not understand how he could willingly lay down his life and then take it again by rising from the grave (17–19).

The man who had been healed of blindness was excommunicated from the Jewish religion by false, uncaring shepherds (9:34), but was found by the good shepherd. He had heard his voice and had followed and worshipped him (9:37–38), finding abundant life (10). Are you rejoicing in your good shepherd who loves you for ever? If not, could it be that you are not one of his ‘*sheep*’, and that you do not know him as your own Lord and Saviour? **He will welcome you and accept you if you will come to him and ask him to forgive your sins. Will you do this and turn from your sin and follow him?**

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me

Verse 22 takes us from the Feast of Tabernacles, October AD 29 to the Feast of Dedication, December AD 29. Jesus was again in Jerusalem for this feast which commemorated the purification and rededication of the temple in 165 BC (it had been desecrated three years earlier by the wicked Antiochus Epiphanes). He was surrounded by some Jews who accused him of keeping them in doubt about his identity, but he replied that he had been quite clear in his claims: *'I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep'* (22–26).

Those who belong to Jesus are his sheep. He says, *'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me'* (27):

- *'My sheep hear my voice.'* He speaks to us through the Bible when we read it and hear it preached. Many of us lead such busy lives that we do not take time to listen to God. We may listen to him when we meet for worship, but God is shut out during the week. We are not listening; we are not behaving like sheep who listen to the Shepherd. Many Christians are weak because they do not hear his voice.
- *'I know them.'* They are given to him by the Father and are eternally secure (27–29; cp. 6:37,39). God the Father does not choose us to lose us. We are safe in his hands; we cannot be lost; we shall never perish. This is a precious truth that brings great comfort to the believer. We may be weak, but our God is strong. He will never let us go.
- *'They follow me.'* The genuine believer, Christ's sheep, hears the voice of the Lord Jesus and follows him in glad obedience to his commands (14:15). He has repented of his sin, he loathes sin and seeks to lead a holy life.

Do you love the Good Shepherd? Do you eagerly listen for his voice? Do you follow him in glad obedience? **If you are a sheep who has strayed from the Lord, repent of your sins and come back to him. He will gladly receive you.**

I know that you always hear me

The Jews could not help but observe how much Jesus loved Lazarus as they witnessed his grief. They wondered why Jesus, who had miraculously healed the blind man, could not have healed Lazarus and so prevented his death (33–37). Was it that he loved Lazarus but was powerless to help? Not at all! They were about to witness an amazing sight.

When he came to the grave of Lazarus, Jesus had the stone removed from the tomb. He reassured the protesting Martha by reminding her that he had told her that if she believed she would see the glory of God (38–40). Jesus thanked the Father, saying, *'I know that you always hear me'* (42; cp. verse 22). Death cannot limit his love for us (cp. Romans 8:38–39). He is absolutely sovereign and wise in all his ways with us. He prays for us (cp. 17:20; Hebrews 9:24) and his prayers are always heard and answered. Let us be encouraged and comforted.

Jesus prayed in the hearing of all those at the tomb so that they would believe that the Father had sent him when they saw the miracle (41–42). With a loud voice he called on Lazarus to come out of the tomb, and he did, still wrapped in his graveclothes (43–44). There is a good illustration here of God's work of saving sinners. The spiritually dead hear the voice of Christ (generally through preaching, reading God's Word, or through the faithful witness of a Christian) and they are raised to new life in Christ (cp. 5:25). **No one is too hard for God to save — the 'deadest' of the dead (spiritually speaking) can be raised. Let us persevere in our prayers and in our witness.**

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

(Charles Wesley)

Lord, if ...

How often we pray (or think), ‘Lord, if ...’ when distressed by grief, perplexity or pain: ‘If only this or that had not happened to us, everything would have been so different...’ Such sentiments breathe unbelief in the loving and wise providence of our God. We may be tempted to complain when God delays answering our prayers, but remember that when Jesus delayed going to his sick friend, it was not because of lack of love or concern for him. His delays are for his glory and for our good (4–6). The love of the Lord Jesus was obvious even to unbelieving Jews (33–37). He is our great High Priest who sympathises with us in our weaknesses and trials (Hebrews 4:14–16).

Both Martha and Mary uttered the words, ‘*Lord, if...*’ (21,32) but Martha also expressed her faith in the Lord Jesus when she said, ‘*But even now I know*’ (22). She knew that the prayers of Jesus are always answered and that Lazarus would be raised from the dead at the end of the world (22,24). She also stated her faith in Jesus as the Christ (the promised Messiah), the Son of God (27).

Jesus made a glorious statement concerning his power over death, ‘*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live*’ (25). Jesus has ‘*the keys of Hades and of death*’ (Revelation 1:18). He raises sinners from spiritual death (cp. 5:25; Ephesians 2:1,5) and he will raise the bodies of all the dead when he comes again (5:28–29). For the believer death has lost its sting (1 Corinthians 15:55). We do not *sorrow as others who have no hope* (1 Thessalonians. 4:13).

Have you been thinking, praying or saying, ‘Lord, if...’? **Think about the things that you know about the Lord Jesus in his greatness, in his love for you, in his wise and sovereign purpose over all your circumstances, good or perplexing. He will never fail you nor forsake you. Take heart!**

The Scripture cannot be broken

The Lord Jesus stressed his oneness with the Father and the Jews tried again to stone him (30). He reminded them that he had shown them many good works from his Father (his many miracles of healing) and he asked them, ‘*For which of those works do you stone me?*’ (31–32). They replied that they were not stoning him for a good work, ‘*but because you, being a man, make yourself God*’ (33). They clearly understood the claims of Jesus. They were in no doubt that he was saying that he was God.

Jesus showed the inconsistency of their argument when Scripture describes judges as ‘*gods*’ because they stood in the place of God when they administered justice based on the Word of God (Psalm 82:6). They were not gods and would die like all men (Psalm 82:7). The Jews did not quibble about this but they rejected the One among them who was the Son of God (34–36).

These verses also show that the Lord Jesus had a very high view of Scripture. He said, ‘*The Scripture cannot be broken*’ (35). J.C. Ryle observes, ‘The principle here laid down by our Lord is one of vast importance. Let us grasp it firmly and never let it go. Let us maintain boldly the complete inspiration of every word of the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Let us believe that not only every book of the Bible, but every chapter, and not only every chapter, but every verse, and not only every verse, but every word was originally given by inspiration of God (DAILY READINGS FROM J.C.RYLE, COMPILED BY ROBERT SHEEHAN, VOLUME 2 – JOHN, Day 135).

We continue to face attacks upon the Bible and its teaching and even many evangelicals fail to hold a high view of Scripture. Let us not be shaken. ***The Scripture cannot be broken. God’s Word is true!***

*Father of mercies, in thy word
What endless glory shines!
For ever be thy Name adored
For these celestial lines*

(Anne Steele)

I am the Son of God.

The Jews were hardened in their unbelief and rejection of the claims of the Lord Jesus. He asked them, ‘*Do you say of him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, “You are blaspheming,” because I said, “I am the Son of God”*’ (36). Jesus made his claims quite clear and he went on to challenge them, ‘*If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me; but if I do, though you do not believe me; believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him*’ (37–38). They had seen many outstanding miracles and yet they still refused to seriously consider his claim to be the Son of God. Miracles do not necessarily convince those who see them.

They sought to arrest Jesus but failed, and he left Jerusalem to go to the place in Galilee where John first baptised (39–40). * The response of these people was so different from that of the Jews in Jerusalem. Many people came to Jesus and believed in him. They remembered the things that John the Baptist had said about him and recognised that what John had said was true (41–42).

The title ‘*Son of God*’ indicates that Jesus is God (36; cp. 5:18). Do you believe in him? Have you heard him speak to you, calling you to follow him? **Those who obey his call will never be disappointed!**

*Thou art the everlasting Word,
The Father’s only Son;
God manifestly seen and heard,
And heaven’s belovèd One.*

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

(Josiah Conder)

* Bethabara or Bethany beyond the Jordan – 1:28; Hendriksen (page 93) suggests that this was probably located just east of the river, about thirteen miles below the Sea of Galilee and about 20 miles south-east of Nazareth).

Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick

Lazarus and his two sisters were close friends of Jesus who was a frequent guest in their home in Bethany when he visited Jerusalem (just two miles away). When Lazarus was ill, they knew where to locate Jesus, though he was in Galilee at Bethabara, about fifty miles away (10:40; 1:28). Their message was, ‘*Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick*’ (3). We must always remember when we are ill or in perplexing and distressing circumstances that God has not stopped loving us (see also verse 5). He loves us for ever and tenderly watches over us.

Jesus said that the sickness of Lazarus would not lead to death, but was for the glory of God and that through it the Son of God would be glorified (4). They understood Jesus to mean that Lazarus would recover from his illness, but two days later Jesus told the disciples that they should return to Judea. They thought that to return unnecessarily to Judea would invite further trouble from the Jews (6–8). The meaning of verses 9 and 10 is that the ministry of Jesus (daytime, cp. 9:4–5) was fixed by God’s eternal decree. No plot of the Jews could bring that ministry to a premature end.

Jesus then told his disciples that Lazarus was asleep, but again they misunderstood him until he said plainly, ‘*Lazarus is dead*’ (11–14). Thomas, called Didymus (‘twin’ – we know nothing about his twin brother or sister) was a man who was prone to pessimism and despair. He thought that a return to Judea would mean certain death for Jesus and in his devotion to the Lord he said to the other disciples, ‘*Let us also go, that we may die with him*’ (16). Jesus had indicated that what had happened to Lazarus was for the glory of God (4) and he now told them that their faith would be strengthened (15). **Satan may whisper doubts into our minds concerning the love of God for us, but let us always remember that the Lord will never fail us.** If we seek to glorify him in suffering, in trials and in affliction, our faith and that of our fellow believers will be strengthened.