

The Bible Notebook

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

That you may know Him
(John 20:31)

Volume 2

Chapters 4-6

By

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DEDICATION

To

Claudine Cofer Sanders

Godly Mother

Rebecca Turner Sanders

Virtuous Wife

Abigail Grace Sanders

Precious Granddaughter

God Has Been Gracious!

(That's what the name John means!)

CHAPTER 4

Jesus and the Woman at the Well

SPECIAL NOTE: It helps to understand the transition from one chapter to another in John. The New American Commentary, published by B & H Publishing, LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville, TN (now available in THE BIBLE NAVIGATOR, the electronic library created by the LifeWay Christian Resources Technology Division) is one of the resources used in this study. It will be identified in this volume with the initials NAC. The writer offers the following note on this chapter:

“One of the delightful facts about the Gospel of John is that many of its stories linger in the listener’s mind and generate implications for a lifetime. Such is the significance of the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4. It encourages reflection about presuppositions and prejudices, about the mission of Jesus and worship, and it offers a wonderful paradigm for considering the nature and strategy of evangelistic outreach.

“If that were not sufficient, the story is structured in such a way as to provide the reader with fertile resources for continuing to probe the nature of belief and of commitment. The references to water and Spirit in this chapter remind one of the themes of purification and cleansing that were also related to water and believing in chaps. 2–3. This chapter thus has veins of meaning that run deep, and the interpreter is constantly challenged to mine the wealth of its valuable resources” [NAC].

4:1 - WHEN JESUS KNEW. “*When Jesus knew that the Pharisees heard He was making and baptizing more disciples than John...*” The NASB reads, “Therefore when the Lord knew...” Since both the HCSB and the NASB are word for word translations, an explanation is in order, and few Bible students have been better qualified to explain than the late A. T. Robertson (WORD PICTURES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, a six volume set now found in many electronic libraries, including The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, ATR). Robertson explains it like this:

“The Lord (ho Kurios). So the best manuscripts (Neutral Alexandrian), though the Western class has ho Iêsous. Mark usually has ho Iêsous and Luke often ho Kurios. In the narrative portion of John we have usually ho Iêsous, but ho Kurios in five passages (John 4:1; John 6:23; John 11:2; John 20:20; John 21:12). There is no reason why John should not apply ho Kurios to Jesus in the narrative sections as well as Luke. Bernard argues that these are “explanatory glosses,” not in the first draft of the Gospel. But why? When John wrote his Gospel he certainly held Jesus to be Kurios (Lord) as Luke did earlier when he wrote both Gospel and Acts This is hypercriticism” [ATR].

Thus, the manuscript used by Dr. Ed Blum and his team of translators has “ho Iesous” (the Jesus) and it translates “Jesus”; whereas the manuscript used by the NASB translators has “ho Kurios” (the Lord).

The word “therefore” is a transition word used throughout the Bible to tie together two related incidents, or arguments. “When Jesus knew” has drawn comments by those who wonder whether He knew by His omniscience (as He knew what was in man), or from reports He was receiving. It seems obvious that if His Disciples knew something He would know it. If they were talking about something He would soon pick up on it.

THAT THE PHARISEES. There were a number sects among the Jews at the time, with the most influential being the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Sadducees, who did not believe in miracles, the resurrection, or angels, had the ear of the Roman governor, who appointed the high priest each year. As incredible as it sounds, the high priest did not believe in the resurrection of the dead! They had the greater wealth, as well as certain political power which they guarded with great care, and at times with political conniving.

The Pharisees were not a large sect, but because they has become the self-ordained guardians of Judaism and watchdogs of Mosaic Law and rabbinical traditions, they had their finger on he religious pulse of the nation. Though these sects were often at odds, they often joined together against anything that might threaten their position. They did not want anything to happen in the land which might cause them problems with Rome, but as time passed, they would bring the wrath of Rome down on the nation, in part because of the lengths to which they went in the persecution of Christians. The time would come when they would conspire to ambush Paul while he was under the protection of Roman soldiers. During the three years of Jesus ministry on earth, the Pharisees would hound His every step.

The Pharisees heard what was going on because they made it a point to know what was happening in Judea and Galilee at all times. They would have heard about the controversy recorded in chapter three when one Jew challenged John by telling him that Jesus was baptizing more people than He. It was at that time that John declared, “He must increase and I must decrease.”

MORE DISCIPLES THAN JOHN. Jesus heard that “the Pharisees heard He was making and baptizing more disciples than John”, and He knew that this fanatical sect would try to create a division between them which would be designed to weaken and destroy both. John was the forerunner, Jesus the Messiah, yet Jesus was careful not to give the Pharisees an occasion to hinder either His work or John’s ministry.

4:2 - THOUGH JESUS. *“(though Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were)...”* “This parenthetical remark emphasizes that it was Jesus’ function to baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:33), not water. The apostles, here as later (after Pentecost), performed water baptisms” [New Commentary on the Whole Bible, New Testament, QuickVerse Electronic Library - NCWB].

John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, continues to provide eye witness testimony. When Jesus fed the five thousand men (plus women and children), John tells us that there was a lot of grass where the people sat down (ch. 6). Earlier, we read, “John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because **there was plenty of water there**. People were coming and being baptized” (John 3:23, bold added by this writer).

In Chapter 3, John writes that “Jesus and His disciples went to the Judean countryside, where He spent time with them and baptized” (3:22). In this passage, John tells us that Jesus did not baptize, but His disciples did. The Believer’s Study Bible Notes, QuickVerse Electronic Bible Library (designated in this study as BSB) offers the following note:

“Although Jesus honored baptism by continuing the practice, commanding it for all of His disciples and (though for a different reason) being baptized Himself, the Lord baptized no one. Since the Savior baptized no one, yet honored the practice in so many ways, three conclusions are inevitable: (1) baptism must be of great importance; (2) that importance is found in terms of the Christian’s obedience to the lordship of Jesus Christ (cf. Matt 28:18-20); and (3) the emphasis of the act is on the witness of baptism, since baptism can never save. Christian baptism is founded on the believer’s willingness to live in union with a crucified and living Savior” [Believer’s Study Bible - after this, BSB]

4:3 - LEFT JUDEA. “*He left Judea and went again to Galilee.*” To avoid an open conflict with the Pharisees, with John the Baptist caught in the middle, Jesus chose to leave Judea and return to Galilee. “So he mainly avoids Jerusalem and Judea now till the end. Each time hereafter that Jesus appears in Jerusalem and Judea before the last visit there is an open breach with the Pharisees who attack him (John 5:1-47; John 7:14-10:21; John 10:22-42; John 11:17-53)” [ATR].

4:4 - HE HAD TO. “*He had to travel through Samaria...*” This does not mean that the only way to go to Galilee was through Samaria, though Samaria is located between Galilee and Judea. It would have been necessary to go through Samaria if He, for some reason, had to travel due north. When I was in seminary, one New Testament professor stressed that Jesus had to go through Samaria because of a moral necessity, not because of a physical necessity. He was obviously correct in that conclusion. This was not the normal way for a Jew to travel from Judea to Galilee.

Jews traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem, crossed over the Jordan River and traveled down through Perea, in part to avoid any conflict between the Samaritans and Jews who were on their way to Jerusalem for one of the great feasts. Another reasons to avoid Samaria, especially on the way to Jerusalem, was that contact with the Samaritans would, they believe, contaminate them and require ceremonial cleansing before they could participate Passover celebration, as well as the other major feasts. The Bible Knowledge Commentary, QuickVerse Bible Library (after this, BKC) notes that “In Jesus’ day the Jews, because of their hatred for the Samaritans, normally took the eastern route in order to avoid Samaria. But Jesus chose the route through Samaria in

order to reach the despised people of that region. As the Savior of the world He seeks out and saves the despised and outcasts (cf. Luke 19:10)” [BKC].

SAMARIA. In New Testament times Samaria “was a region in the middle of Palestine, with Judea to the south and Galilee to the north. Samaria was without separate political existence under the Roman governor. The people were racially mixed and their religion resulted from syncretism and schism from Judaism. Its center of worship was Mount Gerizim. Even today in Israel, a small group of Samaritans maintain their traditions” [BKC].

That the Samaritans were hostile toward the Jews who were on their way to worship in Jerusalem is seen in Luke 9:51-56: “He sent messengers ahead of Him, and on the way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make preparations for Him. **But they did not welcome Him, because He determined to journey to Jerusalem.** When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?” (Luke 9:52-54, bold added by this writer).

4:5 - SYCHAR. “(S)o He came to a town of Samaria called Sychar near the property that Jacob had given his son Joseph.” Since Jesus and His disciples were traveling north from Aenon through Samaria, He would naturally travel through, or near Sychar, but since He has made that decision based on an interest beyond a topographical one, He may have been making it a point to visit this famous site. “Most identify the site with modern Akar but others point to Tell-Balatah. Sychar was between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. A well near Sychar today may be the same as **Jacob’s well**” [BKC].

“As indicated earlier, the edei of v. 4 may have been the evangelist’s indication that Samaria was on the divine agenda as the earthly journey of Jesus led through Samaria. The territory of Samaria was on the main ridge road between Judea and Galilee known as the ancient way of the patriarchs, which Josephus said took about three days to travel. Some Jews of this time probably preferred to avoid this route and travel the longer way from Jerusalem down to the Jordan Valley, along the river, and enter Galilee via the crossing at Beth Shan/Beit Shean (Scythopolis) But Josephus rejected that pattern of travel as inconvenient. Both routes could bring purity-oriented Jews into contact with those outside the covenant—Gentiles or Samaritans. It was not a comfortable choice, but some Jews probably would have chosen the Gentiles to the Samaritan rejects. Travel could always be a problem. The point was avoiding contact. In this story the focus is on contact with Samaritans—an issue clearly noted by the evangelist in the conversation of the woman with Jesus (4:9)” [NAC, bold added by this writer].

THE PROPERTY. This plot of ground which Jacob gave to Joseph is mentioned in Genesis 48:21-22. Jacob had purchased it years earlier (Gen. 33:18-20). Barnes offers additional information on this site:

“This city stood about eight miles south-east of the city called Samaria, between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. It was one of the oldest cities of Palestine, and was formerly known by the name of Shechem, or Sichern, Ge 33:18 12:6. The city was in the tribe of Ephraim, Jos 21:21. It was at this place that Joshua assembled the people before his death, and here they renewed their covenant with the Lord, Joshua chapter 24. After the death of Gideon it became a place of idolatrous worship, the people worshipping Baal-berith, Jud 9:46. It was destroyed by Abimelech, who beat down the city and sowed it with salt, Jud 9:45. It was afterward rebuilt, and became the residence of Jeroboam, the King of Israel, 1Ki 12:25. It was called by the Romans Flavia Neapolis, and this has been corrupted by the Arabs into Nablus, its present name. It is still a considerable place, and its site is remarkably pleasant and productive” [BARNES].

4:6 - JACOB’S WELL. *“Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, worn out from His journey, sat down at the well. It was about six in the evening.”* Interestingly, there is no mention of Jacob’s well, either in Genesis or anywhere else in the Old Testament. Barnes has an interesting note here:

“It was called Jacob's well, probably, either because it was handed down by tradition that he dug it, or because it was near to the land which he gave to Joseph. There is still a well a few miles to the east of Nablus, which is said by the people there to be the same. The Rev. Eli Smith, missionary to Syria, stated to me that he had visited this well. It is about 100 feet deep. It is cut through solid rock of limestone. It is now dry, probably from having been partly filled with rubbish, or perhaps because the water has been diverted by earthquakes. The well is covered with a large stone, which has a hole in the centre large enough to admit a man. It is at the foot of Mount Gerizim, and has a plain on the east” [BARNES].

WORN OUT FROM HIS JOURNEY. Jesus was a young, healthy, strong man, used to the hard work of a carpenter, and used to walking great distances. So, if Jesus was tired, one wonders about the disciples. Did Jesus send His disciples into the town for food so He could stay there to rest, or did He have another reason? If we are right in assuming that He was going through Samaria out of a moral (or spiritual) necessity, this makes perfect sense. He wanted to make contact with the Samaritan people, and one Jew would have been less intimidating, and less provocative than a small band of men from Galilee.

SIX IN THE EVENING. My seminary professor taught that the time of the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman occurred at 12:00 noon. However, as A. T. Robertson and others show, the Elder John had lived many years in Ephesus and he used Roman time. So the time was 6:00 P. M., the normal time when women came to the well to draw water. My professor was looking for an explanation for why the woman came alone. He believed she was ostracized because of her morals, and for that reason she came in the heat of the day by her self. In fact, she may have come a little earlier than the other women, but it seems that it was at six in the evening. This would account

for the fact that Jesus was tired. He was, however, probably no less tired than His disciples.

SPECIAL NOTE ON THE SAMARITANS: Many students of the Word have concluded that the Samaritans were half-breeds, a people of mixed blood, assuming that these people were descended from an amalgamation of Jews and Gentiles. In fact, one commentary on the Book of Acts, belabors that point. I accepted that as a seminary student, and then I spent a considerable amount of time talking about the Book of Acts with the late Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, while he was in the process of writing his commentary on that book. I will first give the traditional view, and then add Dr. Eddleman's claim at the end. The New American Commentary states that

“The Samaritans were regarded by the Jews as despised half-breeds, the offspring of the resettlement policies of the cruel Assyrians, who after sacking the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. transported large groups of conquered Jews to other conquered sites and repopulated the partially vacated sites with other conquered peoples (2 Kgs 17:5–6, 24). The result was an intermingling of peoples who in the mixing of the races lost much of their former national identities and were thus forced to develop new syncretistic identities (2 Kgs 17:25–41). The Jewish desire for a pure and loyal people of God, particularly after the return from the Babylonian exile, led Ezra to develop a segregation policy that excluded Samaritans and others of mixed backgrounds (Ezra 9–10).

“The Samaritans in response to their rejection developed counter restrictive policies such as adopting a canon containing only the Samaritan Pentateuch and promoting a competing temple cult on Mount Gerizim. The antagonism between the two groups periodically exploded into open hostility, such as when the Hasmoneans under John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple in 128 B.C. and when a fierce engagement between the two sides took place in A.D. 52. In the time of Jesus the climate of relations between the two was scarcely conducive to good communications or self-giving acceptance. There is little doubt, therefore, that a story like the “good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25–37) would hardly be received with enthusiasm among the Jewish listeners. Indeed, the lawyer in that story merely calls the man “the merciful one,” avoiding acknowledging this good man as a Samaritan” [NAC].

When he was professor of Greek and New Testament at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. Frank Stagg wrote a commentary on Acts in which he focused on how the Gospel overcame barriers: class, sex (gender), and race. He used the outreach by the deacon Philip and by Peter and John to show how the Gospel overcame the racial barrier between the Jews and the Samaritans, whom he considered a mixed-race of people.

Some time ago, Dr. Gene Jeffries, president of Cambridge Graduate School, sent me (via e-mail) an article he found on Baptists in the Holy Land. The article, dated, March 11, 2007 11:17, entitled, “Baptists in the Holy Land”, was written by DAVID SMITH, and a few excerpts will be given here:

“As a Baptist journalist in Israel for the past 25 years, I've often been shocked at how little Israelis know about my denomination.

“With more than 90 million Baptists in the world, about half of whom are in the United States, and 17 million in my denomination - the Southern Baptist Convention - it's a shock that Israelis, so interested in all things American, overlook this phenomenon.

“...Although some earlier survey work had been done, the single greatest catalyst for Baptist work in the Holy Land was Sukri Mussa, a resident of Safed who went to the US to study in the early 1900s. While there, he came to faith under the preaching of George Truett at First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. Supported by Baptist churches in southern Illinois, he returned to the Holy Land in 1911.

“According to Fuad Sakhnini, pastor of the Nazareth Baptist Church since 1960, ‘He bought a horse and began preaching in the villages. It wasn't easy because people were fanatically loyal to their communities. The first Baptists here were persecuted by the other traditional Christian communities.’

“He witnessed in Turan and Eilabun, villages with large nominal Christian populations - the kind of background he was from. Mussa organized Bible studies and people met in homes for a time, but in 1926 the new believers built Nazareth Baptist Church. Mussa died in 1928, but there was already a vision to start planting churches in the Galilee, Sakhnini said.

“Churches were established throughout the Galilee, in villages such as Jaffa, Kafr Kanna, Turan, Eilabun, Acre and Rama. More recently, two Baptist churches have been established in Nazareth.

“During the 1930s a number of American Southern Baptists arrived in the Holy Land to bolster the local work. **They included Leo Eddleman, later a college Hebrew professor, who was noted for his mastery of both Hebrew and Arabic. He attributed those skills to the curfew maintained during the British Mandate, saying there was little else to do but study from sunrise to sunset”** (Bold and underlining added by this writer).

In our conversations, Dr. Eddleman applauded the desire of Stagg and others who sought to show how the Gospel overcome racial barriers, but he stressed that they need to go to other passages for proof. Dr. Stagg wrote his commentary soon after the 1954 Supreme Court decision which ended segregation, so his intentions were certainly honorable. However, Dr. Eddleman stressed, “If you took a Samaritan and a Jew and dressed them alike and stood them side by side you couldn't tell them apart.” This came from a man who was known for his mastery of both Hebrew and Arabic, a man who had been a missionary to Israel until the Second World War forced him to leave.

Eddleman stressed that it is true that Sargon II of Assyria took many of the people by force and resettled them in other countries, and that he brought foreigners in and settled them in the land. It is also true that, in time, the people of Israel did intermarry with those foreigners. What, according to Dr. Eddleman, is not true is the claim that they intermarried with Gentiles. He stressed that those foreigners who had been forced to move into the land of Israel were Semitic people, not Gentiles. Thus, the bitter enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans was theological, rather than racial.

4:7 A WOMAN OF SAMARIA. *“A woman of Samaria came to draw water. “Give Me a drink,” Jesus said to her...”* Jesus had made a decision to travel through Samaria for a purpose. He chose to wait at this well while His disciples went into town to buy food (vs. 8). He obviously wanted to make contact with the Samaritan people, and there was no better place than this well. We should bear in mind two things. First, a well, like a gate or a spring was a common place to encounter people in ancient times. “The story here reminds us of the meeting between Abraham’s servant and Rebekah (Gen 24:11, 15–17; cf. Rachel in Gen 29:2–12). Indeed, springs and wells in the Bible could be places of divine encounter (cf. the encounter of Hagar in Gen 16:7)” [NAC].

The second thing to remember is that drawing and carrying water was women’s work in that culture. Eventually, every woman in the neighborhood would come to the well for water. Jesus sent two disciples to prepare for His final Passover with His disciples:

“Where do You want us to prepare it?”, they asked. ‘Listen,’ He said to them, ‘when you’ve entered the city, a man carrying a water jug will meet you. Follow him into the house he enters. Tell the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks you, ‘Where is the guest room where I can eat the Passover with My disciples?’ ’ (Luke 22:9-11).

GIVE ME A DRINK. In any witness encounter, there must be an opening, a greeting. Jesus made a logical request, but this Samaritan woman must have been shocked when Jesus spoke to her, being fully aware of the enmity that existed between Jews and Samaritans. She certainly knew the attitude of the Samaritans toward the Jews, so it is reasonable to assume that she knew how what the Jews thought of her. She recognized a potential crisis when she saw one. For any Jewish man other than Jesus the thought of speaking to this woman would have brought on a cultural shock. In the first place, Jewish men did not speak with women in public, and that included their own wives.

ILLUSTRATION: Arab evangelist Anis Shorrosh was born in Nazareth and he has often told how his father was killed when the Jews captured Nazareth. His goal in life as he was growing up was to get big enough to start killing Jews. However, when he was old enough to work, he got a job in the Baptist mission hospital, and before long he was saved, and called into the ministry, and on his way to America to attend Clarke Memorial Baptist College in Newton, Mississippi. Upon graduating from that Junior College, Anis transferred to Mississippi College where I met him in my freshman year. We had Sociology together under Dr. R. R. Pierce, and talked often about his experience.

Years later, Everett Geis would invite Anis to preach in revival services at First Baptist, Delhi, LA,

and while he was there he was invited to speak to area pastors. We had an opportunity to visit, and then, several years later my son John and I went to hear Anis share his testimony in a church in Monroe, LA, again at a church where Everett Geis was pastor.

Anis told us that when he got on the plane in Israel to come to America, a stewardess paused and told him to fasten his seat belt. He testified that he was in shock. Not only had a woman spoken to him in public, she had spoken of something so personal! And how did she know his belt was not tight enough?

He landed in America and headed south by bus to Mississippi, and as the bus traveled through farm country he looked out and saw great fields of flowers. He was amazed. He had heard of rich Americans, but to have flower gardens this big? Later, he would learn that he was looking at cotton fields that were in full bloom. As those of us from the Delta would say, they were bloomin' out the top.

Anis had only been on the campus at Clarke a brief while when he had the most shocking experience of his life. He sat down on a bench on the campus, and in a few minutes a girl walked up to him and spoke to him. In public! Then, the girl sat down on the bench with him. Anis was glancing all around to see if she had some brothers who were coming to kill him. After a few minutes the girl got up to leave, and as she was getting up she reached over and touched him on the forearm. Panic seized him. Surely, now her brothers were coming to kill him!

Anis had an opportunity to stand in Nazareth and listen to an Israeli officer tell a group of American tourists that he had commanded the soldiers that captured Nazareth from the Palestinians. Anis said, "You killed my father when you took Nazareth." The officer was immediately on the alert, but Anis said, "I want you to know that I forgive you because I am a Christian and Jesus forgave me." Anis Shorosh would understand how shocked this Samaritan woman must have been when Jesus spoke to her.

"Jewish rabbis wanted women to stay "in their place." Men certainly did not want to discuss theological issues with them. They also did not think that the 'am ha'ares? ("the people of the land" who worked with their hands such as fishermen and carpenters) had any ability to speak about the fine points of religion, particularly about details of God's saving work (cf. the view of the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:13). This perspective would be even more emphatic when dealing with a woman, particularly the wife of a common laborer who was viewed as very low on the Jewish social scale" [NAC].

The author of the NAC material holds that the Jewish man of Jesus' day would have been particularly repulsed at the idea of speaking to a "half-breed" [NAC]. However, if Dr. Eddleman was right, the revulsion would have been on religious grounds. The Samaritans, though they accepted the Law, rejected the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures, and they did not follow the oral traditions of the Jews. Because of that, Jewish rabbis would have avoided any contact with a man,

let alone a woman. Remember that the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26ff) was returning from Jerusalem, reading the scroll of Isaiah. The Jewish rabbis would not have had a problem with the Ethiopian's black skin, had he chosen to become a proselyte to Judaism. Their problem would have been that he was a eunuch.

4:8 - HIS DISCIPLES. *“(F)or His disciples had gone into town to buy food.”* This is the kind of historical note that we can expect from John. The lone surviving apostle, without any doubt, was called on to answer a lot of questions about Jesus at the time he was writing this Gospel. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he often provides a little extra historical information. For example, we read, “John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, **because there was plenty of water there**” (John 3:23, bold added by this writer). In his account of the feeding of the 5,000, John adds an historical note: “Then Jesus said, “Have the people sit down. **There was plenty of grass in that place**, so they sat down. **The men numbered about 5,000**” (John 6:10, bold added by this writer). Here, John explains why Jesus was alone at the well when the woman came.

4:9 - YOU BEING A JEW. *“How is it that You, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” she asked Him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.”* This Samaritan woman may have been surprised that a Jewish man would speak to her, but as we shall see, she was used to speaking with men, so she did not hesitate to ask the first question that came to mind: “How is it that You, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” This was the first thing that came to mind, so she asked it. A more timid woman might not have asked this question of a Jewish man. **FOR JEWS DO NOT ASSOCIATE WITH SAMARITANS.** Robertson offers a critical note and then offers an explanation:

“For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans (ou gar sunchrōntai Ioudaioi Samareitais). Explanatory (gar) parenthesis of the woman's astonishment. Associative instrumental case with sunchrōntai (present middle indicative of sunchraomai, compound in literary Koin., here only in N.T.). The woman's astonishment is ironical according to Bernard. At any rate the disciples had to buy food in a Samaritan village and they were travelling through Samaria. Perhaps she was surprised that Jesus would drink out of her waterpot.[ATR].

To put it in everyday language, she was saying that Jews do not drink after Samaritans! “In context, “this statement could indicate that it was against Jewish custom to use a Samaritan's utensil—such as a bucket (see TEV, NIV mg.). For Jesus to drink from a Samaritan's bucket would violate Jewish custom. Thus, the Samaritan woman was startled by Jesus' request” [NCWB].

4:10 - JESUS ANSWERED. *“Jesus answered, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would ask Him, and He would give you living water.”* Jesus had opened the dialog with a question, and the surprised Samaritan woman answered with what she must have assumed to be the logical question under the circumstances. Now Jesus responds on a serious note. His response would have let the woman know that He was not interested in idle chit-chat; and that

His interest in her ran a lot deeper than anything she had ever experienced before.

THE GIFT OF GOD. “If you knew” is the condition of the second class: if she knew the gift of God, but she didn’t; nor did she know who was speaking to her. What does Jesus mean by “the gift of God?” Is it not the gift mentioned in John 3:16 (eternal life), “the inexpressible gift (2Co 9:15). Some take it to refer to the living water below, but that is another allusion (metaphor) to John 3:16. See Eph 4:7 for Paul’s use of both charis and dôrea (from didômi, to give)” [ATR].

Another writer stresses that what Jesus offers is “Christ himself as living water. Christ followed his perfect approach with a startling offer to the now attentive woman: **living water** for the asking” [NCWB]. Summarizing the entire verse, yet another student of the Word writes:

“Having captured her attention and stimulated her curiosity, **Jesus** then spoke an enigmatic saying to cause her to think. It was as if He had said, “Your shock would be infinitely greater if you really knew who I am. *You*—not I—would be asking!” Three things would have provoked her thinking: (1) **Who** is He? (2) What is **the gift of God?** (3) What is **living water?** “Living water” in one sense is running water, but in another sense it is the Holy Spirit (Jer. 2:13; Zech. 14:8; John 7:38-39)” [BKC].

SPECIAL NOTE: In his newsletter dated August 6, 2008, Moody Adams credited a man named Norman Grubb for helping him to understand a little more about the gift of God:

(O)ne night a man in Jackson, Mississippi explained this passage in John 1:12 to me: As many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God.

That verse opened the door to a New World. All I had to do was “receive” him. He gave the “power.” Norman Grubb stated it this way, “Man’s chief function is RECEPTIVITY, or receiving from God, not ACTIVITY, or doing for God.”

Man’s chief function is to receive from God. As I read the Bible, I discovered RECEPTIVITY was a thread running through all of Scripture. It traced the key to all of heaven’s gifts:

“We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now RECEIVED the atonement”—(Romans 5:11).

“Shall RECEIVE remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

“That they may RECEIVE forgiveness” (Acts 26:18).

“We have RECEIVED mercy” (II Corinthians 4:1).

“Which have RECEIVED the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10:47).

“You shall RECEIVE power” (Acts 1:8).

“Man hath RECEIVED the gift” (I Peter 4: 10).

“RECEIVING the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls” (I Peter

1:9).

“Asks and you shall RECEIVE, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

“You shall RECEIVE a crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4).

4:11 - SAID THE WOMAN. *“Sir,” said the woman, ‘You don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this ‘living water’?’* Jesus is speaking on one level, but this woman is hearing on another; He on spiritual and eternal things, she on physical and material things. When Jesus mentioned “living water” (vs. 10), she could think only of water from the well. “Since Jacob’s **well** was so **deep** how could Jesus **get this living water?**” [BKC].

The Samaritan woman addressed Jesus as *kurie*, which should be translated “Lord”, but since she had no knowledge of His Lordship, and obviously had no knowledge of who He was, it is simply a term of respect, so “Sir” is appropriate (in the vernacular). She is either respectful of this Jewish man, or simply addressing Him impersonally to introduce the question that came to her mind.

She states the obvious, “You don’t have a bucket, and the well is deep.” When I was a child, during World War II, I had to stay with my Great Aunt Effie Berry one school year while my father was in Germany. She would often say to me, “Go draw a bucket of water”, and I would go to the well in her yard and take the long slender well bucket and slowly lower it into the narrow well casing until I could tell the bucket had entered the water at the bottom, at which time I would lower the bucket slowly, and then begin drawing the bucket out by means of a rope which had been run through a pulley directly over the well opening. When the well bucket cleared the top of the well, I would pull it to the side and pour the water into the water bucket, replace the well bucket and take the fresh water into the kitchen.

Jacob’s well had no such convenience. One brought her own well bucket and rope. “This well (phrear) is 100 feet deep and Jesus had no rope. The bucket of skin (‘with three cross sticks at the mouth to keep it open,’ Vincent) was kept at the well to be let down by a goat’s hair rope” [ATR]. This was the only well there. Jesus had no bucket with which to draw out the water. To this woman the logical question was, where would He get this “living water”?

4:12 - OUR FATHER JACOB. *“You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and livestock.”* To this woman, the next question followed logically after the observation that the well was deep and He had no bucket. Admittedly, this woman might have been seriously looking for answers, but we shall see that she was apparently more than comfortable bantering with a man. She had been married five times and was at that time living with a man to whom she was not married (4:18). That being the case, there is no reason to believe that this poor, guilt ridden Samaritan woman was seeking biblical truth, or theological answers here.

If this Jewish man had water other than water from this very well in mind, the first question that came to mind was, “Are you greater than our father Jacob?” “In Greek this question expects a

negative answer. She could not conceive of Him as greater than Jacob. Her claim “our father Jacob” is interesting in light of the fact that the Jews claim him as the founder of *their* nation. That well had great tradition behind it but, she wondered, *What does this Stranger have?*” [BKC].

Jacob and his sons drank from this well, and watered their livestock from it. “Livestock” is appropriate here, even though others have “cattle”. They watered cattle, sheep, and donkeys at this well. The world translated livestock here is an “Old word from trephô, to nourish, nursling, child, flock, cattle. Only here in N.T.” [ATR].

4:13 - JESUS SAID. *“Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again.”* Jesus knew where he wanted to go with this conversation when He first spoke to this woman, and He was not going to be sidetracked, as many are distracted who try to witness for Him today. Jesus responds to her question and continues to focus on the “living water” He has offered this woman. “Jesus did not directly answer her question, or say that he was greater than Jacob, but he gave her an answer by which she might infer that he was. He did not despise or undervalue Jacob or his gifts; but, however great might be the value of that well, the water could not altogether remove thirst” [BARNES].

4:14 - THE WATER THAT I WILL GIVE. *“But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again—ever! In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up within him for eternal life.”* Jesus now moves from the water this woman and women of her village drew from this well daily to something much deeper and far more satisfying.

NEVER GET THIRSTY AGAIN—EVER. Jesus sets the water He offers in sharp contrast to the water the women came daily to draw from Jacob’s well. They had to return daily, if not more than one time each day, because those who drank water from this well became thirsty again in a short period of time. Those who drink of the water Jesus offers will never thirst again. How can that be? The answer is simple: He offers Himself, and He is the Water of Life, a truth stated so clearly that one almost expects to find it in the list of “I Am” saying of Jesus in John.

In addition to that thought, Robertson s adds, “Shall never thirst (ou mê dipsêsei eis ton aiona). The double negative ou mê is used with either the future indicative as here or the aorist subjunctive, **the strongest possible negative**” [ATR, bold added by this writer]. Jesus could not state it more strongly than this, unless it was is declaration in John 10:28: “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (KJV). These two verses compliment each and underscore the eternal security of born-again believers.

A WELL OF WATER. Anyone who receives the “gift of God” (4:10) will never thirst again. Later on, Jesus will amplify this promise: “On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone is thirsty, he should come to Me and drink! The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, will have **streams of living water flow from deep within him**” (John 7:37-38, bold added by this writer).

I grew up in the Mississippi Delta, where city water was, for the most part, confined to the towns. The Mississippi Delta is actually an alluvial plain, built up by top soil deposited by the Mississippi River over many centuries. The soil was ideal for cotton and soybeans, so most of the land out side the towns was farm land. We had several pumps on out farm, including the one that served our home. Even as a small boy, I had to pump water for cooking, drinking, washing clothes, cleaning the house, for livestock, and on occasions for my mother's plants.

Even though I lived in Tunica County, I worked for several years for the Quitman County ASCS (USDA) office in order to pay school expenses when I was a student at Mississippi College and New Orleans Seminary. I was surprised to discover that some of the boys who were used to drinking city water would become sick when they drank from a farm pump, because the water was "hard". Farmers said it has iron (minerals) in it.

The pumps that were used, or maintained, regularly, could be counted on for good cold water, even if it did have iron in it. There were times, however, when I would go to a pump near a house or barn and lift the pump handle, only to discover that there was no resistance when I raised it. I knew that when I released the handle it would fall back down. The pump was dry. At times, a farmer would leave a can of water with which the next person who stopped by could "prime the pump". The situation usually occurred when the leather seal had gone bad. When you poured water into the pump you could "prime" it and then pump water, but when you stopped using it the water would run back down into the pipe and the pump would "lose its prime".

Another problem was conceivable. The farmer might stop driving the point of the pump when found water and not drive it any deeper. The water table might drop, leaving the point of the pump above the water. There would be no water.

I had not worked in Quitman County, Mississippi long before I located most of the artesian wells, wells that had been drilled on large plantations for use by the farm owner and others near the well. I always made it a point to stop by an artesian well, if there was one in the area, when I left a farm. In some cases, in addition to supplying the home or homes near the well with water, the water ran twenty-fours a day into a large trough or concrete box, and then out through a ditch. People could stop by and fill thermos cans or even barrels with good, soft water. It was always running. I soon began stopping by one well and filling my thermos can before going home. I liked the water better than that at our home, mostly because it was soft and lacked the iron taste often found in the pumps in the area.

Someone once told me that the water we drank from the artesian wells had probably fallen somewhere in the Rockies a century earlier. I have no idea whether or not that was so, but I know I could count on good fresh water any time I wanted it.

Jesus offered, as a free gift, an eternal spring of water, that did not come to the surface because of some mysterious pressure under ground, or because of a pump. The water He gives "will become a

well of water springing up within him for eternal life.” The water He gives is always fresh, it is always adequate, and it continually blesses with life, for the simple reason that He is the source of that “living water”.

SPECIAL APPLICATION: David was inspired to write, “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (Ps. 18:2, (NASB). In the same psalm, David added, “For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God” (Ps. 18:31, NASB).

Another psalmist wrote, “He split the rocks in the wilderness And gave them abundant drink like the ocean depths. **He brought forth streams also from the rock And caused waters to run down like rivers**” (Ps. 78:15-16, NASB, bold added by this writer). The same psalmist added, “Behold, He struck the rock so that waters gushed out, And streams were overflowing...” (Ps. 78:20, NASB). Now, let us make an application of these verses to the promise Jesus has just made:

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that **our fathers** were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; **and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink**, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; **and the rock was Christ**” (1 Cor 10:1-4, NASB, bold added by this writer).

Jesus had said, “If you knew **the gift of God**, and who is saying to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would ask Him, and **He would give you living water**” (John 4:10, HCSB, bold added by this writer). Jesus then promises, “But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again—ever! In fact, the water I will give him will become **a well of water springing up within him for eternal life**” (John 4:14, bold added by this writer).

With that in mind, look at the final invitation in the Bible: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And **let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost**” (Rev 22:17, NASB, bold added by this writer).

4:15 - GIVE ME THIS WATER. “*Sir,*” *the woman said to Him, “give me this water so I won’t get thirsty and come here to draw water.”* She still calls him *Kurie* (the word for Lord), but He is not yet her Lord. So, “Sir” is appropriate. She asks Him to give her this water, of which he spoke. Did she seriously expect Him to give her a bucket of water that she could drink and never become thirsty again? The very thought that she might not have to come to the well and draw water again must have appealed to her, but it is highly improbably that she expected that.

Was she being flippant, or just making conversation? That she did not understand is obvious. That she did not believe Him is equally apparent. The New American Commentary stresses that, ““Although the woman may have been thinking about well water (4:13), Jesus was interested in internal or spiritual water. Such water would become in a person (en auto) not stale cistern water but a free-flowing fountain or spring (pege) of water leaping or bubbling (hallomenou) into life eternal

(4:14)” [NAC]. The theme of spiritual food and water was not new to Jewish leaders of the day:

“Isaiah had promised Israel that the thirsty and hungry could have water and bread that would not cost them money, and outsiders would be brought into the fold (Isa 55:1–5). This great theme of the thirsty and the hungry was picked up by the Wisdom writers as a symbol for the desire of God’s way of wisdom (Sir 24:21; 1 Enoch 48:1). Here, however, not merely the faithful of Israel but also the rejected and thirsty half-breeds of Jewish society were being drawn into the fold of Jesus. Their coming would soon thereafter elicit from them one of the primary confessions found in the Gospel of John (4:42). Yet the symbolism of Jesus’ water completely escaped the woman’s understanding just as Nicodemus missed the symbolism of birth earlier. So she asked for a pipeline to Jesus’ water to avoid the drudgery of the physical work that brought her to draw water from the well either at high noon or at six in the evening (4:15)” [NAC].

4:16 - CALL YOUR HUSBAND. *“Go call your husband,” He told her, “and come back here.”* Jesus, who knew what was in every person, knew she did not understand, so He asked her to go call her husband, “and then come back here.” Adam Clarke wrote, “Our Lord appears to have spoken these words for two purposes: 1. To make the woman consider her own state. 2. To show her that he knew her heart, and the secret actions of her life; and was therefore well qualified to teach her heavenly truths” [CLARKE].

For those who are looking for proof that the Gospel overcame barriers, this is a great example of the Gospel overcoming the barrier between the sexes at a time when that barrier was very high. For those who are looking for an example of how Jesus witnessed to lost people, there is a lot to learn from His encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. She did not understand, and her responses were not leading to an understanding. Therefore, Jesus refocuses the discussion by presenting her with something she could do, and by demonstrating His omniscience. We are not omniscient, but the Holy Spirit who indwells us is. He will lead us, provided that we do not try to led Him!

4:17 - I DON’T HAVE A HUSBAND. *“I don’t have a husband,” she answered. ‘You have correctly said, ‘I don’t have a husband,’ Jesus said.”* The woman could answer this question honestly, but it is highly probable that her response was designed to change the subject, to avoid the issue. One wonders if she was not beginning to realize that this was no ordinary Jewish man standing before her. It is also possible that she did not want to go back and ask the man with whom she lived to return with her, either for fear of his reaction, or possibly because she did not want admit the immoral relationship. The Samaritans also professed to obey the Ten Commandments.

4:18 - YOU HAVE HAD FIVE HUSBANDS. *“For you’ve had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”* The woman denied having a husband, but “Jesus saw through the double sense of her language and read her heart as he only can do, a supernatural gift of which John often speaks (John 1:48; John 2:24; John 5:20)” [ATR]. What

she said was true, but her purpose was to hide the truth from Jesus. He saw through her attempt to mislead Him and announced, “you’ve had five husbands, and the man you now have in not your husband.” There can be no doubt this was a shocking announcement for this woman to hear.

We are not told what happened to those five husbands. Was she widowed five times? Had she been divorced five times? “It is not clear that this woman was a prostitute: she might have been legally married to those five, and might have been divorced through some misbehavior of her own, not amounting to adultery; for the adulteress was to be put to death, both by the Jewish and Samaritan law, not divorced” [CLARKE]. Jesus said that she had had five husbands and the man with whom she was living at the time was not her husband. That she was immoral is clear, but that does not mean that she had always been immoral.

“When she tried to avoid the issue of a husband (4:17), just as she apparently sought to avoid coming for water along with the other women, Jesus spelled out clearly her ethical problem. After experimenting with five husbands (which should not be allegorized), she no longer found the marriage ritual necessary (4:18). Jewish tradition permitted three husbands, but she obviously had long passed that more lenient rule. When she said she had no husband at that time, she had in fact stumbled onto an important idea with Jesus—the idea of truth (alethes, 4:18). Jesus therefore noted this fact clearly” [NAC].

4:19 - A PROPHET. “*Sir,*” the woman replied, “*I see that You are a prophet.*” She continues to address Him by the same title, “Sir” (kurie, or kyrie). Now, she has an answer: He is a prophet! She must have concluded that no one but a prophet could know this. Even though she concludes that He is a prophet, her main purpose in making the statement was no doubt to deflect attention from herself and focus it on Him.

“Whether she made this observation as an off-handed comment or as a statement of her profound respect for Jesus is not entirely clear. Some interpreters have suggested that she might here have been making a confession that Jesus was “the” prophet like Moses who was expected by the Jews and Samaritans (cf. Deut 18:15–19; Cf. John 1:21). The Samaritans’ expectation focused on the Taheb, a prophet-like figure similar to Moses, whom they believed would be able to answer all the vexing questions of the law (which for them was the Samaritan Pentateuch). On the balance of probabilities, however, it seems that the reference to “prophet” here is likely a generic use of the term since in v. 25 the issue becomes more individualized on a figure” [NAC].

4:20 - OUR FATHERS WORSHIPED. “*Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, yet you [Jews] say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.*” The woman’s response underscores not only how much history the Jews and Samaritans shared, but how that history separated them. When Jesus reached out to this woman beside Jacob’s well, the Lord was reaching across numerous barriers: religious, sex (gender), cultural, class, and intellectual barriers. The one thing commentaries want to

dwell on is the one thing that did not divide them. The NAC author persists in calling this woman a half-breed, but the Samaritans descended from intermarriage (miscegenation) between the Israelites Sargon II of Assyria left in the region and other Semitic peoples he moved into the region following his conquest in 722 B. C. There is an abundance of Scripture that should guide us in racial relationships without forcing this application here.

Consider the woman's response. Think how often it happens that when one is confronted with his or her sins, they ask a religious question in an effort to divert attention from themselves. What pastor cannot recall a time when he caught some church member doing something wrong, only to have that person ask him a question about the Bible. The woman jumps now from the well to the different places of worship that identified the Samaritans and the Jews

Jacob's Well is located at the base of Mount Gerizim toward which she probably pointed. "Sanballat erected a temple on this mountain which was destroyed by John Hyrcanus B.C. 129. Abraham (Gen 12:7) and Jacob (Gen 33:20) set up altars at Shechem. On Gerizim were proclaimed the blessings recorded in Deut 28:1-68. The Samaritan Pentateuch records an altar set up on Gerizim that is on Ebal (over 200 feet higher than Gerizim) in the Hebrew (Deut 27:4). The Samaritans held that Abraham offered up Isaac on Gerizim" [NAC]. The Samaritans worshiped there at the time and some report that a tiny group still worship there.

YET YOU. The woman stated the contrast: "Our fathers worshiped"; yet, "you [Jews] say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem." Her purpose is clear. In the Greek (*kai humeis legete*), the emphasis is on *humeis* (you). You Jews teach that you must worship (as a necessity) in Jerusalem. (*proskunein dei*). "The woman felt that by raising this theological wrangle she would turn the attention of Jesus away from herself and perhaps get some light on the famous controversy. *Proskuneō* in John is always worship, not just respect" [NAC]. She may have been looking for some new light on an old controversy, but her primary purpose was clearly to distract Jesus.

4:21 -THE HOUR IS COMING. *"Jesus told her, "Believe Me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem."* Our supreme example in witnessing to a lost person, regardless of their circumstances, is Jesus. He is dealing with a lost woman who asks a religious question to get Him off the subject. He was not fooled by her ploy, and His response shows that His focus was not deflected in any way. He draws her into a deeper focus on the things of God: "The woman parried by diverting the discussion from a personal exposé to a current religious controversy, but Jesus seized the opportunity to define the true worship of God and to expose the futility of ignorant Samaritan worship" [NCWB].

When Jesus said, "The hour is coming" (see also, vs. 23), He "referred to the coming death of **Jesus** which would inaugurate a new phase of worship in God's economy. In the Church Age, because of the work of the Spirit, **worship** is no longer centered in temples like those on Mount Gerizim and Mount Zion" [BKC].

WORSHIP. Jesus said that the time is coming when the emphasis in worship will not be

on a physical location.

“If Jesus had entered the age-old argument of which was the “right” temple (like our arguments about the “right” church), the woman would not have had to face herself and her sin. Christians who seek to be ambassadors for Christ must always be wary of falling into the trap of arguing about the “right” place of worship or the “right” denomination. Just as Jesus did not argue with the presuppositions of Nicodemus (John 3:2) and the paralytic (5:7), Jesus did not argue with the woman here. The point is not winning arguments but introducing people to the dimension of God in their lives. The model of Jesus is thus very instructive. He turned the conversation away from place of worship to nature of worship. In so doing, he modeled a correct evangelistic perspective” [NAC].

This does not mean that it does not matter whether or not we worship in the Lord’s house, with His people. Paul clearly shows that New Testament believers came together on the Lord’s Day to worship Him. However, those who say, “I can worship the Lord as well on the lake or in the woods as in church,” clearly do not understand what true worship really is. The lone fisherman, sitting in a boat with his spinning rod in his hand, may say, “My Lord”, but the worshiper sitting (or standing) in the Lord’s house, on the Lord’s day, with the Lord’s people, prays, “Our Father....”

4:22 - YOU SAMARITANS. *“You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews.”* Jesus was kind, meek, and gentle, but He never compromised the truth for expediency, popularity, or safety. The Samaritans maintained the first five books of the Bible but rejected the Prophets and Psalms. They knew about God, but they could not know God. They had the Law, but rejected the One who gave them the Law. They went to Mount Gerizim for a religious exercise, but knew almost nothing of the Messianic hope promised throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. They professed a faith in God but knew very little about Him. As Clarke wrote,

“The Samaritans believed in the same God with the Jews; but, as they rejected all the prophetic writings, they had but an imperfect knowledge of the Deity: besides, as they incorporated the worship of idols with his worship, they might be justly said to worship him whom they did not properly know. See the account of their motley worship, 2Kings 17:26-34. But after Sanballat had built the temple on Mount Gerizim, the idolatrous worship of the Cutheans and Sepharvites, etc., was entirely laid aside; the same religious service being performed in the Samaritan temple which was performed in that at Jerusalem” [CLARKE].

SALVATION IS OF THE JEWS. The Samaritans were not “the vehicle for the salvation of mankind. Israel was the nation chosen by God to have great privileges (Rom. 9:4-5). When Jesus said, “Salvation is of the Jews”, He did not mean that all Jews were saved or were especially pious. ‘Salvation is from the Jews’ in the sense that it is available through Jesus, who

was born of the seed of Abraham” [BKC]. “The salvation of mankind” denotes “Messianic salvation which had long been the hope and guiding star of the chosen people (Luke 1:69, 71, 77; Acts 13:26, 47). It was for the whole world (John 3:17), but it comes ‘out of’ (ek) the Jews. This tremendous fact should never be forgotten, however unworthy the Jews may have proved of their privilege. The Messiah, God’s Son, was a Jew” [ATR].

The Samaritans knew about God, but they did not know God. Today, it is common to hear someone on television say, “He is a man of faith”; or “She has her faith; or perhaps, “They have their faith to sustain them at a time like this.” This comes at a time when, according to Internet web sites, a major employer in American is going to let Muslims take a holy day off from work instead of celebrating Labor Day. When people say faith today they can mean any kind of religion. Franklin Graham was interviewed by Greta Van Susteren from a run down hospital in North Korea on August 7, 2008. She questioned him about his efforts to bring aid to a very primitive hospital. Surgeons were doing emergency surgery on an individual with no electricity. Franklin Graham and his Samaritan’s Purse Ministries, is partnering with the U.S. Government in an effort to provide a generator and medical supplies for this, and other hospitals in North Korea. While Graham stressed that he is an American, trying to provide supplies and assistance to that hospital, he said, “I serve Jesus Christ.” At a time when the word “faith” satisfies more and more Christians, it is refreshing to hear someone stress, “I serve Jesus Christ.”

4:23 - AN HOUR IS COMING. *“But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship Him.”* The “hour”, or time to which the Jewish prophets looked (of which the Samaritans were for the most part ignorant) has already arrived, “and is not here”. When exactly did that hour come? Jesus answers that question of us: “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John” (Matt. 11:13). The Law and the prophets were fulfilled when John the Baptist stood pointing to Jesus and declared, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” In other words, with the coming of the Messiah, Jesus, the time had come for a new order of worship.

TRUE WORSHIPERS. True worshipers always stand in opposition to false worshipers. Let us be very clear about this. God had revealed the truth about true worship to His people through His prophet Jeremiah when He told the weeping prophet to proclaim His message of judgment to the people He had Chosen for His Messianic purpose. First, The Lord told Jeremiah to demand of Judah, “**Has a nation [ever] exchanged its gods?** (but they were not gods!) Yet My people have exchanged their Glory for useless idols. Be horrified at this, heavens; be shocked and utterly appalled” (Jer 2:11-12, bold added by this writer). Note that **God does not excuse false worship on grounds of ignorance, tradition, culture,** or any other human division. The nation had not simply slipped into something less than God’s perfect will for His people; they had “**exchanged**” the glory of the true God for the worship of false gods! They chose false worship over true worship.

Second, the Lord charged, “For My people have committed **a double evil:** They have **abandoned Me,** the fountain of living water, and **dug cisterns for themselves,** cracked cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jer. 2:13, bold added by this writer). They chose to exchange true worship for false worship,

and that usually follows one of two directions: (1) **worship of false gods**, or (2) **false worship of the true God**. Jeremiah's contemporaries blended the two, with the help and encouragement of the priests and prophets who professed to be serving Yahweh.

WORSHIP THE FATHER IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH. True worshipers will worship the Father, not through ritual, ceremony, and imagery, but in spirit and truth. **“True worshipers** are those who realize that Jesus is the Truth of God (3:21; 14:6) and the one and only Way to the Father (Acts 4:12). To worship **in truth** is to worship God through Jesus. To worship **in Spirit** is to worship in the new realm which God has revealed to people. **The Father** is seeking true **worshipers** because He wants people to live in reality, not in falsehood. Everybody is a worshiper (Rom. 1:25) but because of sin many are blind and constantly put their trust in worthless objects” [BKC, bold in original]. This contrasts with the false worship of the Samaritans and “their ignorance of the scriptural truths (4:22)” [NCWB]. Writing about worshipping God in spirit and truth, Robertson writes:

“This is what matters, not where, but how (in reality, in the spirit of man, the highest part of man, and so in truth). All this is according to the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:5) who is the Spirit of truth (John 16:13). Here Jesus has said the final word on worship, one needed today. Seeketh (zêtei). The Father has revealed himself in the Son who is the truth (John 14:6, 9). It does matter whether we have a true conception of God whom we worship” [ATR].

In His Farewell Discourse, Jesus proclaimed Himself to be “the way, the truth, and the light (John 14:6). He had already declared, “If you continue in My word, you really are My disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). No one goes to the Father except through the Son, and no one will ever know the Son apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, whom He sent for such purpose.

I met Dr. Brad Waggoner when I was on the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources. As chairman of the Broadman and Holman Committee (or possibly when I was vice-chairman) I was serving on the executive committee when the president, Dr. Thom Raier, recommended Dr. Waggoner, a professor at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, KY, to head up a new Research Division at LifeWay. We recommended the new division, with Dr. Waggoner as the vice-president to the full board. He is currently serving as vice-president over the B & H Publishing Group (formerly Broadman and Holman). I had opportunities to talk with Dr. Waggoner at meetings and I have e-mailed questions or comments to him. In responding to a question about the Emerging Church, he expressed his concern about a recent study that showed that **something like 53% of church members do not believe Jesus is the only way to know God** or to go to heaven. If that is true, the church in America is in trouble today. Peter was the first preacher ever to preach in the full power of the Holy Spirit when he delivered that monumental sermon on the Day of Pentecost. In it, he declared that “There is no other name known among men whereby you must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NKJV).

YES, THE FATHER WANTS SUCH PEOPLE TO WORSHIP HIM. This is what God wanted in Wilderness; it is what He wanted when Joshua led in the Conquest; it is what He wanted in during the Period of the Judges; It was what he wanted when He entered a Covenant relationship with David; it was what He wanted when He sent Jeremiah before His people with a warning that should have alarmed every person in the land. It was what He wanted when Jesus was on earth, and it is what He demands today.

4:24 - GOD IS SPIRIT. *“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”* Jesus makes the definitive statement on the worship of God here. Robertson wrote, “God is Spirit’ as ‘God is Light’ (1Jn 1:5), ‘God is Love’ (1Jn 4:8). In neither case can we read Spirit is God, Light is God, Love is God. The non-corporeality of God is clearly stated and the personality of God also. All this is put in three words for the first time” [ATR]. This mean that “Since God is himself Spirit and Spirit is his nature, he must be worshiped in (and by) the realm (or medium) that is akin to his nature—namely, man’s spirit. There is one part of man’s being—his human spirit—that corresponds to God’s nature and can even be united to God (see 1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:16)” [NCWB].

IN TRUTH. That is, “in reality, and with proper knowledge concerning the truth in God’s Word” [NCWB]. Truth is a major theme of the Gospel According to John, as we shall see in chapter 8. In 14:6, He declares that He is the way, the truth, and the life. How else should the One who is deserving of those titles be worshiped? One New Testament scholar explains:

“This is the second reason why men should worship him in spirit and in truth. By this is meant that God is without a body; that he is not material or composed of parts; that he is invisible, in every place, pure and holy. This is one of the first truths of religion, and one of the sublimest ever presented to the mind of man. Almost all nations have had some idea of God as gross or material, but the Bible declares that he is a pure spirit. As he is such a spirit, he dwells not in temples made with hands (Acts 7:48), neither is worshipped with men's hands as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things, Acts 17:25. A pure, a holy, a spiritual worship, therefore, is such as he seeks--the offering of the soul rather than the formal offering of the body--the homage of the heart rather than that of the lips” [BARNES].

SPECIAL NOTE: The New American Commentary reminds us that John was not only proclaiming divine truth, He was refuting gnostic claims:

“The Johannine understanding of spirit and truth is not to be identified with the Gnostic usage of such terms. **The Gnostic perspective is that of a secret godhead that is hidden from all except those who possess the special key of gnosis** (knowledge). The stress in John is not on the hiddenness of God revealed through an alien messenger from without. Such a messenger in Gnosticism does not actually

participate in human flesh because flesh is regarded as the creation of an evil subgod. Such a messenger always remains a spiritual reality even though it might employ the vehicle of flesh to awaken the elite Gnostics from the sleep of forgetfulness. But such a view is hardly the Johannine perspective on Jesus, the incarnate Son of God” [NAC, bold added by this writer].

God is the supreme Spirit and He is absolute truth, therefore, all who would worship Him must worship Him in the realm of the spirit, and in total truthfulness. Jesus assured the woman that true worshippers “must” worship in spirit and truth. “Here is the real necessity (dei), not the one used by the woman about the right place of worship (verse John 4:20)” [ATR]. Today, Muslims build very expensive mosques, some suspect that their purpose is to build imposing mosques near Christian churches to make the statement that Islam is superior to Christianity. We must never waver, whoever in our effort to show them that Jesus alone loved them and died for them.

4:25 - MESSIAH IS COMING. “*The woman said to Him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When He comes, He will explain everything to us.’*” If the woman’s response seems a little perplexing to one reading this for the first time, it may help to assure him that he is in good company. It would help if we know whether or not she was serious in making these two statements: (1) “that Messiah is coming”, and (2) “He will explain everything to us”. “Her statement that she knew that the Messiah was coming and that he would provide all the answers (4:25) could be interpreted as a genuine quest for the time of the messianic age, or it could be her last effort at changing the subject and putting this strange speaker in his place. Or it could be a combination of both possibilities” [NAC].

We must remember that the Samaritans used the first five books of the Bible, but rejected the prophets. How did they know to expect the Messiah? Genesis, Chapters 3; 6; and 12 offer hope, but Messianic hope is amplified in Psalms and in the prophets. That they looked forward to a Messiah is clear, both from this passage and from history: “The Samaritans looked for a Messiah, a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:18). Simon Magus gave himself out in Samaria as some great one and had a large following (Acts 8:9). Pilate quelled an uprising in Samaria over a fanatical Messianic claimant (Josephus, Ant. XVIII. iv. 1)” [ATR]. So,

“The Samaritans expected a coming messianic leader. But they did not expect Him to be an anointed king of the Davidic line, since they rejected all the Old Testament except the Pentateuch. Based on Deuteronomy 18:15-18, they expected a Moses-like figure who would solve all their problems. The Samaritan **woman** now understood a part of what Jesus said. She wistfully longed for the messianic days when the **Messiah** would **explain everything**” [BKC].

4:26 - I AM HE. “*I am [He],’ Jesus told her, ‘the One speaking to you.’*” “This self-declaration by Jesus Himself—I... **am He** (the Messiah)—is unusual. Normally in His ministry in Galilee and Judea (cf. 6:15) because of political implications, He veiled His office and used the title

“Son of Man.” But with this Samaritan the dangers of revolt by national zealots were not a problem” [BKC].

Students of John anticipate the I AM saying of Jesus throughout the Gospel, but this is not one of them. It is, however, reminiscent of the God’s revelation of his covenant name to Moses when, speaking from the burning bush, He gave His name as, “I AM”. It is interesting that the special, holy, covenant name for our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer is a verb rather than a noun. I once talked with the late Dr. Leo Eddleman about this name for God. I had spent a lot of time with Dr. Eddleman, but when I as a student and after graduation, and I always liked to pick his brain. I mentioned the fact that the name God gave Moses at the burning bush, I AM, actually means, “I am that which I am, I was that which I was, and I shall be that which I shall be.” Dr. Eddleman said, “It means more than that. In its deepest sense it also means, “I am the cause of your being. He is the source of all that exists.” When I recall that, I also remember that J. Edgar Hoover has once said, “Leo Eddleman has the best working knowledge of Hebrew of any non-Jew in the United States.” While Jesus is not specifically stating that He is the great I AM at this point, He is making a significant statement about Himself. In fact, In response to her reply, He seized the opportunity and declared “I am (He), the one speaking to you.”

“In John the use of ego eimi is an important theological theme that is used in the mouth of Jesus as a self-identifying vehicle for announcing some important theological idea concerning him. Normally the expression is accompanied by some thematic description such as “bread of life” (6:35), “light of the world” (8:12), “door of the sheep” (10:7), “good shepherd” (10:14), or “resurrection and life” (11:25). But in a few places like the present one ego eimi is used without such an accompanying description (cf. also 6:20; 8:58; 18:5). In these texts the shocking reality of a confession of the divine-human presence is being highlighted, and there is no need for discussion with Jesus about who he is. Elsewhere the ego eimi statement by itself is used to emphasize that Jesus is the startling presence of the divine, and in one case it highlights the fact that resistance to him is impossible (18:5). The particular force of the statement here needs to be noted. The conversation is finished!” [NAC].

A HARVEST IN A STRANGE FIELD

4:27 - HIS DISCIPLES. *“Just then His disciples arrived, and they were amazed that He was talking with a woman. Yet no one said, ‘What do You want?’ or ‘Why are You talking with her?’”*

They had arrived at the site of Jacob’s well at 6:00 P.M. and Jesus was “worn out” (v. 6). They left to go into the town to buy food, and while they were gone a Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus asked the woman for a drink, but she challenged with the fact that Jews and Samaritans did not socialize. After a brief exchange in which He tried to reach the woman with His message of salvation, and she verbally fenced with Him, Jesus told her to go find her husband and bring him to see Him.

John continues the narrative with his first hand account of their experience. Before the woman could go, the Lord's disciples returned, and when they saw Him speaking with the woman they were amazed. He was violating two serious taboos. He was speaking to a woman, and if that was not bad enough, He was speaking to a hated Samaritan. They were "amazed" but no one said anything.

This verse could easily be dismissed as simply a part of the narrative, but some think that would be a mistake. "The return of the disciples constitutes an interruption that in effect sets up a striking contrast between the woman, who is an outsider, and the disciples, who are insiders. The contrast is a study in reversal because **the insiders** who ought to know Jesus' perspective wrestle with unspoken questions that reveal their lack of understanding, whereas **the outsider** posits an important question that moves her in the direction of being an insider. **The words in these verses are therefore exceedingly important**"[NAC, bold added by this writer].

4:28 - THE WOMAN LEFT. *"Then the woman left her water jar, went into town, and told the men..."* Jesus has asked the woman go get her husband, so now she leaves her water jar, and rushes into town, not to get her husband, but to tell the men of the town about the man who has provided answers on human being should have known.

John, throughout this Gospel, provides eyewitness side-notes that tell us that he was there. He was an eyewitness to key events that happened during the earthly ministry of our Lord. As he wrote in the First Epistle of John, they saw Him with their eyes, they heard Him with their ears, and they touched Him with their hands. In this case, when he writes that she left her water jar, we must understand that this is not a case of forgetfulness, but purposefulness. Though some have written that the woman left the water jar out of excitement and embarrassment, this writer believes there was more to it than that. She left the water jar at the well because she had some urgent news to share with leaders of the town. She wanted fresh water for her home, so she left the jar knowing she would return, fill it, and take it to her home later. That, of course does not preclude either embarrassment or excitement.

4:29 - COME AND SEE. *"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could this be the Messiah?"* The woman ran into the town and urged the men of the town to "come, see a man who told me everything I ever did!" Her excitement may well have been enough to override what they knew about this woman. The note in the *Believer's Study Bible Notes* remind us that:

"The Samaritans expect a Messiah because there are prophecies about Him in the Pentateuch. Since the Samaritans reject the rest of the O.T., their notion about Him is inadequate and flawed, but to the Samaritan woman Jesus discloses the truth of His messiahship. Other Samaritans come to believe through her witness and confession, in agreement with John's thesis (20:31), 'This is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world' (v. 42)" [BSB].

COULD THIS BE THE MESSIAH? This woman was apparently already convinced (4:26), “but she puts the question in a hesitant form to avoid arousing opposition. With a woman’s intuition she avoided ouk and uses mêti. She does not take sides, but piques their curiosity” [ATR]. She had to be careful how she phrased her question because she was known to be a person of less than acceptable morals. She uses a little native psychology in the way she asked the leading men of her town if they thought this might be the Messiah.

“We must remember that the Samaritans did anticipate the coming of a Messiah, but they did not have the benefit of hundreds of years of Messianic prophecy to guide their thinking. Neither had they heard John the Baptist proclaim Jesus to be the Lamb of God. This report from the woman from their village caused quite a stir” [BSB].

4:30 - MADE THEIR WAY TO HIM. “*They left the town and made their way to Him.*” The Lord had manipulated nations to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, about whom we are reading here. He had raised up the Assyrians to destroy the Northern Kingdom; the Babylonians to take Judah into captivity for seventy years to purge them of idolatry; the Persians to return them; the Greeks to give the world a common language; and the Romans to give the world three things that would help in the spread of the Gospel. Rome gave provided (1) the greatest highway system the world had ever known, (2) the safest travel by land and seas the world had ever known, and (3) the greatest postal system the world had ever known (by which the Scripture might be sent from congregation to congregation). Here, the Greek pulls back the veil and reveals the narrative we miss in English. Robertson explains: “Second aorist (effective) indicative of exerchomai, **at once and in a rush.** And were coming to him (kai êrchonto pros auton). Imperfect middle, graphically picturing **the long procession as they approached Jesus**” [ATR, bold added by this writer].

4:31 - RABBI, EAT. “*In the meantime the disciples kept urging Him, “ Rabbi, eat something.*” John had been kept alive after all the other apostles had been martyred. When, in the final chapter, Jesus predicted what kind of death Peter would die, Peter asked, “what about him”, indicating John. Jesus said, “If I want him to remain until I come,” Jesus answered, “what is that to you? As for you, follow Me” (John 21:22). Years after the death of Peter and Paul, and some 16 years after the destruction of the Temple (A. D. 70), the aged John was inspired to write the Fourth Gospel. It doesn’t take long to discover that it is different from the Synoptic Gospels, even though all four have the Holy Spirit for their divine Author.

In John, the story telling is different in that John often supplies those human interest side-notes that both hold the interest, and declare the authenticity of the account. It is no different here, as he returns to the disciples’ concern introduced in verse 27. They had gone to buy food, and when they returned they found Jesus talking with a Samaritan Woman. Jesus is focused on spiritual things, the disciples on physical things. *The New American Commentary* captures the fascinating story lines here and explains how John does this in other places:

“John was a master at weaving two stories into a single unit. His expertise is most

evident in the death story, where he first weaves the Peter and Annas stories together (18:18–27) and then alternates between the inside and outside scenes of Pilate’s trial (18:28–19:16). In the present story the task of the Gospel writer was to help the reader understand how Jesus brought his disciples to accept the universal nature of his mission sufficiently so that the impact of both the confession and the sense of community as evident in the concluding verses of this pericope (4:39–42) might be perceived by later readers. The means used to achieve that goal is the discussion over food followed by Jesus’ sermonette on the harvest (4:31–38) [NAC].

In the beginning of this account, John wrote that Jesus had to go through Samaria, even though Jews commonly crossed over Jordan, walked north through Perea, and then crossed back into Galilee, rather than encounter the Samaritans. Groups did travel that way, but the necessity here was not geographical or topographical, but moral and spiritual. Jesus is focused on His reason for being at this well in Samaria, but the disciples are focused on their immediate physical needs. The disciples were concerned about supper, whereas Jesus’ focus was upon His purpose in coming into the world (stated in 1:9–14). He never takes His eyes off His mission (stated succinctly 20:30–31).

4:32 - I HAVE FOOD. *“But He said, “I have food to eat that you don’t know about.”* John was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write this account, to which he was an eye witness. He was one of those disciples who were trying to get Jesus to eat. He would never forget that Jesus had assured them that He had a source of food that was unknown to them.

4:33 - THE DISCIPLES SAID. *“The disciples said to one another, ‘Could someone have brought Him something to eat?’”* This is another case in which Jesus confuses His disciples by dealing with both the physical and the spiritual in what today might be considered “double-speak” by those who do not understand Him.

“The disciples’ questioning among themselves (4:33) introduces another case of Jesus’ double-level language resulting in a misunderstanding (cf. Nicodemus at 3:4 and the woman at 4:11). Moreover, it confirmed Jesus’ statement to them that they did not know (a familiar theme) what he was saying. The follow-up statement that Jesus’ food was doing the will of the one who sent him reasserts the theme that Jesus was on a mission as an agent of God doing the Father’s will, one of the strategic themes expanded later in the Festival Cycle and repeated elsewhere (e.g., 5:23, 24, 30, 37; 6:38, 44; 7:16)” [NAC].

4:34 - MY FOOD. *“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work,” Jesus told them.*” What the disciples did not understand was that “The conversion of a needy sinner had been food for Christ’s soul, and he used the occasion to impart some of his own missionary urgency into the hearts of his disciples” [NCWB]. Interestingly, this statement is consistent with what Jesus said in response to the first temptation by Satan (Matt. 4:3–4). “Bread is there contrasted with the word that issues from the mouth of God when Jesus obviously was hungry, having fasted for the long period of forty days in the wilderness (Matt 4:4)” [NAC].

4:35 - DON'T YOU SAY. *“Don’t you say, ‘There are still four more months, then comes the harvest’? Listen [to what] I’m telling you: Open your eyes and look at the fields, for they are ready for harvest.”* Jesus was a master teacher, and He never missed an opportunity to use ordinary things, or common sayings, to teach His disciples eternal truth.

THE HARVEST. With these words, Jesus introduces a theme of which the esteemed rabbis in Jerusalem were totally ignorant. The Synoptic Gospels remind us that Jesus was always focused on the harvest of souls. Here, “Jesus realized that the Samaritans were ripe for the harvest; they were ready, like sheaves of wheat, to be brought into the experience of obtaining eternal life—just like grain is brought into the granary (which explains the statement, **gathereth fruit unto [into] life eternal.** (Cf. Matt. 13:30; Luke 3:17.)” [NCWB]. In time, His disciples would understand that Jesus was saying,

“Farmers have a period of waiting between their sowing and their reaping. **Four months more and then the harvest** was probably a local proverb. But in the spiritual realm there is no long wait. Jesus has come so now it is the day of opportunity. All that is needed is spiritual vision and perception. If the disciples would **look** around, they would see people with spiritual hunger. The Samaritans in their white garments coming from the village (v. 30) may have visually suggested a wheat field **ripe for harvest**” [BKC].

APPLICATION: There are three main applications of the word harvest in the Bible, **the first** of which is the harvest of a crop, whether grape or grain. In fact, the Lord gave specific instructions concerning a Feast of Harvests: “Also [observe] the Festival of Harvest with the firstfruits of your produce from what you sow in the field, and [observe] the Festival of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather your produce from the field” (Ex. 23:16). In Jeremiah, the harvest has both a practical and a prophetic application” “Harvest has passed, summer has ended, but we have not been saved” (Jer 8:20). People living in an agrarian society understand the application in this respect.

The second use of the word harvest concerned the judgment, either temporal or eternal. The word harvest may denote a blessing rather than judgment: “Now the One who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your seed and increase **the harvest of your righteousness**, as you are enriched in every way for all generosity, which produces thanksgiving to God through us” (2 Cor 9:10-11, bold added by this writer).

Israel had to pay a price for her rebellion, as have nations and individuals throughout history, but the Bible clearly warns of a future harvest that should cause all people to fall on their face before Him and ask for his mercy and grace. This future harvest redefines the word catastrophic. Jesus not only kept John alive to write this Gospel, He kept him alive long enough for him to write the Revelation, which offers hope to the righteous, but should scare the living daylights out of every lost person on earth: “Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and **One like the Son of Man** was seated on the cloud, with a gold crown on His head and **a sharp sickle in His hand.**

Another angel came out of the sanctuary, crying out in a loud voice to the One who was seated on the cloud, **‘Use your sickle and reap, for the time to reap has come, since the harvest of the earth is ripe’** (Rev. 14:14-15, bold added by this writer).

The third is a kind of harvest and that harvest is positive, not negative; a blessing, not a curse. That is a harvest of souls. Luke tell us that Jesus spoke of a potential harvest of souls: “He told them: “The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, **pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest**” (Luke 10:2, bold added for emphasis). There are six billion people on earth and most of them are going to perish. The fields truly are white unto harvest, and the workers are still few today. Southern Baptists have something like six thousand missionaries serving with the International Mission Board”, and possibly another six thousand serving with the North American Mission Board. Even if we add all missionaries sent out by all mission minded churches or denominations, the workers are still very few and the harvest is beyond our comprehension. However, we do not have to spend out time fretting over the numbers. Jesus gave us the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), and He empowers us to be His witnesses throughout the world (Acts 1:8).

4:36 - THE REAPER. *“The reaper is already receiving pay and gathering fruit for eternal life, so the sower and reaper can rejoice together.”* This world’s farmer plants his crop, fertilizes it, cultivates it, and waters, and waits four months (vs. 35) for the harvest. The spiritual Harvester does not have to wait four months to begin His harvest. Jesus was reaping a harvest now with the conversion of this Samaritan woman, and He was anticipating a greater harvest, as she went back into the village to tell others about Him. Jesus is sowing spiritual seed and He is being rewarded with a harvest of souls.

THE SOWER AND REAPER. Jesus said, “The sower and the reaper can rejoice together”, meaning that the seed time and the harvest time may happen simultaneously, as in this case. “Usually considerable time passes between the sowing and the reaping as in verse John 4:35. Amos (Amos 9:13) spoke of the time when ‘the ploughman shall overtake the reaper’ and that has happened here with the joy of the harvest time (Isa 9:3). Jesus the Sower and the disciples as the reapers are here rejoicing simultaneously” [ATR].

APPLICATION: I can identify with the agricultural illustration Jesus used here more than most people because I grew up on a cotton and soybean farm in the Mississippi Delta, seven miles west of Sledge, which is located in the northwest corner of the state, south of Memphis. In the late Spring, I would watch my father go out into the fields near our home on Sunday afternoon, take out his pocket knife, open it and slip the blade into the drill (the seed bed), and carefully turn over the crust to see if the seeds had begun germinating. He never worked on Sunday, but he would go out and check to see if the cotton seeds were about to sprout. We then watched as the tiny plant broke through the crust of the earth to see if we would get a “stand” (complete row, with no gaps). Then we watched as the cotton grew, and in those last days before pre-emergence chemicals prevented grass from coming up in the field, we had to chop the cotton with hoes, after it had been plowed to kill the grass and weeds in the middles (between the rows). We did this until the cotton was well established and big enough

to shade out the grass. In time the farmers could prevent that problem with chemicals.

Next, came lay-by time. Between the time we stopped plowing the cotton and the harvest, we took care of other farm jobs, including getting ready for harvest. It was during this time that a farmer checked out his trucks or trailers. You didn't want a tire blowing out in the field, or on the way the gin. Before we bought the first mechanical cotton picker, we had to get the cotton sacks ready for those who would be picking the cotton by hand. When I was pastor of the Dockery Baptist Church, between Ruleville and Cleveland, Mississippi, the manager of the commissary for Dockery Farms told me he had seen as many as 500 hands go into the fields with sacks each day, back before mechanical pickers replaced them.

Today, farming is much more mechanized, but just as we stood on those turn rows many years ago, the farmer today drives by to try to estimate is yield. An ariel application of defoliant and bowl opener means that all the cotton will be open at one time so the farmer can plan only one pass over the rows. In the case of a modern cotton farm, the fields will literally be white unto harvest.

Not only can I appreciate the agricultural illustration, as a pastor I can identify with the spiritual message. A close friend, Charles Roberts, is pastor of the Denman Avenue Baptist Church in Lufkin Texas. He and I communicate almost every day, either by e-mail or cell phone. One Monday morning I received an e-mail message in which he told me that a large number of people had made professions of faith during the previous few weeks. He said that he was not doing anything different, but the people who were coming were telling him they were coming to hear him preach. He was not preaching any differently from the way he had preached for the past thirty-one years, but the people were coming and being saved. He was rejoicing, but giving the Lord the credit.

When I was a young man, I was called to a church that had gone through one problem after another. As soon as I moved onto the field, I began systematically visiting, sreet by street. It seemed that my labor was totally fruitless. Over and over, church leaders would say, "We think we will be all right, if you just don't become discouraged and leave us." I said, "The Lord has more at stake here than I. If He doesn't give up on you why should I?" Still, there were times when I would go home after a service and asked the Lord to help me remember what I had said. Then one day the phone rang in my study, and a man asked, "Will you talk with us about God?" For two years, people kept coming to our church and they continued coming to Christ. A deacon in another church in town made the statement that "You are reaching people every other church in town had given up on." We had worked for five years before we saw that "overnight success", but we know what it was like to rejoice in a harvest of souls.

4:37 - THE SAYING. *"For in this case the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.'"* This, like the reference to four months between sowing and harvest (vs. 35), may have been a proverb of the time and place, because the one who plants a crop is usually the one responsible for the harvest. In the spiritual realm, the saying is definitely true. "One man may preach the gospel, and with little apparent effect; another, succeeding him, may be crowned with eminent success. The seed, long buried, may spring up in an abundant harvest" [BARNES]. Clarke observes that Jesus was telling

His disciples that:

“Others have labored- the patriarchs and prophets, and ye are entered into the fruits of their labors. They announced the Messiah who was to come, and the expectation of the people was excited, and they longed for his appearance; but they were gathered to their fathers before they could see the fruit of their labor. You are come to tell the people that the kingdom of God is among them, and that God has visited his people.

“The proverb which our Lord mentions above was taken from what ordinarily happens in the course of the Divine providence, where one takes a great deal of pains to procure that of which another reaps the benefit. See instances of this proverb, Leviticus 26:16: Ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. Micah 6:15: Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but not anoint thee with the oil. See also Hosea 7:9” [CLARKE].

4:38 - I SENT YOU. *“I sent you to reap what you didn’t labor for; others have labored, and you have benefited from their labor.”* In the Greek, “I sent” (ego apestela) is emphatic. Jesus has the authority to send out His disciples. He had called His disciples to follow Him, and they had obeyed. He will send them out into the world, where they will benefit from the work of others (Jesus, the prophets, John the Baptist). These disciples had done no sowing here in Samaria. Only Jesus, and now this Samaritan woman had sown.

YOU HAVE BENEFITTED. The disciples were going to see a harvest for which they had not sown the seed. This happens all the time. A pastor goes to a new church and discovers that there are some serious problems. He preaches, he visits the lost, he visits in the hospitals and nursing homes, he counsels with people who have problems with other members. All the time he is working to improve the image of the church in the community. After several years this pastor is called to another ministry, and that church calls a new pastor, who experiences “success” beyond his wildest imagination. New people begin to come to the church, the Sunday School grows, baptisms are up. The pastor goes to a Pastors Conference, and he is asked about his work. What does he say? He may give the former pastor credit, adopting the attitude of Paul in writing to the church at Corinth: “So, what is Apollos? And what is Paul? They are servants through whom you believed, and each has the role the Lord has given. **I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth**” (1 Cor 3:5-6, bold added by this writer). Or, he may take full credit without giving the former pastor any thought. Of course, he might confide in friends, “I have had more success in this church in six months than my predecessor did in ten years!”

Godly men and women should prayerfully consider what their attitude should be toward the work to which they are called to do. Barnes’s observations are practical and applicable:

“1. That the man who is crowned with eminent success has no cause of boasting over others, any more than the man who reaps a field of grain should boast over the man who sowed it. The labour of both is equally necessary, and the labour of both would

be useless if GOD did not give the increase. Comp. 1Co 3:6.

“2. We should not be discouraged if we do not meet with immediate success. The man that sows is not disheartened because he does not see the harvest immediately spring up. We are to sow our seed in the morning, and in the evening we are not to withhold our hand, for we know not whether shall prosper, this or that; and we are to go forth bearing precious seed, though weeping, knowing that we shall come again rejoicing, bearing our sheaves with us, Ec 11:4 Ps 126:6

“3. Every part of the work of the ministry and of teaching men is needful, and we should rejoice that we are permitted to bear any part, however humble, in bringing sinners to the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, 1Co 12:21-24” [BARNES].

The Savior of the World

4:39 - MANY SAMARITANS. *“Now many Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of what the woman said when she testified, ‘He told me everything I ever did.’”* The Woman to whom Jesus spoke at Jacob’s well had left her water jar at the well and rushed into the town to tell the men she saw about a man who had told her all about herself (4:28). She asked them if this could not be the Messiah (4:29). The men began going in a steady line out to the well to see the One of whom she spoke (4:30). A good number of the Samaritans believed in Jesus because of the woman’s testimony.

4:40 - THEY ASKED HIM TO STAY. *“Therefore, when the Samaritans came to Him, they asked Him to stay with them, and He stayed there two days.”* In 4:4, we are told that Jesus “had to go through Samaria,” and the original stresses, not a physical, but a moral or spiritual necessity. Jesus chose to travel back to Galilee through Samaria in order to take the Gospel to the Samaritans, and now many believe in Him as the Messiah, and ask Him to stay with them. He accepted their invitation and stayed two days. “The word ‘stayed’ (from *meno-*, “to remain, to abide”) is a favorite Johannine theological term (cf. 3:36; 6:56; 15:4” [BKC]. Robertson writes that Jesus “wanted to cultivate the acquaintance of Jesus. So he remained in Sychar in a continuous revival, a most unexpected experience when one recalls the feeling between the Jews and the Samaritans (John 4:9). The reaping went on gloriously” [ATR].

One may wonder why nothing is said about miracles here. Everywhere Jesus went in Galilee and Judea there were miracles of various kinds, from healing, to casting out demons, to walking on water. One might expect Him do demonstrate His power here among a people who might have responded favorably to a supernatural exhibition. In the first place, He had miraculously revealed His knowledge of the woman’s five husband, and the sinful relationship she was in at the time, so there was an initial supernatural manifestation, but there is no record of any other miracles among the Samaritans. Clarke says

“this does not appear to have been necessary: they were a simple- hearted, teachable people, and they credited him on the evidence of his own eternal truth. Why are not miracles wrought now? Miracles were only for the establishment of the doctrines of Christianity, where they were first preached; we profess to believe these doctrines; therefore, to us, miracles would be useless. Where the doctrine is credited, no miracle is necessary: the Samaritans believed, and no miracle was wrought among them; for the simple reason, it was not necessary” [CLARKE].

4:41 - MANY MORE. *“Many more believed because of what He said.”* Many believed because of the testimony of the woman, and others believed when they initially heard Jesus at the well. They invited Him to stay with them, and during the two days he stayed there many more believed, receiving eternal life. “His message was the cause of their faith. Personal testimony plus the message of Jesus is still God’s means of salvation” [BKC]. The woman had given her testimony and Jesus had witnessed to the people, but here is another element of which we may surmise: these new believers most certainly were sharing the good news with their neighbors, which led many of them to believe.

“The evangelist also pointedly stressed that Jesus actually stayed (note the mention twice of the theme word for “remain” or “abide” at 4:40) with them two days. The Jewish concern over association (ritual purity) that was specifically enunciated by the woman in her opening words (4:9) obviously was not a major concern for Jesus. Jewish rules of ritual purity also were not what he meant when he said ‘salvation is from the Jews’ (4:22)” [NAC].

4:42 - THEY TOLD THE WOMAN. *“And they told the woman, ‘We no longer believe because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this really is the Savior of the world.’”* The people of her village told the woman that they “no longer” believed because of her testimony, because they had heard the truth for themselves.

“After seeing Christ and hearing his words of grace and truth, large numbers of the despised Samaritans believed in Jesus as the Messiah and received eternal life. The missionary zeal of the Samaritan woman and the willing response of her compatriots is sadly ironic in its condemnation of the many privileged Jews who heard Christ for nearly three years but rejected him to the very moment of his crucifixion (Matt. 27:20-25, 39-43). The faith of the Samaritans is doubly ironic because millions of sophisticated people today persist in refusing the one Person who can rescue them from the eternal wrath of God (cf. John 3:18-20, 36)” [NCWB].

It seems very natural that they would make this statement to the woman who had first testified about the One who had told her all about herself. However, it seems in order to note that these new believers do not make this statement as a rebuke. They are not “putting her down” because she was a woman, or because of her immoral lifestyle. This is a positive statement, not a criticism. Her

testimony opened the door for them, but the words of Jesus were most compelling.

SAVIOR OF THE WORLD. They had heard the woman, and then they had heard the truth from Jesus Himself. Now they tell the woman who had introduced them to Jesus, we now “know that this really is the Savior of the world.” The use of the term, “Savior of the World” has been debated through the ages. Those words were used of Roman emperors, but there is no reason to assume that this was what these people meant. Robertson mentions various claims that various leaders were called saviors of the world, but the Jews did not use this term for Jesus. However, he points out that “the New Testament so calls Christ (Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Acts 5:31; Acts 3:23; Php 3:20; Eph 5:23 Tit 1:4; Tit 2:13; Tit 3:6; 2Ti 1:10; 2Pe 1:1, 11; 2Pe 2:20; 2Pe 3:2, 18). All these are writings of the first century A.D. The Samaritan villagers rise to the conception that he was the Saviour of the world” [ATR]. It seems appropriate that the Gospel we call the Evangelistic Gospel would identify Jesus as the Savior of the World.

“The expression “Savior of the world” is particularly Johannine. It coordinates magnificently with the baptizer’s initial confession of Jesus as the paschal “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). John saw Jesus as the answer to the world’s need. The people of the world were the focus of God’s love in Jesus (3:16). The outcasts of Samaria here articulated the purpose of God because Jesus was their expected Taheb, the Savior of the world. Their confession stands as a vivid contrast to the disgust of the Pharisees in the story of the entry into Jerusalem just prior to Passover when in exasperation they finally complained, ‘The whole world has gone after him!’ (12:19)” [NAC].

The New American Commentary wraps this Samaritan experience up for us:

“The story here returns to the Samaritans and concludes with a two-stage statement of the Samaritans’ believing and with the most important confession in the Cana Cycle. In this conclusion one notes first that the theme of witness again occupies a central role. It is forthrightly asserted that many were brought to a point of believing through the woman’s testimony (lit., ‘the word of the woman’s witnessing,’ 4:39). But John also stressed the fact that their believing moved beyond depending upon the testimony from another human (e.g., the woman). Therefore the story emphasizes a believing based upon the word of Jesus (ton logon autou, 4:41)” [NAC].

BACK TO GALILEE

4:43 - GALILEE. “*After two days He left there for Galilee.*” John continues the narrative by telling his readers that Jesus, after accepting the invitation of the Samaritans and staying in Sychar for two days, left for Galilee, His native province. He had been on the way to Galilee when he left

Judea, traveling through Samaria. He went into “some of the parts of Galilee, though evidently not into Nazareth, but probably direct to Cana, John 4:46” [BARNES].

“This can be understood in two ways: (1) Jesus returned to the general region of Galilee, though not to his home town of Nazareth, since a prophet is honored everywhere except in his own country (cf. Mark 6:4; Luke 4:22-27), or (2) Jesus purposely returned to a region in which he knew he would be rejected. His popularity had been growing, so he needed to take an action which would restrain this. (John 4:1-3 tells us that Jesus left Judea to go to Galilee because he knew that the Pharisees were aware that he was gaining more disciples than John had.)” [NCWB].

4:44 - JESUS HIMSELF TESTIFIED. “*Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.*” Why did Jesus say that? Was He not on His way to “his own country” when He spoke those words? This is not the first time someone has asked that question. We may remind ourselves that this statement is made in the Synoptic Gospels (Luke 4:24; Mark 6:4; Mat 13:57), and there can be no doubt that John was aware of that, but it seems a stretch to say that John wrote it because He had read it in the Synoptic accounts (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). We must remember that the divine Author of this material is the Holy Spirit, so that which is stated here is not simply quoted from those sources.

The New American Commentary has a lengthy discussion on this debate, and as good as that commentary normally is, this writer takes issue with the use of the word “half-breeds” in reference to the Samaritans. As mentioned in another place, the late Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, an recognized authority on the region who mastered both the Hebrew and the Arabic, assured this writer that **if you stood a Jew and a Samaritan side by side and dressed them alike you couldn’t tell them apart.** The Samaritans were descended from mix marriages, not between Jews and Gentile, but between Jews and other Semites. The division was religious, not racial. The Golden Rule should be our guide in racial matters, but we should not force an interpretation here.

The NAC points out that some students of John believe Jesus had in mind the fact that the Pharisees were trying to stir up trouble between the disciples or Jesus and those of John the Baptist. However, Judea is not usually considered to be “His own country”, even though He had been born in Bethlehem. In fact, there is no mention of the birth place of Jesus in John [NAC].

Jesus was twice rejected in Nazareth, but does John refer to Judea as ‘his own country’? “If so, the application hardly fits for he had already explained that Jesus was leaving Judea because he was too popular there (John 4:1-3). If he means Galilee, he immediately mentions the cordial welcome accorded Jesus there (verse John 4:45). But even so this is probably John’s meaning for he is speaking of the motive of Jesus in going into Galilee where he had not yet laboured and where he apparently had no such fame as in Judea and now in Samaria” [ATR]. Jesus did not hesitate to go to Jerusalem when He knew His life was in danger, so it should not surprise us that he would go to Galilee, His home province to proclaim the Good New to those would listen.

APPLICATION: Why would Jesus leave Samaria where people were listening to Him, where many people were being saved, to go to Galilee where He knew (vs. 44) most people would reject His message? He knew the people of Galilee would reject Him. He also knew that the people of Judea would ultimately reject Him. Why did He not stay where He was wanted? The answer seems obvious: The Jews had the Scripture. Even though they were not obedient to the Lord, and distorted the Messianic Covenant, they had both the Law and the Prophets.

This writer has written an eight volume, verse-by-verse study on the Book of Acts, and in those volumes a great deal of emphasis is placed on Paul's missionary strategy. Simply stated, he followed the major Roman roads to the major population centers, and on the first Sabbath Day he went to the Jewish synagogue, where he was given an opportunity to speak. They recognized him as a pharisee and a scholar. He could begin with Abraham and review the history of God's covenant with His Chosen People, and go on to reveal that the Messianic Covenant had been fulfilled, and that the Messiah was Jesus of Nazareth. To appreciate the advantage this offered compare Paul's sermon at the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:13ff) with the sermon he preached on the Acropolis in Athens (Acts 17). Those Jews who did believe could begin teaching new believers because many of them were well grounded in the Old Testament Scriptures. That was a major disadvantage for the Samaritans.

There is another reason, and that is more important. God had promised to send His Messiah to the Jews. He would honor His promise. Jesus was fully aware of that.

4:45 - ENTERED GALILEE. *“When they entered Galilee, the Galileans welcomed Him because they had seen everything He did in Jerusalem during the festival. For they also had gone to the festival.”* “When” is used in the sequential sense, not the consequential sense. He was not forced out of Samaria, but chose to go back to Galilee. When Jesus entered Galilee, people began to recognize Him and began to welcome Him. The Samaritans did not recognize Him because they had not been in Jerusalem for the Passover, but these Galileans had been there and they had seen His miracles: “While He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many trusted in His name when they saw the signs He was doing” (John 2:23). They were excited, and continued to welcome Him because they had seen the mighty works he had done in Jerusalem during the first Passover

THE SECOND SIGN

The Healing of an Official's Son

4:46 - AGAIN TO CANA. *“Then He went again to Cana of Galilee, where He had turned the water into wine. There was a certain royal official whose son was ill at Capernaum.”* Jesus returns to Galilee, but instead of going to Nazareth, His hometown, he went to Cana, the place where He had performed the first sign. After an absence of some time one might wonder why He didn't go to Nazareth to see His family. They had no telephones and no Internet, so He couldn't call to check on

His mother Mary. Would he not want to see His brothers and sisters? If traditions are to be believed and Joseph was dead, Jesus may well have worked to provide a living for His mother and younger siblings, so it would have been natural for Him to go to Nazareth.

The problem with that kind of reasoning is that this was not a natural ministry. He knew exactly where He was going and why. At the wedding feast in Cana, Mary had gone to Jesus when they ran out of wine, and in His simple question, “What is that to you and Me?”, there may have been a gentle reminder that He was in charge of His ministry. From that time forward, He was Lord and she would be His servant. He was not neglecting His mother, not did she ever neglect Him. When vile critics imply immoral relations with women who traveled with Him, one might remind them that His mother was one of those women. The last decision Her older Son would make from the cross before His death was to commit her care to John, the very one who is writing this account.

A CERTAIN ROYAL OFFICIAL. This “certain royal official” is not identified. “He could have been a Gentile or a Jew, a centurion, or a minor official in Herod’s court. Possibly he was a Jew because Jesus included him among the people who desire signs and wonders (v. 48; cf. 1 Cor. 1:22)” [BKC]. All things considered, it seems reasonable to conclude that this royal official may have been in the service of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, who served the Roman emperor. He may have been a military officer, but since he was headquartered in Capernaum, it is just as likely that he served in a civil capacity, such as a tax or revenue official.

Some have pointed out a connection between the two Cana signs, suggesting that there is “a sense of rhythm to the two Cana stories. Perhaps in the oral stage of tradition or at some early memo stage the stories may have been linked together by Christian witnesses. In both stories there is a statement of need that becomes a longing for help from Jesus. It is followed by a censure from Jesus and then the providing of a miraculous answer to the need. The miraculous answer also is said to lead to believing, which is a major theme of the cycle” [NAC].

That which we are given is all we need to know, and that is that this royal official had a son who was seriously ill at Capernaum. Would Jesus come and help him? Capernaum was located several miles from Cana on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, where the Jordan River empties into that body of water. To be consistent with the narrative, as well as the eternal lessons taught by this second sign, we will want to look for the practical application for people of all ages. “If men receive benefits of Christ, they must come in the same manner. The rich and the poor, the high and the low, must come personally as humble suppliants, and must be willing to bear all the reproach that may be cast on them for thus coming to him. This man showed strong faith in being willing thus to go to Jesus, but he erred in supposing that Jesus could heal only by his being present with his son” [BARNES].

Why should we look for the reason this story is included in this Gospel? What does it matter that Jesus healed this royal official’s son, or that He healed him from a distance? It should matter because the Holy Spirit so constructed the Fourth Gospel to include certain miracles as “signs”.

“It is probable that the miracles of Jesus heretofore had been performed only on those who were present with him, and this nobleman seems to have thought that this was necessary. One design of Jesus in working this miracle was to show him that this was not necessary. Hence he did not go down to Capernaum, but healed him where he was” [BARNES].

4:47 - THIS MAN HEARD. *“When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and pleaded with Him to come down and heal his son, for he was about to die.”* Reports of Jesus’ miracles in Judea had naturally preceded Him to Galilee for the simple reason that people from Capernaum would have been in Jerusalem for Passover and many of them would have seen Him or heard of His miracles. Others would have heard about them because the people returning to Galilee after Passover would have been discussing them. John does not tell us that this official saw the miracles, it is obvious that he knew about them.

The official had heard that Jesus had returned from Judea to Galilee. Those in authority made it a point to know what was happening in their territory, and soon after Jesus returned to Galilee, word reached this royal official.

HE WENT TO HIM. Note that this official did not send someone to bring Jesus to him. As soon as he heard this news, “he went to Him and pleaded with Him to come down and heal his son, for he was about to die.” He was a desperate man who did not hesitate to go to Jesus to beg for help for his son. There is no doubt that he had looked everywhere in the province for help for his son, but regardless of what any local physician might have done, this official knew his son was dying. Was he grasping for straws, or did he genuinely believe Jesus could save his son? Desperate times demand desperate measures, and this man was too desperate to leave it up to a servant to find Jesus and beg Him to come to Capernaum and save his son. He went himself, but it apparently never occurred to Him that Jesus did not have to be physically present to heal him.

4:48 - UNLESS YOU SEE. *“Jesus told him, “Unless you [people] see signs and wonders, you will not believe.”* Jesus was not so much rebuking this official as instructing him and all those present. However, in another sense, it really was a rebuke of their whole attitude toward Him. What was it about the Jews of His day that made them demand “signs and wonders” before they would believe in Him? He was stating a truth, but it did not change their attitude. We might remind ourselves that even His resurrection did not convince the masses, though it did convince many.

There is another question we should consider. Why, with all the miracles Jesus performed during his three year ministry, was this one included as a “sign”? There were more spectacular miracles than this one. He walked on water, He calmed the storm, He fed thousands of people with a child’s lunch, and He raised the dead. In fact, John would write, “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if they were written one by one, I suppose not even **the world itself could contain the books** that would be written” (John 21:25, bold added by this writer).

Since, as John would write, if everything Jesus said and did was written in a book the world could

not contain them, why is this sign included? The obvious answer is that the Holy Spirit determined that it served His purpose, and it supported the purpose in the writing of this Gospel. That purpose is clearly stated: “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. But **these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah**, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31, bold added by this writer).

4:49 - COME DOWN. “*Sir,*’ the official said to Him, ‘*come down before my boy dies!*’” The father desperately pleads with Jesus, obviously in the presence of others to “come down before my boy dies!” It seems that he believed that Jesus could only help his son before he died! Mary and Martha would have that problem when their brother died. Clarke assigns an attitude to this official to which I do not fully subscribe: “He did not think our Lord could cure him without being present, and seems here to feel himself hurt, because our Lord did not come at his first entreaty. It is difficult for a proud man, or a man in office, to humble himself, or to treat even God Almighty with proper respect. The spirit of this man seems not much unlike to that of Naaman the Syrian, 2Kings 5:11” [CLARKE]. That scholar was right in stating that it is difficult for a proud man, or a man of some authority, to humble himself before another, but we must be careful in ascribing that attitude to this desperate father. He is not an official commanded obedience, but a father begging for his son. It is obvious that this father believed Jesus would have to be present in order to help his son, but I don’t know how much significance we should give that fact.

4:50 - YOU SON WILL LIVE. “*Go,*” Jesus told him, “*your son will live.*” The man believed what Jesus said to him and departed.” Jesus is the Son of God, and when He says “come”, wise people will come to Him. When he says “Go”, wise people will go. He commands all of us to “go” unto all the world with His message of salvation. In this case, the “go” is a compassionate command to a grieving father. “Go”, Jesus said, “your sin will live.”

THE MAN BELIEVED. Whatever his thoughts might have been as he made his appeal, when Jesus told him his son would live he “believed what Jesus said to him and departed” immediately for Capernaum and for his son. When he was at home in Capernaum, he believed that Jesus could heal his son, if only He would come to his son’s bedside. Now, as he stands before Jesus in Cana, he believes Jesus has worked a miracle with his son in Capernaum. Miraculous things happen when we believe Jesus. Someone said a long time ago that someday, someone is going to pick up the Bible, read it and believe it, and turn the world upside down. Jesus invites people to come unto Him for eternal life, and all who believe are saved. Jesus is still working miracles in the lives of believers, and not from a distance, because He is now with us at all times. Why then do we not believe? Think of the blessings we deny ourselves because we do not believe Him! Sadly, people who refuse to believe Him are the first to accuse God of being unfair!

4:51 - GOING DOWN. “*While he was still going down, his slaves met him saying that his boy was alive.*” One traveling from the hilly area of Cana to Capernaum on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee would be “going down” all the way. While the official was still traveling from Cana to Capernaum, a journey of about 18 miles, he met his slaves met him, which suggests that they knew exactly which way he would be traveling. They had no way of knowing when the official

would leave Cana, but they knew he would waste no time.

HIS SLAVES. Other translations have “servants”, but the HCSB, seeking to provide us with a word for word rendering translates the word “slaves”. Which is right? Modern Bible scholars follow the traditional rendering of the Greek word (doulos), going back to the KJV, a wonderful version, which is about eighty-five percent the Tyndale NT. Dr. William R. Cooper of Middlesex, England spent years translating the 1526 Tyndale New Testament into modern English, which means that he had to modernize it letter for letter. Here is his modern rendering of this verse from a first edition copy of this amazing work: “And anon as he went on his waye, his servauntes met hym, and tolde hym, sayingg: Thy sonne liveth” [The New Testament, 1526, translated by William Tyndale, Original Spelling Edition, Edited for the Tyndale Society by W. R. Cooper]. Dr. Cooper, as you see, maintained the original spelling.

Now we know why the KJV uses the word servant, but when we look back to First Century Rome, we discover that most of those servants were actually slaves. The use of the word slave may shock the modern reader, but the General Editor of the HCSB, Dr. Ed Blum, and his team of translators considered this word carefully while they were translating the New Testament. As mentioned elsewhere, Dr. Blum met with the Broadman and Holman Committee at a regular meeting of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources, and then at lunch, Dr. Jimmy Draper, who was President of LifeWay Christian Resources at the time, brought Dr. Blum to my table to answer a question raised by a Hispanic trustee from Miami. The man was concerned about the word slave. Dr. Blum explained that the translators were convinced that this is the literal meaning. We listened as Dr. Blum explained that when we are born again we become slaves of Jesus Christ. We are bought with a price and that price is His blood. The Holman Bible Dictionary carries the following note on the word “Slave”:

“Slavery was prevalent and widely accepted in the ancient world. The economy of Egypt, Greece, and Rome was based on slave labor. In the first Christian century, one out of three persons in Italy and one out of five elsewhere was a slave. Huge gangs toiled in the fields and mines and on building projects. Many were domestic and civil servants. Some were temple slaves and others craftsmen. Some were forced to become gladiators. Some were highly intelligent and held responsible positions. Legally, a slave had no rights; but, except for the gangs, most were treated humanely and were better off than many free persons. Domestics were considered part of the family, and some were greatly loved by their masters. Canaan, Aram, Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia had fewer slaves because it proved less expensive to hire free persons. Still, the institution of slavery was unquestioned. The Stoics insisted that slaves were humans and should be treated accordingly; Israel’s law protected slaves in various ways; Christian preachers called upon masters to be kind, but only the Essenes opposed slavery” [Holman Bible Dictionary - after this, HBD].

HIS BOY WAS ALIVE. One wonders what this royal official thought when he saw his slaves coming toward him on the road. Possibly, the expression on the faces of these men told the story

before they announced that “ his boy was alive.”

4:52 - WHAT TIME. *“He asked them at what time he got better. ‘Yesterday at seven in the morning the fever left him,’ they answered.”* The first thought that came into this father’s mind was the announcement Jesus had made the previous day, so he asked “what time he got better. “The fact that the servant reported the healing as being on the previous day would certainly suggest a walking trip rather than a riding trip by the official. The healing event would seem to have taken place either in the early afternoon at one o’clock (if according to some by Hellenistic time the seventh hour were counted from 6:00 a.m.) or about sundown (if counted by Roman time from noon)” [NAC].

THE FEVER LEFT HIM. What was the first sign that the boy was getting better? The fever broke! This would be a good sign today, but in that day when there were no blood tests, no scans, and no MRIs, this was the sign for which one looked first. Soon after the fever broke physical strength should begin returning, especially in a younger person.

4:53 - THE VERY HOUR. *“The father realized this was the very hour at which Jesus had told him, ‘Your son will live.’ Then he himself believed, along with his whole household.”* The father’s first thought (vs. 61) was what time his son began feeling better. His servants told him and he realized that the fever broke the very hour that Jesus announced to him that his son was well.

“The healing was no accident, for it occurred at **the exact** moment Jesus made His promise to him. It was **at the seventh hour**, which by Roman time was 7:00 in the evening. The man’s faith grew, and he brought **all his household** to faith. The lesson of this incident is that Jesus’ power is able to save from death even at a great distance. His Word has power to work; people are simply to believe His Word” [BKC].

4:54 - THE SECOND SIGN. *“This therefore was the second sign Jesus performed after He came from Judea to Galilee.”* There are many references to the miracles of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, but in John the emphasis is upon signs. John was as aware of all the signs and miracles as any other disciple, as we shall see in his concluding remarks, which I offer here for a second time in this volume: “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, **if they were written one by one, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written**” (John 21:25, bold added by this writer).

The first sign had been the changing of water to wine at the wedding feast in Cana. It is interesting that this sign was also performed in Cana - or was it announced in Cana and accomplished in Capernaum? “Both signs **in Galilee** (changing the water into wine [2:1-11] and healing the official’s son) demonstrate that Jesus is the Promised One. Yet both signs had a certain hidden aspect to them. Only the disciples and some servants saw His miracle at the wedding, and this healing was not in public view” [BKC]. The New American Commentary wraps up this chapter with a reference to the “Cana Cycle”: “This story and the entire Cana Cycle conclude with the statement that this event was the second (deuteron) sign Jesus did (4:54). The statement is masterfully coordinated with

the concluding words of the earlier Cana story. There it was said to be the initial (arche) sign (2:11). The question is how John used the words “initial” or “first” and “second.” Are they merely chronological, time-oriented numbers? Or could they be more like the opening and closing numbers in an argument?” [NAC].

This was the second “sign”. As noted above, the first had also been done in Cana (2:1), but many miracles had been done in Jerusalem (John 2:2). A sign is given to signify something. Then what does this second sign signify? For one thing, it shows that Jesus had the power to heal someone who was not present with Him. He healed from a distance. One might logically conclude that Jesus, now that He is no longer limited by a physical body, can still heal without being present with the one He is healing, but the truth is, He is omnipresent! He cannot be separated from anyone who needs him today! He is still Immanuel (God with us).

CHAPTER 5

The Third Sign

Healing a Lame Man

5:1 - A JEWISH FESTIVAL. “*After this, a Jewish festival took place, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*” Interestingly, the festival, or feast, is not named. We must remember that at the time John was writing this Gospel account of the life and ministry of Christ, there was no temple in Jerusalem. It had been destroyed in A. D. 70. John, the lone surviving apostle, had been preaching and teaching in Ephesus for many years, and he knew that most of his readers would be Gentiles. For this reason, it is natural for him to refer to “a Jewish festival”. “John probably intended only to give a reason why Jesus was in Jerusalem” [BKC]. Robertson adds that, “Some manuscripts have the article (hê) ‘the feast’ which would naturally mean the passover. As a matter of fact there is no way of telling what feast it was which Jesus here attended. Even if it was not the passover, there may well be another passover not mentioned besides the three named by John (John 2:13, 23; John 6:4; John 12:1)” [ATR].

One may wonder what difference does it make which festival it was, and dismiss the question without a thought. However, the writer of the material on John in the *New American Commentary*, takes the argument a bit further:

“Because some scholars have failed to perceive this role of Sabbath, they have sought for a specific identification of the feast in 5:1 as Pentecost, Trumpets, Tabernacles, and others. Although the focus of the discussion that follows in John is clearly on Sabbath, it is intriguing to note how the evangelist drew the concepts of Sabbath and Passover together when he referred to “the great day of the Sabbath” in connection with Passover at

19:31. The problem with searching for a name for the unnamed feast is that it involves filling in what is perceived to be a chronological gap in John, failing to realize the theological nature of these festival statements and the cyclical pattern that focuses these chapters on Passover” [NAC].

SPECIAL NOTE: It would be easy to “pass over” the Passover speculation at the beginning of chapter five, but just as we would be missing a fundamental point in the Fourth Gospel if we do not understand the message of the Prologue, we would miss a connection here if we do not see how John 5:1 makes a connection with the chapters that follow. The NAC writer reveals his personal questions as to why we have this reference to this festival.

“The answer to the relationship of chap. 5 to the remaining six chapters of what is here called the Festival Cycle in John is not to be found in seeking to establish the unnamed feast of 5:1 as one of the other Jewish festivals that would fall between the Passover of 2:13, 23 and the Passover of 6:4 as though John were trying to squeeze in another festival between two Passovers in a mere pedantic chronological report. This Gospel is far too organized and theologically sophisticated for such a haphazard approach.

“The entire discussion of chap. 5 is built upon the implications arising from a Sabbath controversy. **Yet for years, I, like many others, struggled to discover the Johannine rationale behind the so-called unnamed feast.** An extended evening discussion with my Old Testament colleagues, however, set me on the track that I had strangely and unfortunately overlooked for years. The answer I am now convinced is offered by the important festival text of Leviticus 23.

“According to that text, festivals are holy convocations. The first day of Passover accordingly is a holy convocation in which no labor is to be done (Lev 23:7). It is in fact a Sabbath, according to the perspective of Leviticus. Thus, **a Sabbath understanding of the festivals is absolutely crucial for sensing the Levitical and Johannine perspective on the festivals. Obviously this evangelist knew what he was doing.** The festivals are thus to be perceived as holy convocations established by God in the Torah (Purim and Hanukkah being added later to the calendar), and they are in Leviticus by statement and implication linked to Sabbath and to the many restrictions on labor pertaining to Sabbath observances.

“With this understanding of festival in mind, the reason for the continual undercurrent of Sabbath in the Johannine Festival Cycle becomes, I believe, much clearer and more relevant to the Johannine portrayal of Jesus as the Lord, even in the festivals. **It also renders any Bultmannian discussion of displacement of chap. 5 as a complete misunderstanding of the Gospel**” [NAC, bold added by this writer].

5:2 - A POOL. *“By the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool, called Bethesda in Hebrew, which has five colonnades.”* “A sheep-gate is repeatedly mentioned by Nehemiah (Ne 3:1,32 12:39) being that by which sheep and oxen were brought into the city. As these were brought mainly for sacrifice, the gate was doubtless near the temple, and near the present place which is shown as the pool of Bethesda” [BARNES]. The present tense, “there is”, implies that the Sheep Gate and the Pool, called Bethesda were still in existence at the time John was writing this, but scholars have long been convinced that the temple had been destroyed for many years before John wrote of it. Some have suggested that the temple had been destroyed, but maybe this gate and this pool may have survived, even though that does not take into account the total destruction Jesus had prophesied. Adam Clarke wrote that

“This is thought by some to be a proof that John wrote his Gospel before the destruction of Jerusalem; and that the pool and its porticoes were still remaining. Though there can be little doubt that Jerusalem was destroyed many years before John wrote, yet this does not necessarily imply that the pool and its porticoes must have been destroyed too. It, or something in its place, is shown to travelers to the present day. See Maundrell's Jour. p. 108. But instead of *esti*, IS, both the Syriac, all the Arabic, Persic, Armenian, and Nonnus, read *hn*, WAS; which is to me some proof that it did not exist when these versions were made, and that the pool which is shown now is not the original” [CLARKE].

To Jews who still remembered the temple, this reference would have brought back some priceless memories. For us today, the reference to the Sheep gate and the Pool of Bethesda remind us of what we have already discovered: John is giving an eye-witness account. He could probably close his eyes and picture both the pool and the colonnades in his mind.

BETHESDA. In Hebrew, BETH, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, stands for house; thus, Bethesda means House of Mercy; Bethlehem means House of Bread; and Bethel means House of God. “The ‘Bethesda Pool’ is probably the pool rediscovered in 1888 near Saint Anne’s Church in Jerusalem” [NCWB]. Excavations of a pool “near the Sheep Gate have uncovered five porticoes or covered colonnades, confirming the accuracy of the description given here in the Fourth Gospel. The pool was actually two pools next to each other” [BKC]. The impression one had in visiting this area was that this was a place of healing.

5:3 - A MULTITUDE OF SICK. *“Within these lay a multitude of the sick—blind, lame, and paralyzed [—waiting for the moving of the water...”* “Within these” denotes the “five colonnades”, or five porches mentioned in the previous verse. The words “multitude of sick” are a sobering reminder of the sad plight of any culture without modern medical care. There were physicians, like Luke, in the First Century, so they were not totally without care. There was, however, very little physicians could do for many of the health problems of the day, but they were not totally helpless. Herbs have been used for countless centuries to help relieve pain, and to treat certain illnesses. The ancient Egyptians, we are told, could diagnose a brain tumor and surgically remove it. If the reports

of a fifty percent success rate is **credible**, that figure is “incredible”!

Many of the illnesses that plague mankind for many centuries were beyond the care of physicians until a few generations ago. My father-in-law, the late B. F. Turner, told me that his father was a very strong, healthy young man when he developed pneumonia and died. He was the picture of health, standing six feet, five inches and weighing 240 pounds, at a time when the average height of men was almost a foot shorter, and people thought of a 200 pound man as a “giant of a man”. Until the discovery of penicillin and other miracle drugs, there was very little doctors could do for many patients. If you check the headstones on many really old cemeteries you may conclude that an epidemic of some kind swept through that community in a certain year.

I was hunting near Oxford, Mississippi when I discovered a cemetery deep within the woods, not far from my aunt’s place. I stood and read the dates. There was a head stone with the name, James Dunn on it, and as I recall, more than one inscription read, “infant son” of James Dunn. Then there was the one that read, “the consort of James Dunn” (she died at age 32 or 33). The next one marked the grave of the second “consort of James Dunn” (who died at age 24). Finally, there was the head stone that marked the dead of a third “consort” of James Dunn”, and this one was 17 years old when she died! He may have married her to take care of children from previous marriages!

John was inspired to tell us that there was a “multitude of sick” people there. We read it, but it is still hard to comprehend it. Missionaries today tell of shocking conditions that exist in remote parts of the earth, and some that are not so remote. Dr. Irene Steward, with whom I have talked countless times, told me about the time she stood with others, including a Catholic priest, in front of Mother Theresa. She told me that Mother Theresa picked up a baby “from the gutter and handed it to me, and she handed one to the priest. I held the baby out from me because of the filth, but she held it close to her.” Dr. Steward had compassion, but her compassion did not override her concern for her clothes. Mother Theresa’s compassion caused her to hug those babies without any thought of her clothes.

Jesus saw this multitude of sick people and had compassion on them. There were the “blind, lame, and paralyzed” there. These people were desperate, as were their loved ones who were trying to help them.

5:4 - BECAUSE AN ANGEL. *“...because an angel would go down into the pool from time to time and stir up the water. Then the first one who got in after the water was stirred up recovered from whatever ailment he had].*

SPECIAL NOTE: The words, “waiting for the moving of the water” (3b), and all of verse 4 are not found in the earliest manuscripts, as most reliable commentaries inform us. For example, one writer tells us that “The earliest manuscripts omit these words which appear to be a late insertion to explain why the pool water was “stirred” (v. 7). People believed that an angel came and stirred it. According to local tradition, the first one in the water would be healed. But the Bible nowhere teaches this kind of superstition, a situation which would be a most cruel contest for many ill people.

No extant Greek manuscript before a.d. 400 contains these words” [BKC].

This raises the question, why would someone have done that? Lest we conclude that someone was deliberately trying to corrupt the Scripture here, let us remind ourselves of marginal notes found in many Bibles, as well as footnotes found on almost every page of a study Bible. Perhaps this was a side note that some copyist either innocently (or ignorantly?) copied as a part of the text. Robertson offers a reasonable suggestion here:

“It is undoubtedly added, like the clause in verse John 5:3, to make clearer the statement in verse John 5:7. Tertullian is the earliest writer to mention it. The Jews explained the healing virtues of the intermittent spring by the ministry of angels. But the periodicity of such angelic visits makes it difficult to believe. It is a relief to many to know that the verse is spurious” [ATR].

We may want to remind ourselves that all nations have had their traditions, and some were so well known that a writer might mentioned one, with the assumption that readers (or listeners) would understand that they referred to a tradition, without discussing the evidence for or against that tradition. The Old Testament Scriptures guarded against the kind of pagan superstition that prevailed in ancient pagan cultures, even though Israel had repeatedly rebelled against God and turned to idolatry in her past. That past was now well behind them, the Babylonian Captivity having purged them of idolatry in the sense of worshiping graven images.

Dr. William R. Cooper, whom I love in the Lord, has made an incredible contribution to our understanding of the Word of God, not only through his “translation” of the 1388 Wycliffe NT, and the 1526 Tyndale NT into modern English (he sent me a signed, first edition copy of this one). He has been working on the 1520 Scots (Nesbitt) NT for almost four years at this writing, and still needs another year, he says, to complete it. He has been battling a form of Leukemia that should have killed him eight years ago (as of this writing in September, 2008). Each Old English letter must be meticulously converted into modern English. In addition to this amazing work, Dr. Cooper has written (after 25 years of research) a book, AFTER THE FLOOD, which research was done to try to determine whether or not he could trust the record of the “Table of Nations” found in Genesis. He discovered that six different European nations could trace their royal line back through Japheth to Noah at the time of Christ.

In his research, Dr. Cooper turned up some interesting facts about the discovery of the Island of Briton, as well as ancient traditions, and information that would challenge modern historians to reconsider some of their conclusions. Just as “the Jews” had their traditions in the First Century, so had the ancient Britons their traditions, many based on pagan superstitions. Dr. Cooper pulls back the veil and sheds some ancient light on the idolatrous background of early inhabitants of Briton.

“There is much else that Flinders Petrie could have added had he been aware of it. For example, before Brutus sailed with his colony to the African coast on their migration from the mainland of Greece, they were said to have alighted upon an

island whose name is given as Legetta in the Welsh chronicle, as Leogetia in Geoffrey of Monmouth, and which was known as Leucadia amongst the classical authors of the Mediterranean world. Today, we know it as the island of Levkås. But there are certain details, important details, that the British accounts mention that could not have been gleaned by a medieval forger simply hearing of the place or seeing it on a map, even one that happened to possess an unusual degree of accuracy for medieval times. For example, although the Welsh chronicle omits the fact, Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin version recounts the detail of the island's woodlands, (22) and we note that even today one can still see on the island 'the remnants of the oak forests which were a feature of Levkås well into the nineteenth century.

“For Geoffrey of Monmouth to be aware of these woods, they must have been mentioned in the original and ancient source-material that he was translating, and we can only ask ourselves whether the presence of oak forests on this sacred island which the Britons long remembered, and the fact that the early Druids of Britain ever afterwards held the oak tree to be particularly and peculiarly sacred, are entirely unconnected. As Pliny tells us:

'The Druidae... esteeme nothing more sacred in the world, than Misselto, and the tree whereupon it breedeth, so it be on Oke... they seem well enough to be named thereupon Dryidae in Greeke, which signifieth ... Oke-priests. (24)

“However, of added interest is the fact that both Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Welsh chronicle record the presence on the island of a ruined temple that was dedicated to the goddess Diana. There then follow the descriptions of a most complex ritual performed by Brutus and the nature and attributes of the goddess Diana that could only have come from a pagan source. But there is an added aspect to all this. Diana was considered to be the personification of the moon, and although there is no apparent trace remaining today of the temple of Diana on the island, there are the ruins of a temple to Diana's theological husband, the sun god Apollo. These ruins lie on a prominence some 230 feet above the sea, and:

'... it was from here that the priests of Apollo would hurl themselves into space, buoyed up - so it was said - by live birds and feathered wings. The relationship between the ritual and the god seems obscure, although there was an early connection between Apollo and various birds. **Ovid confirms that the virtues of the flight and the healing waters below the cliff had been known since the time of Deucalion, the Greek Noah.**' [Bold added by this writer]

“Now there are definite echoes of this curious and most ancient ritual in the story of one of Brutus'not far removed descendants, king Bladud (Blaiddyd in the Welsh

chronicle. See next chapter). Bladud, it is recorded, made himself pinions and wings and learned how to fly. He only had one lesson and the flight was predictably a short one, but the important detail is that Bladud was killed as he struck the temple of Apollo that once stood in the city known today as London” [AFTER THE FLOOD, Bill Cooper, New Wine Press, 1995, West Sussex, England, p 64].

Further research by Dr. Cooper is found in an unpublished book, which may eventually be found on the PastorLife.Com web site, edited by Dr. Mike Minnix for the Georgia Baptist Convention. There is one section in that work, OLD LIGHT ON THE ROMAN CHURCH, that is devoted to a letter Dr. Cooper found in the copy of the Wycliffe New Testament, which he was using to translate Wycliffe from the Latin into modern English (Tyndale was the first to translate the NT from Greek into English).

The letter, which Dr. Cooper determined had been written in Greek and translated into Latin. He translated it back into Greek and then into English. There was a note included that explained that this was a “non-canonical” letter (not a part of the NT Canon). It is not Scripture and that is stated very clearly. If some copyist had copied that without that note modern readers would be facing similar problem to the one here, and assume that this was an inspired copy of the letter Dr. Cooper concludes is the letter to the church at Laodicea which Paul mentions in the fourth chapter of Colossians.

5:5 - ONE MAN. “*One man was there who had been sick for 38 years.*” When I was in college and the first two years of seminary I worked for the Department of Agriculture (ASCS) in Quitman County, Mississippi. One day I stopped at a farm, got out of my car and approached the home of this particular farmer, conscious of the white building near the farm house that had once housed a country store. I was aware of the fact that a former teacher of mine had married one of the sons who had grown up here. I knocked on the door and a very gracious lady answered my knock. I decided that this lady, who possessed the dignity often associated with the Mississippi Delta, was married to the other brother. We talked only a few minutes before making an arrangements to meet her husband, but in those few minutes I told her I was a ministerial student at Mississippi College. She seemed pleased to hear that and went on to tell me that her father had been a Methodist pastor, and that she had some of his books. She asked if I would go through them and pick out any I though I could use. One of those books was, *Gleaning from Genesis*, by Arthur Pink. I discovered that Pink loved this theme or format: Gleaning from the Scripture.

This passage lends itself to that kind of gleaning. This man had been sick for 38 years, but that is not the issue that surfaces from my gleaning. The two words that speak volumes here are “One man”. Within those “five colonnades” (5:2), “lay a multitude of the sick—blind, lame, and paralyzed” (5:3).

What may we glean from this passage? **First**, Jesus had performed many miracles in Jerusalem before this. **Second**, Jesus had the power to heal everyone there that day. **Third**, Jesus did not heal everyone there. **Fourth**, He singled out this one man. **Fifth**, the man had been sick 38 years. **Sixth**, there was no way His critics could have claimed this man had been faking it. **Seventh**, it was the Sabbath Day (5:9).

What do we glean from these facts? It might be stated simply and succinctly: “Jesus picked a certain invalid on a Sabbath Day (v. 9) at a feast, a man who had been afflicted **for 38 years**. John did not say what kind of physical problem he had or if he was **an invalid** from birth. In any case his condition was hopeless” [BKC, bold in the original].

We might expand that a little. **First**, there were many sick people there, many with serious health problems, yet Jesus singled out one man, thus exercising His sovereign right to bless this man. In the **second** place, Jesus, in the midst of all His miracles, is about to give His disciples, as well as believers of all ages, a third sign. For His purpose, this one man was exactly what He needed. Also, it does not take much imagination to conclude that this man was known, both to the others sick people, and to many passers by. What Jesus was about to do for this man would be repeated over and over until Jesus returns.

5:6 - WHEN JESUS SAW HIM. *“When Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had already been there a long time, He said to him, ‘Do you want to get well?’”* There were many sick people there that day, but Jesus saw this one man. He needed only one man for His purpose, which was to give us another sign. Jesus finds the multitudes, and He sees individuals; or perhaps we should say that **Jesus sees the multitudes, but He finds individuals**. He still does that, but not only individual with physical afflictions. He sees multitudes, but he reaches out to individuals who acknowledge their sinful condition and seek His salvation.

HE KNEW. Jesus knew this man had been lying there a long time. How did He know this? Did He ask someone, or assume it from the man’s location or appearance? Or does this denote supernatural knowledge: “He did not need anyone to testify about man; for He Himself knew what was in man” (John 2:25b).

DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL? What a strange question! Or, is it? Is this a question for the modern psychologist to analyze; for sociological speculation; or theological debate? He was there, according to tradition, because he hoped to get into the water at the right time and receiving healing. Is it possible that he had lost hope? Is it that family members took him to this place and left him because they didn’t know what else to do with him?

Jesus knew what he was thinking when he asked the question, so why ask it? His question “was designed to focus the man’s attention on Him, to stimulate his will, and to raise his hopes. In the spiritual realm man’s great problem is that either he does not recognize he is sick (cf. Isa. 1:5-6; Luke 5:31) or he does not want to be cured. People are often happy, for a while at least, in their sins” [BKC]. People who are addicted to alcohol, drugs, pornography, or certain other sins want to be delivered, but often resign themselves to their addiction, and rather than seeking healing, they focus on feeding their addiction, and hiding it from others. Jesus asked this man “a pertinent and sympathetic question” [ATR].

“Christ, by asking this question, designed to excite in this person faith, hope, and a

greater desire of being healed. He wished him to reflect on his miserable state, that he might be the better prepared to receive a cure, and to value it when it came. Addresses of this kind are always proper from the preachers of the Gospel, that the hearts, as well of hardened as of desponding sinners, may be stirred up to desire and expect salvation” [CLARKE].

5:7 - I DON'T HAVE A MAN. *“Sir,” the sick man answered, “I don’t have a man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I’m coming, someone goes down ahead of me.”* It was the belief of locals that an angel troubled the water from time to time, and the first one into the water would be healed. This man, whether or not he believed this myth, could not get into the water by himself, and he had no one to help him. The ones who needed healing the least were the ones who could get into the water first!

“The man’s response to Jesus’ question, “Do you want to get well?” (v. 6), revealed both his poor understanding of God and his sense of hopelessness. Instead of answering the question, he gave his gloomy testimony and his perception of how God works. The only hope evident in his testimony was his commitment to a myth of a periodic miraculous troubling of the pool, which allegedly brought healing to the first person able to jump in” [NAC].

It was bad enough to suffer from such a debilitating affliction, but to live with this hopelessness for so many years compounded it. He had given up on ever being healed. No doubt he had gone through the anticipated stages: denial, hope, resignation, frustration, and finally, despondency.

5:8 - GET UP. *“Get up,” Jesus told him, ‘pick up your bedroll and walk!’* Who but Jesus could issue such a command? For anyone else to make issue such a command it would have been extremely cruel, but Jesus knew exactly what He was doing. John tells us what happened when Jesus healed this man, but there is more. The story provides us with an opportunity to contrast the healing of Jesus to the so called faith healers. Jesus found this man, even though the religious leaders walked by him daily without really seeing him. Unlike modern faith healers, Jesus did not advertise that He would be healing all comers in a tent near the temple complex. He went to the man.

In other studies, I have written about the time I witnessed the work of a faith healer, who in time would be well known and his work highly publicized throughout America. His name was Oral Roberts. He had giant tent set up in a park in Memphis, and people were driving in for all over the region. A number of people from our rural community, the Green River community, 7 to 8 miles west of Sledge, MS, drove to Memphis, not only to see what was happening, but also to support a family that had an appointment to get a family member in the healing line. We watched as the lady who was identified as a deaf-mute in that day advanced toward the stage. We saw her stand before Oral Roberts, we saw him firmly, but gently slap her forehead with the palm of his hand and pronounce her, “HEALED!” When she came off the stage and joined her family she still couldn’t speak or hear. The family watched her for two weeks before writing to the Oral Roberts organization

to explain that Virginia still could neither hear nor speak. Several days later they received a response: She may have gotten out of her place in line! It makes you wonder what the horrible condition was from which she was delivered! Even better, what about the person who had her place in line?

Here is my question: Why is it that the modern faith healers must have a large audience, and why do the people have to come to them, or send in a prayer cloth? Why do we never read about the faith healer who goes to a nursing home, discovers a quadriplegic, and heals him or her? In my youth we heard some bazaar stories about what happened at healing services at a local church that was open during cotton picking season when there was a little money in the Mississippi Delta, but closed the rest of the year. We also heard some rather strange stories about how the people were harangued about the money they were giving, or not giving! One man told us that the evangelist kept them until 10:00 P. M. one night because the Lord had revealed how much money they were supposed to get before he dismissed them. To make sure they gave that amount, he placed his open Bible in the doorway and warned that anyone who stepped over that Bible would be walking on the Word of God!

PICK UP YOUR BEDROLL AND WALK. This, as Robertson explains the Greek construction, is “The first active imperative (ἀρον of ἀρῶ) means to pick up the pallet, and then "go on walking" (present active imperative of περιπατεῖν)” [ATR]. The man was healed instantly, told to pick up his bedroll immediately, and keep on walking. He continued walking the rest of his life. “His command carried with it the required enablement. As with dead Lazarus (11:43), Jesus’ word accomplished His will. This illustrates conversion. When people obey His command to believe, God works in and through His Word” [BKC].

What Jesus did not do that day is noteworthy. He did not invite the man to come to His healing service that night in the big tent at the fairgrounds. He did not take up an offering at the site of this encounter. He simply said, “Pick up your bed and walk.” He was not trying to keep this miracle a secret. In fact, He knew that the news would spread, and that it would create a controversy.

There is another interesting note here. There is **no reference to the other people who were waiting to be healed.** We are told nothing of them. Was Jesus being unfair to them? The answer to that question must be, no, He cannot be unfair. Any suggestion that Jesus was unfair reveals a limited understanding of His holiness and His sovereignty. There is a vast chasm between our understanding and God’s understanding of what is fair and just.

What we must remember here is that John records this as a “sign”. He performed many miracles, many of which are recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, but John records specific “signs”. When we find a sign in the Gospel According to John we must look for the lesson. We will see that which this sign signifies as we continue.

5:9 - INSTANTLY. *“Instantly the man got well, picked up his bedroll, and started to walk. Now that day was the Sabbath...”* Movies and television programs have often portrayed those who were

supernaturally healed as standing slowly and painfully at first, then gradually standing and walking with a certain amount of difficulty. We know that muscles atrophy, and shorten, from pain and inactivity, and rehabilitation normally requires a significant amount of time. When Jesus told this man to take get up, pick up his bedroll and walk he did so instantly. He was instantly and totally healed, and he obeyed Jesus and picked up his bedroll and began to walk.

When Jesus spoke the words the man was healed, but Jesus had the man to give a demonstration of the fact that he was totally healed. Enough people saw the formerly lame man stand up, reach down and pick up his bedroll, and walk, that no one could deny what they had seen. When Jesus heals a sin sick soul, that person is “healed” instantly. One may come to an awareness of his need for Jesus over a period of time (Revelation and Conviction), but one is born again (Converted) instantly.

THAT DAY WAS THE SABBATH. The healing of the lame man was but part of the story. Not only would people notice that the man had been healed, they would be especially conscious of the fact that this had all happened on the Sabbath. Two things had happened on the Sabbath: (1) Jesus healed the lame man, and (2) the man carried his bedroll. Modern day readers will find it difficult to imagine the problems that created in Jerusalem at that time. Today, people tell their children, “We are going to Sunday School; then we are going to eat at your favorite restaurant; and after that we are going to the mall and then we will go to see that new movie you have been wanting to see.” You drive through my area and you will see people mowing lawns, working at service stations, and plowing cotton on the Lord’s Day. I might add that when I was growing up, we had neighbors who worked on Sunday, but my as my father explained to a man who lived on our place, “I don’t work on Sunday, my tractors don’t work on Sunday, and my land is not worked on Sunday.” We fed livestock and watered them, but no other work was done except in a genuine emergency.

In ancient Israel, the Pharisees taught the people from their Scripture: “Remember to dedicate the Sabbath day: You are to labor six days and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the foreigner who is within your gates” (Ex. 20:8-10). They read from Jeremiah,

“This is what the Lord says: Watch yourselves; **do not pick up a load** and bring it in through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. **You must not carry a load** out of your houses on the Sabbath day or do any work, but you must consecrate the Sabbath day, just as I commanded your ancestors” (Jer. 17:21-22, bold added by this writer).

Adam Clarke explains the significance of all of that happened on that Sabbath.

“1. The man was a poor man, and if he had left his bed he might have lost it; and he could not have conveniently watched it till the next morning. Christ showed by this that he was Lord of the sabbath: see Matthew 12:8.

“2. This was not contrary to the spirit of the law: the sabbath was made to honor God

in, and this was a public monument of his power and goodness.

“3. It was consistent with the wisdom of Christ to do his miracles so that they might be seen and known by a multitude of people, and especially in Jerusalem, which was the capital of the country, and the center of the Jewish religion; and this very circumstance of the healed man carrying his bed on the Sabbath day must call the attention of many to this matter, and cause the miracle to be more generally known” [CLARKE].

5:10 - THE JEWS SAID. “...(S)o the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “This is the Sabbath! It’s illegal for you to pick up your bedroll.” John, writing from Ephesus to those living in the Roman world, used the word “Jews” to denote Jews living in Israel who rejected Jesus and were often hostile toward followers of Jesus. He often had in mind the Jewish authorities.

THIS IS THE SABBATH! The reaction of those religious leaders of the Jews, whose authority was sanctioned by Rome, gives us some insight to the attitude that made the Pharisees proverbial for their hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and blindness to divine Truth. The Sadducees were just as rigid but often for a different purpose, namely position and power. They saw this man who had been seriously afflicted for many years carrying his bedroll, and their first thought was not that he had been healed, but that he was carrying his bedroll on the Sabbath. They had no compassion but they were loaded with condemnation for the healed man. Here is a man who has been miraculously healed, and no one who had ever seen him could have doubted that he had been healed, but he hardly had time to rejoice before he is condemned by religious leaders.

To better appreciate the attitude of the Jewish leaders here, we might recall Jeremiah’s famous Temple Sermon (Jer. 7), where God told Jeremiah to tell the people of Judah to stop saying, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord” because that temple was going to be destroyed and they were going to be taken into captivity (Jer. 7). As their ancestors had worshiped the temple instead of the Lord, those religious leaders of Jesus’ day worshiped the Sabbath, and the things associated with the second temple.

PICK UP YOUR BEDROLL. The man used “the very words of Jesus (verse John 5:8), only infinitive (first aorist active). Carrying burdens was considered unlawful on the Sabbath (Ex 23:12; Neh 13:19; Jer 17:21). Stoning was the rabbinical punishment. The healing of the man was a minor detail” [ATR]. The Jews told him, It’s “illegal” for you to pick up your bedroll on the Sabbath. The Levitical Law forbade working on the Sabbath, and the rabbinical law had added stoning as a penalty. They were filled with pride, arrogance, and self-righteousness, but void of compassion. Ritual and ceremony had replace sincere worship of Yahweh.

5:11 - THE MAN WHO. “He replied, “The man who made me well told me, ‘Pick up your bedroll and walk.” When challenged by the Jewish authorities, the healed man responded by simply telling what had happened to him. The same man who healed him had told him to pick up his bedroll and walk. He may not have known who Jesus was, or even His name, but he knew that the

same man who had told him to “get up” (5:8) had told him to pick up his bedroll and walk. The religious authorities were not condemning him because he had been healed, but carrying his bedroll was a major offense.

“The confused man had been caught in the very act of breaking the rules of the rabbis and did not know how to deal with his problem. So he sought for a quick defense by blaming the healer (John 5:11), even though he did not know (note the Johannine theme) who he was (5:13). The mention of the fact that Jesus had “slipped away” (exeneusen, 5:13) calls to mind the familiar “secret” or “hidden” theme of Mark. The hiddenness of Jesus, or so-called “Messianic Secret,” is not a significant theme in John, but the theme of “not knowing” Jesus would function in a similar manner in that it calls the reader’s attention to what should be known” [NAC].

5:12 - WHO IS THIS MAN. “*Who is this man who told you, ‘Pick up [your bedroll] and walk?’ they asked.*” The Jewish religious leaders demand, “who is this man” who told you to pick up your bedroll and walk. They are still focused on the act of carrying a load that was in violation of the Sabbath. Religiosity, Religious zeal and fervor that is not tempered by compassion, can be a dangerous thing. In fact, it has led to the slaughter of millions of people. When we read or see reports today of a riots and murder by angry Muslim mobs we are reminded of that fact. One Danish cartoon set off riots in various places throughout the Islamic world as soon as the news broke.

The author of the material on this passage in The New American Commentary contrasts this healing with that of the blind man in chapter 9. The article is informative and I agree, with one possible exception. That author writes that “The healed blind man made no effort to escape the implications of the healing (cf. 9:17, 30–33) whereas this man blamed the healer” [NAC]. That he “blamed the healer” is an assumption. Might he not have simply been answering the questions asked by the Jews who were authorized to ask this question? The healed man might well have intended to say that he was simply doing what “the man” told him to do, without pointing the blame at Jesus. Apart from that statement, it is worth the time to make the comparison between this healing and the one in chapter 9.

“The Gospel writer, however, makes it clear that in both cases Jesus did not simply leave helpless people to the wolves but “found” them (5:14; 9:35; note the Johannine theme, cf. 1:14–18). In this story Jesus found the man in the temple, a place where in his hopeless state he would have found little welcome but in his healed state was now able to enter. Moreover, Jesus addressed him in his healed state: “Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you” (5:14). These words are not meant to be a cause-and-effect statement related to his sickness or paralysis. Such a direct identification between personal sin and illness, which was proposed by the disciples in the story of the blind man (9:2), was firmly rejected by Jesus (9:3). The statement of cause and effect in this story, therefore, must be taken as referring to the eschatological correlation between sin and judgment that undoubtedly is the meaning of “something worse” in Jesus’ warning to the paralytic” [NAC].

5:13 - DID NOT KNOW WHO. *“But the man who was cured did not know who it was, because Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.”* This man was 38 years old and he had spent a good part of his life on a bedroll “By the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool, called Bethesda in Hebrew, which has five colonnades” (5:2). Unlike the blind man (see John 9:33), this man did not seem to understand who Jesus was. He simply did not understand. Interestingly, some insist that the man sought only to find someone else to blame, and considering the seriousness of the charges brought by the rabbis, they may have a point. One writer charges that “the blaming, self-centered, self-preservation pattern of his former life continued after the healing as he turned from the Healer to investigators (the Jews) and reported Jesus to these authority figures. One implication of the story is that no one should be surprised by the responses of people. Not everyone accepts merciful acts with gratitude (cf. the nine lepers of Luke 17:17–18" [NAC].

That might be a valid charge against the man who had been healed, but again it may be a little severe. In his place we might do the same thing. In the first place, the man had been healed physically; no mention is made of spiritual healing at this point. In the second place, having been charged with the serious offense of carrying his bedroll on the Sabbath, he may have simply been offering the only defense he had. Considering the circumstances, anyone of us might have done the same thing. He did not know Jesus, not was Jesus in sight as the man spoke.

JESUS HAD SLIPPED AWAY. Jesus had not introduced Himself to the man before He healed him. Why? We must not lose sight of the fact that this healing was a sign to the people. **All of the signs in John are recorded to tell us something about Jesus.** He raised Lazarus to proclaim that He is the Resurrection and Life. He fed the multitude in order to teach them that He is the Bread of Life. Had a reason for slipping away into the crowd, and we find some insight into His purpose when we read in the Synoptic Gospels that Jesus would perform an amazing miracle and then ask the person, or His disciples, not to tell it. If He had come to proclaim Himself to be the Messiah, why would He ask them not to tell it? Some have suggested that He was using good psychology on the people: Tell them not to tell, so that they would be motivated to tell it! Frankly, I don't believe Jesus was playing mind games with His disciples. He knew exactly what He was doing.

When I read such stories in my youth, I kept thinking that I wished that Jesus had proved Himself to those religious leaders. The simple fact is, **when the time came to act, Jesus would confront and confound the Pharisees and Sadducees.** However, He did not permit either His disciples or the crowds to determine when and how He would bring matters to a head, and force their hands in order to have them appeal to the Roman governor to have Him crucified. There was never a moment when He did not know exactly what He was doing.

5:14 - JESUS FOUND HIM. *“After this, Jesus found him in the temple complex and said to him, ‘See, you are well. Do not sin any more, so that something worse doesn't happen to you.’”* Here, John answers the question as to why Jesus had not identified Himself to this man when He healed him. He had slipped away into the crowd after healing the man, “Yet Jesus was personally interested in the invalid too, for he not only healed him (5:8) but searched him out in the

crowded temple courtyard to warn him against the recurring judgment of God. The miracle and its aftermath show that all circumstances of life, including calamities, can eventuate in the glory of God” [NCWB].

Jesus obviously had compassion on this man. There had been many others there who had serious health issues, but He singled out this one man, healed him, then slipped away into the crowd. Why would He do such a thing when with a word He might have healed everyone at the pool that day? Was it that He was very selective in His compassion, was He simply exercising “election”, or was there a higher purpose. **Remember, this was a sign.** We shall see what is signified by it.

We must remind ourselves that Jesus found the man he had healed from a life-long affliction, He found him again in the temple complex. Jesus Himself said, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). We do not find Jesus, He finds us!

DO NOT SIN ANY MORE. Does Jesus know this man had been accused of sinning by carrying his bedroll on the Sabbath? Did He walked know the rabbis were accusing him of sinning? We are not given the answer to that. “Jesus’ warning (**Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you**) does not mean that his paralysis was caused by any specific sin (cf. 9:3), though all disease and death come ultimately from sin. The warning was that his tragic life of 38 years as an invalid was no comparison to the doom of hell. Jesus is interested not merely in healing a person’s body. Far more important is the healing of his soul from sin” [BKC].

We may have more questions than answers when it comes to this statement. If the man had been saved at the time he was healed physically, we might be asking about apparent contradictions between this statement and statements in the First Epistle of John that tell us that a true believer does not continue in sin (keep on sinning), even though he will commit acts of sin as long as he is in this world. That discussion is academic, however, because we learn in 5:13 that the man did not even know who had healed him.

That leaves us with a simple, if shocking, fact, and that is that there is something worse than being lame for 38 years. **Eternity hell is far worse than 38 years lying on a pallet by a pool.** The New Testament is filled with warning for those who reject Jesus Christ. “Jesus is interested not merely in healing a person’s body. Far more important is the healing of his soul from sin” [BKC].

5:15 - THE MAN...REPORTED. “*The man went and reported to the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.*” The man did not have answers for the Jewish religious leaders when they first challenged him about carrying his bedroll on the Sabbath Day. Now that he knew who had healed him his first thought seemed to be to reveal the identity of the man who had healed him to the authorities. We have two verbs, both of which indicate the immediate action taken by the man. Both verbs in the Greek “went away and reported (apêlthen kai eipen) are aorist active indicatives. “Instead of giving heed to the warning of Jesus about his own sins he went off and told the Jews that now he knew who the man was who had commanded him to take up his bed on the Sabbath Day, to clear himself with the ecclesiastics and escape a possible stoning” [ATR].

IT WAS JESUS. We are not told everything the man said, but some have concluded that “The man was either ungrateful and wilfully betrayed Jesus or he was incompetent and did not know that he was bringing trouble on his benefactor. In either case one has small respect for him” [ATR]. If the man’s purpose was to place blame on Jesus in order to protect himself, I would agree. However, if he had only sought exoneration before authorities, Robertson’s statement may be a little harsh.

The Father and the Son

5:16 - PERSECUTING JESUS. *“Therefore, the Jews began persecuting Jesus because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.”* Up until now, the Jewish religious leaders had questioned Jesus, challenged his disciples, and tried to stir up trouble between the followers of Jesus and the disciples of John the Baptist. This incident in the temple complex marks the point at which they moved from questions, to investigation, to outright persecution of Jesus. They began persecuting Him at this point and they would escalate until they plotted His death.

THE SABBATH. There were a number of ways in which Jesus challenged the authority of the “the Jews” of whom John is writing, but few things would have been more certain to cause them to persecute Him than a violation of their rules concerning the Sabbath. At the time John wrote this, he had lived outside Palestine for a number of years; the temple had been destroyed in A. D. 70, and John was the lone surviving apostle. Even though John was a Jew, he lives in the Roman world, serves in a church that is predominantly Gentile, and he is writing to churches that are predominantly Gentile. He has lived and served in Ephesus for a number of years, and he has been a positive influence for Christ throughout the region.

When John writes the Jews began persecuting Jesus because of what he was doing on the Sabbath, he means the Jews who did not accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah. The supreme authority over religious issues among the Jews was the sanhedrin, which was made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees. Rome allowed them oversight over religious issues both in Palestine and in other provinces.

Early in his ministry Jesus asked His disciples not to spread reports of His miracles, probably to avoid conflict with the Jewish authorities before the time was right. When the time comes for the intensification of the conflict with the Pharisees and Sadducees, not only will He no longer try to avoid controversy, He will take challenge them in such a way as to force their hand. In a sense, Jesus takes the battle to them, but in a manner that is almost passive in nature.

The issue here is what Jesus had done on the Sabbath, but we can learn some valuable lessons from this incident that will equip us to deal with a variety of issues in the local church today. The basic lesson is that these people had seen a phenomenal manifestation of the miraculous power of Jesus Christ in healing a man who had been lame for 38 years, but all “the Jews” could see was that He had violated the Sabbath. Jesus knew what to expect when He healed the man on the Sabbath. He knew exactly what He was doing, and why. The confrontations between Jesus and the religious leaders of

the Jews is about to take a fresh turn right here. Writing of verses 16-18, the author of the NAC material writes:

“These verses represent the formal introduction to the controversy scenes of the Festival Cycle. The focus is on Jesus’ identity and his relation to the Sabbath. The man’s report to the authorities is pictured as transferring the investigation committee’s hostility from the paralytic to Jesus (5:16). Indeed, the statement that the Sabbath issue was the reason why the Jews “persecuted” (ediokon) Jesus is John’s way of formally defining for the first time in this severe way the authorities’ relationship to Jesus. But the issue of the Sabbath is transposed into an even more serious charge in the discussion that follows. That charge will become the reason for the crucifixion. As a result, the argument that follows is strategic to Johannine theology” [NAC].

As noted earlier, this is the third sign John records. While Jesus healed many people, the healing of the lame man on the Sabbath is recorded as a sign. What does it signify? **Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath!** Think of the irony! Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, but these pious fanatics will not begin plotting to kill Him for violating the Sabbath.

5:17 - MY FATHER. “ *But Jesus responded to them, “My Father is still working, and I am working also.”* Jesus could not have stated His deity any more clearly. Once again, we are reminded of the Prologue (1:1-18). The Holy Spirit inspired John to begin this Gospel account with a the declaration that Jesus and the Father are one. At His baptism, the Son was baptized, the Spirit descended, and the Father spoke.

Now, Jesus announces, “My Father is still working.” God, His Father, had not only worked in creating the world, He continues the work of sustaining and maintaining what He created. He also continues His redemptive work in the world. He has never ceased working. Jesus not only defends His work, He also claims the Creator as His Father. In other words, He “defended his ministry on the basis of his personal relationship to the Father in heaven, and the Jewish leaders immediately condemned this obvious claim to deity and Messiahship” [NCWB]. Robertson explains that the verb is the “Linear present middle indicative, ‘keeps on working until now’ without a break on the Sabbath....He made the Sabbath for man's blessing, but cannot observe it himself” [ATR].

Jesus has taken a step that would incite the “the Jews” to oppose Him. By claiming that God is His Father, He invites the opposition that will soon escalate into the full blown the persecution that is sure to follow. The author of the material in the Bible Knowledge Commentary says it like this:

“**The Sabbath** controversy was enough to cause them to hate Jesus, but the implication of His claim that God is **His own Father** was impossible for them to accept. To them, God has no equals. Jesus’ claim, in their thinking, was a monstrous blasphemy. To be **equal with God** suggested, they thought, two gods and therefore polytheism. To make oneself “equal with God” was a claim

of arrogant independence. In the Talmud four persons were branded as haughty because they made themselves equal to God: pagan rulers Hiram, Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh, and the Jewish King Joash” [BKC].

5:18 - THIS IS WHY. *“This is why the Jews began trying all the more to kill Him: not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.”* In 1 Corinthians, Paul answers questions without writing down the questions. We read the answer and then we can figure out what the question was. Here, John states clearly what motivated “the Jews” to move from observing, investigating, questioning, and challenging Jesus on various issues, to actively persecuting Him, with the purpose of killing Him in such a way that they will not incite a riot in Jerusalem, which would bring down the wrath of Rome on them.

CALLING GOD HIS OWN FATHER. Jesus violated rabbinical rules governing the Sabbath, and then He claimed God as “His own Father”. “The Jews recognized the argument immediately and from that point pursued him not merely for Sabbath breaking but also for blasphemy (5:18). They understood that he was not merely claiming to be a child of God in the general sense but in a very special way. Accordingly, they charged him with ‘making himself equal with God’ (5:18)” [NAC]. The religious leaders could not tolerate such a claim. At first, the persecution was veiled and calculated, but as Jesus embarrassed and humiliated them with His response, they intensified their persecution. The Believer’s Study Bible Notes adds:

“Not only because He disregarded rabbinic interpretation of the Sabbath is Jesus hated by the Jews, but also because He claimed to be Deity. His use of the title “Son of God” clearly indicates that Christ makes Himself equal with God. Thus, they plot to kill Him. In regard to Christ’s divinity here and throughout the Gospel of John, one ought to remember again John’s testimony in 20:30, 31, a text which, as we have seen, serves as the thesis statement of the book” [BSB].

Both through this third sign, and with His own word, Jesus clearly stated His deity. When Jesus claimed that God was His Father, He was challenging the Jewish authorities and they would have to do something about it. They could not let either his attitude toward the Sabbath or His claim that God was His Father go unchallenged. The confrontations are assured, the plot thickens, and the outcome is set. They must destroy Jesus. Most Bible students would agree that:

“Jesus’ claim would violate their understanding of monotheism and would surely have reminded them of the serpent’s temptation to “be like God” (Gen 3:5). Such a claim, therefore, would undoubtedly be categorized by the rabbis as sinning with the high hand (a direct challenge to God), unless the claim was true. And that was precisely the claim of Jesus and the early church.

That claim, however, must be carefully understood. Jesus did not claim to

take the place of God or be an alternative to God, which is what the Jews meant by “making himself equal with God” (5:18; cf. the charge at 10:33 and “claimed to be the Son of God,” 19:7). **What Jesus, as the One and Only Son of God (1:14, 18), claimed was to be sent by God, on mission for God, doing the works of God, obedient to God, and bringing glory to God.** That is not the role of one who displaces God but one who is a representative or emissary of God. It is in fact the *pros ton theon* of the Prologue in the context of being *theos* (1:1). Here then is both the equality and the subordination that will be the focus of this chapter” [NAC, bold added by this writer].

5:19 - JESUS REPLIED. *“Then Jesus replied, “I assure you: The Son is not able to do anything on His own, but only what He sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son also does these things in the same way.”* Jesus may well have surprised the Jewish authorities who had sent representatives to investigate him at an earlier date. But they had been keeping an eye on Him, watching for an opportunity. Now He will answer them.

THE SON. Robertson explains that this is “The absolute use of the Son in relation to the Father admitting the charge in verse John 5:18 and defending his equality with the Father” [ATR]. There is no question that He claims to be the Son of God here. Barnes offers the following commentary:

“The first explanation which he gives is in these words: The Son--whom he had just impliedly affirmed to be equal with God-- did nothing of himself; that is, nothing without the appointment of the Father; nothing contrary to the Father, as he immediately explains it. When it is said that he CAN do nothing OF HIMSELF, it is meant that such is the union subsisting between the Father and the Son that he can do nothing independently or separate from the Father. Such is the nature of this union that he can do nothing which has not the concurrence of the Father, and which he does not command. In all things he must, from the necessity of his nature, act in accordance with the nature and will of God. Such is the intimacy of the union, that the fact that he does anything is proof that it is by the concurring agency of God. There is no separate action--no separate existence; but, alike in being and in action, there is the most perfect oneness between him and the Father. Comp. John 10:30; 17:21” [BARNES].

WHATEVER THE FATHER DOES. The Son is obedient to the Father There is absolute harmony between the Father and the Son, as there is complete obedience to the Father: “whatever the Father does, the Son also does these things in the same way.” If the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are One, there is total harmony in the Trinity. God is One is essence, Three in Person. There is nothing in this world that perfectly illustrates this great doctrine, but it is Scriptural. The work of the Father is the work of the Son. “Instead of rescinding his strong claim in the face of the leaders’ hostility, Christ bolstered his assertion of deity with claims of absolute harmony between him and the Father, thus asserting absolute equality (see Phil. 2:6” [NCWB]. Jesus also shows us

what our attitude toward the Father should be. We must obey Him and do His work.

5:20 - THE FATHER LOVES THE SON. *“For the Father loves the Son and shows Him everything He is doing, and He will show Him greater works than these so that you will be amazed.”*

Jesus, while He was on earth, was totally convinced of the Father’s love for Him, and He understood the implications of His love. There is a unique relationship between the Father and the Son in that they know each other perfectly and understand each other completely. Our understanding of the Father’s love is limited now, but someday, when we are glorified, we will fully appreciate it.

SHOWS HIM EVERYTHING HE IS DOING. How did the Father do that? When did He do it? The pre-incarnate Son would have had perfect knowledge of this before He came into this world, but the human Jesus also had the Holy Scriptures, which He knew better than the Jewish authorities who now challenge Him, and would soon be plotting His death. There is one other way in which the Son received knowledge of the work and will of the Father. He often withdrew to be alone with the Father. He prayed to the Father, and had fellowship with Him when He withdrew from the masses.

HE WILL SHOW HIM GREATER WORKS. The Father will show the Son “Greater works than these” (*meizona touton erga*). Robertson explains that “*Toutôn* is ablative case after the comparative *meizona* (from *meigas*, great). John often uses *erga* for the miracles of Christ (John 5:36; John 7:3, 21; John 10:25, 32, 38, etc.). It is the Father who does these works (John 14:10). There is more to follow. Even the disciples will surpass what Christ is doing in the extent of the work (John 14:12)” [ATR].

WILL BE AMAZED. When God raised His Son from the dead, His followers were amazed, and his persecutors were baffled. The Jewish authorities did everything they could think of to prevent the story of the resurrection of Jesus from getting out, but they could not prevent it. Then, at Pentecost, the power of God was manifested in the supernatural phenomena associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciples of Jesus witnessed to people from many countries in their own native languages, and three thousand people were saved. And the Father was not even close to being finished with His work.

5:21 - THE FATHER RAISES THE DEAD. *“And just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to anyone He wants to.”* God had in fact demonstrated that He could raise the dead. He illustrated that when He stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son Isaac. He raised the soldier when his body was thrown into the grave of Elisha, and He had raised Israel as a nation on many occasions when they were as good as dead. “One of the prerogatives of Deity is the right over **life** and death. (A king of Israel asked Naaman, “Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life?” [2 Kings 5:7]) One of Jesus’ “greater” works (John 5:20) is the giving of life” [BKC].

SO THE SON GIVES LIFE. Jesus declares that the Son “gives life to anyone He wants to, “just as He chose to heal one man out of a crowd of disabled people. The giving of life includes spiritual (eternal) life and a resurrected body. The resuscitation of Lazarus (chap. 11) would illustrate both”

[BKC]. While that is true, we must also remember that the Scripture holds out hope to all who believe in Him. Jesus said, “Everyone the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out” (John 6:37). When He said that He gives life “to anyone He wants to”, is He not teaching a radical form of election, but stressing that the decision is His. He does all the saving, we simply trust Him. No one is given this life against his or her will.

5:22 - GIVEN ALL JUDGMENT TO THE SON. *“The Father, in fact, judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son...”* Or, “For neither doth the Father judge any man,’ implying that the same thing was meant in the former verse of the quickening of the dead—both acts being done, not by the Father and the Son, as though twice done, but by the Father through the Son as his voluntary Agent” [NCWB]. The Father has turned all judgment over to the Son, so that He does not need to judge those who reject Him. It seems fitting that those who reject Jesus will be judged by Jesus.

We must guard against the temptation to isolate either the Person or the work of the Father from the Son. John began the prologue to this Gospel by revealing that the Father and the Son are One. In Genesis 1:1, we read, “In the beginning God created...” In John 1:1f, we read discover that Jesus was the Agent of creation: “All things were made by Him.” We have already seen that “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hands” (John 3:35). The Father’s first concern is the salvation of all who believe in His Son: “For God did not send His Son into the world that He might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:17).

5:23 - HONOR THE SON. *“(S)o that all people will honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”* Jesus is explaining the relationship between the Father and the Son, and while the unitary theory of God may appeal to some, the trinitary view of God is stressed in passages like this. We worship God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (three in Person, one in essence). Here, Jesus states that He has the same right to worship from us that the Father has. “Dishonouring Jesus is dishonouring the Father who sent him (John 8:49; John 12:26; John 15:23; 1Jn 2:23). See also Luke 10:16. There is small comfort here for those who praise Jesus as teacher and yet deny his claims to worship. The Gospel of John carries this high place for Christ throughout, but so do the other Gospels (even Q, the Logia of Jesus) and the rest of the New Testament” [ATR].

“The rationale for judgment being given to the Son is so that all persons might properly recognize (“honor,” timan) the Son as they do the Father (5:23). The clear unity of the Father and the Son is forcefully indicated here by the fact that failure to give proper respect (honor) to the Son means failure to respect the Father. The Son was the authentic agent of the Father and therefore should have been treated accordingly” [NAC].

There is absolute harmony between the Father and the Son. God sent His Son into the world to save those who believe in Him, but those who reject the Son will perish (John 3:16). The Son came to

seek and to save lost people, but those who reject Him will stand before Him in judgment.

Eternal Life or Righteous Judgment

5:24 - ANYONE WHO HEARS. *“I assure you: Anyone who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.”* We must hold in mind the absolute harmony between the Father and the Son which Jesus has stressed in verses 19-23. In John 3:16, the Father saves those who believe in His Son. Here those who believe in the One who sent the Son receive eternal life. There is absolute harmony in this, because to believe in Jesus is to believe in the Father, and to believe in the Father is to believe in the Son. The One who enables and motivates anyone to go to the Father through the Son is the Holy Spirit (John 16).

This clearly refutes the modern attitude that all paths lead to heaven, therefore it doesn't matter whether one believes in Jesus or someone else, just as long as he or she is sincere. Some Muslim religious leader prayed before a meal at the White House in September, 2008, in the name of the god of Abraham, Jesus, and Mohammed. Let us be clear about this: the god of Mohammed is not the God of Abraham! Furthermore, the God of Abraham is the Father of Jesus, not the God of Jesus. And the god of Mohammed was the creation of Mohammed.

God has provided for our salvation, and Jesus is not afraid of repetition: “Anyone who hears My word and believe Him who sent me has eternal life...” When I was a student at Mississippi College in the late fifties I discovered that there were pastors who would part company with you if your views on Eschatology (the study of last things) did not agree with theirs. In time, I discovered that a lot of pastors made one's position on end-time events a test of fellowship. Years later, I was attending a meeting of the Louisiana Baptist Convention when a young man asked, “Are you a Calvinist?” I observed in time that there were a number of Calvinists around, and their numbers seemed to be growing. As I talked with various Calvinists, I noticed something many of them had in common. They would begin a statement by saying, “Calvin said...”, or “Calvin believed...” I kept thinking, “don't tell me what Calvin said, tell me what Jesus said.” Then I wondered if I might be more like Calvin than some of them: Calvin quoted Jesus, John, and Paul, and that is what I choose to do. I did not subscribe to a particular eschatological position because most of my professors held the Amillennial position, and I did not adopt a premillennial position because well known pastors like R. G. Lee and W. A. Criswell held that position. I sought my answers from the Bible. And, though I have great respect for John Calvin, I will look past him to the New Testament which he studied. I agree with some of his positions but reject others.

Jesus is very clear in this passage: “anyone” who believes in the One who sent Him receives eternal life. Having said that, let me go on to stress that no one “finds” God, either through his search, insight, or intuition. Jesus will explain later in this Gospel that the Holy Spirit convicts lost people of sin and its consequences, and of the righteousness offered through Jesus Christ (John 16:7ff).

PASSED FROM DEATH TO LIFE. Jesus stressed that, while all judgment has been given to Him by the Father (5:22), those who believe in the One who sent Him “will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.” The Bible Knowledge Commentary summarizes this verse in this way:

“Since Jesus has the unity and divine prerogatives mentioned in verses 19-23, to trust His message and His Father is to have in the present time **eternal life** (cf. 3:36). No judgment will come in the future (he **will not be condemned** [cf. 3:18; Rom. 6:13; 8:1] because he has already passed **from** one realm—**death**—into another—**life** [cf. Eph. 2:1, 5]). Only once elsewhere (in 1 John 3:14) is the phrase “passed from death to life” used” [BKC].

5:25 - I ASSURE YOU. “*I assure you: An hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.*” The KJV has “Verily, verily, I say unto you”, and NASB has “Truly, truly, I say to you.” Jesus is affirming in the strongest terms the truth He is about to announce. “An hour is coming” holds before us the time when something will happen. “An hour is coming”, occur four times in John (4:21, 23; 5:25, 28) [BKC].

IS NOW HERE. The hour for which Israel had looked had come. In fact, the New Covenant became effective when John the Baptist declared Jesus to be the Lamb of God. Two of John the Baptist’s disciples, Andrew and possibly John, followed Jesus, and then went and found their brothers and led them to Jesus. The point is, salvation is by grace, through faith, and it is available to all who believe in Him. We do not wait until Judgement Day to have our good deeds weighed against our bad deeds to determine whether or not we will go to heaven. Jesus said, “I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28). Those who believed in Him were saved that day.

THE DEAD. All lost people are spiritually dead. There are those who insist that dead men cannot make decisions: they are dead, therefore, they cannot hear God’s voice. Those who hold that doctrine believe that God elects certain people and regenerates them so they can repent. Is that what he says here? No. What Jesus said was, “...**the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.**” Those on either side of the election debate will quote Scripture to support their position, but if the Islamic terrorist attacks on America on Nine-Eleven taught us anything it is that we have a common enemy that would destroy us all. We should all concentrate on the Great Commission and resist evil. We do not have to compromise our theology, but we must not go to war against other believers at a time when all our energy and wisdom is demanded in the battle against the forces of darkness.

Jesus had, and has the power to speak to people who are dead and enable them to hear Him and follow Him. “Jesus’ life-giving power can call a person out of the grave (11:43), everyone from their tombs (5:28-29), or anyone in spiritual death (v. 24) to eternal life” [BKC]. Jesus has in mind the spiritually dead, “as is clear from 5:28. Here Jesus rises from the calmer phrase “hearing his word” (5:24) to the grander expression “hearing the voice of the Son of God” to

signify that as it finds men in a dead condition, so it carries with it a resurrection-power” [NCWB].

HEAR HIS VOICE. It is with His voice that Jesus passes judgment, and it is with His voice that He announces that one receives eternal life. It was with His voice that God created the world, and it will be with the sword of His mouth that Jesus will defeat all enemies (Rev. 19:15ff). It is with His voice that Jesus gave commands to His disciples.

“Jesus raised up the dead by his command, or by his authority. When he did it he spoke, or, commanded it to be done. Mark 5:41, "He took the damsel by the hand, and said, `Talitha cumi.'" Luke 7:14: "And he came and touched the bier, and said, `Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.'" John 11:43: "He cried with a loud voice, `Lazarus, come forth.'" So it is by his command that those who are dead in sins are quickened or made alive, John 5:21. And so at the day of judgment the dead will be raised by his command or voice, though there is no reason to think that his voice will be audibly heard, John 5:28" [BARNES].

WILL LIVE. Anyone who believes in Jesus “will live”, as in the sense of 5:24: he passes “from death to life.” Anyone who believes in Jesus Christ will have eternal life.

5:26 - AS THE FATHER HAS LIFE. “*For just as the Father has life in Himself, so also He has granted to the Son to have life in Himself.*” Jesus states an obvious fact, so there is not a lot one can say by way of interpretation that has not already been said in this Gospel, and in fact, in this passage. Robertson has written, “The Living God possesses life wholly in himself and so he has bestowed this power of life to the Son as already stated in the Prologue of the Logos (John 1:3)” [ATR]. However, there is every reason to ask “Does this refer to the essential life of the Son before all time (1:4) or to the purpose of God that this essential life should reside in the person of the incarnate Son and be manifested thus to the world? The question is as difficult as the subject is high. In his essential relationship with the Father, the Son possessed the same essential divine life; in his economical relationship, he has the authority to impart this life to men” [NCWB].

5:27 - HE HAS GRANTED HIM. “*And He has granted Him the right to pass judgment, because He is the Son of Man.*” The Father has granted the Son “the right to pass judgment.” But on what basis? It is “because He is the Son of Man.” The outstanding Greek scholar, A. T. Robertson writes, “Rather, ‘because he is a son of man’ (note absence of articles and so not as the Messiah), because the judge of men must partake of human nature himself (Westcott)” [ATR]. If this is the case, does this imply that the eternal Son had that right, but the human Jesus was granted that right by the Father. The New American Commentary seeks to tie all these verses together to show the relationship between the Father and the Son:

“Having thus signaled the resurrection of the dead by reference to the call or voice, Jesus declared that God vested in him both the power of life (5:26; cf. 1:4) and the

authority (exousia) to render judgment (5:27). In the ultimate sense both of these qualities are characteristics of God alone. The parallelism between the Son and the Father is thus again asserted. Here it is in an eschatological sense. But it is imperative to recognize that however one may imagine the idea of equality (5:18) working in Johannine theology, there is never any hint of the Son being in charge of the Father. The Son is always recognized as having been sent by the Father, gifted by the Father, obedient to the Father, and ultimately glorifying the Father (cf. 5:23, 27, 30 6:44; 8:28–29; 17:1). He is the emissary of the Father. This fact is true even though Jesus is identified as the eschatological Son of Man (5:27; cf. Dan 7:13; Matt 13:41; 24:30; 25:31). In a causal sense that designation argues for Jesus' right to the role of judge in the divine court, but that role never minimizes the stature of the Father. It is an eschatological role assigned by the Father to the Son" [NAC].

5:28 - A TIME IS COMING. *“Do not be amazed at this, because a time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear His voice...”* They were amazed, but after following Jesus all this time, they should not have been so amazed at what He said. It is almost certain that they had never heard anyone else speak like this. They may have been wondering whether this statement foretold events that would soon come to pass, or if it had only eschatological implications. We know that the graves opened up and gave up their dead when Jesus was crucified, but some will see here only an end-time fulfillment. For example, consider the Bible Knowledge Commentary position:

“Jesus said His hearers should **not be amazed at** His claim that right now those who believe pass from death into life (v. 24), because in the future there will be a universal physical resurrection at His command. This universal resurrection is clearly taught in Daniel 12:1-2. Other passages show that the resurrection to life, “the first resurrection,” will occur in stages (the church at the Rapture, and Tribulation saints at the Lord's second coming at the end of the Tribulation), and that the resurrection of those who will **be condemned** will occur at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:11-15). John 5:28-29 is one of the few passages in this Gospel which expressly teaches eschatology” [BKC].

There are also questions left for believers of every generation to answer. Jesus said to the thief on the cross who asked for mercy, “This day shalt thou be with me in paradise”, but Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “The dead in Christ shall rise first.” Lazarus died and went to heaven, and the rich man saw him at Abraham's side. Lazarus was in heaven and the rich man was in hell. Is there a contradiction here? Or, are those in heaven disembodied spirits awaiting a reunification with their resurrected bodies? This certainly does not teach that Jesus would call the dead to come from their graves, only to see them return again.

“A major role of the Son in the eschatology of humanity is his issuance of this decisive call (phone), which summons the dead from the tombs (5:28) to one of two destinies. In this decisive hour (hora, the NIV again has ‘time’) the division that takes place will be based on what people have ‘done’ (5:29). Because that believing is often superficial (cf. 2:23–25), the integrity of believing is to be judged by a person's

activity, not merely by what a person says” [NAC].

5:29 - COME OUT. *“(A)nd come out—those who have done good things, to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked things, to the resurrection of judgment.”* Those who are called will come out of the graves (5:28). For some, this is good news, but for others it will be exceedingly bad. Only those who are called come to Jesus. Only those who are called to the Father in the name of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit, can possibly respond to Jesus for salvation.

GOOD THINGS. We must be careful here not to develop a whole system of theology around the one statement: “those who have done good things, to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked things, to the resurrection of judgment.” Rather, it is a part of the over all theological picture. This isolated verse might seem to an uninformed person to imply salvation by good work, but a careful study of John’s theology will absolutely prohibit that interpretation (see 3:16-21; 6:28-29). Paul clearly states that we are saved “by grace, through faith” and that no one is saved by works (Eph. 2:8-9). However, those are saved are saved “unto good works” (Eph. 2:10). “Those who are truly born again do live a different kind of life. They obey Him (14:15), they abide in Him (15:5-7), and they walk in the light (8:12; 1 John 1:7). They are saved by the Lamb of God who, as their substitutionary Sacrifice, takes away the penalty of their sin. Salvation is by faith in Christ. Damnation is because of rejection of God’s Son (John 3:36)” [BKC].

TO THE RESURRECTION OF LIFE. Much emphasis will be placed on the resurrection from this point on in this Gospel. We have already seen the truth proclaimed in John 3:16, but there the emphasis is on faith: those who believe in Jesus receive eternal life, and those who do not believe in Him will perish. Here, there is an emphasis on doing good and doing “wicked things.” If this had been the only thing Jesus ever said about the resurrection this would be especially confusing, but this is only part of the story.

Remember that Jesus spoke often of His death and His resurrection, yet when He died His disciples were totally bewildered and discouraged. When they knew He had risen they were amazed. Today, we tend to marvel at their ignorance, yet with all the Lord has revealed to us through the New Testament and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Christians in general are still ignorant when it comes to eschatological Matters.

“The importance of human action as a litmus test of human commitment is a frequent message of the New Testament (e.g., Eph 2:10; Phil 2:12–13; 3:17–19; 2 Tim 3:16–17; Jas 2:14–17; 1 John 3:18; 4:20–21). Moreover, it is made the significant test in the judgment scene of the sheep and goats by Jesus (e.g., Matt 25:31–46) and at the judgment seat of Revelation (20:11–15). But many Christians apply only the assurance texts to themselves and exempt themselves from these passages, firmly convinced that the passages have no application to them. We should remember that the New Testament books were written primarily to Christians not to point the finger at others but to take the warnings of the Bible very seriously” [NAC].

RESURRECTION OF JUDGEMENT. Great emphasis is placed by Christians on the “resurrection of life”, but far too little emphasis is placed on the “resurrection to judgment”. As the first offers hope to all believers, the latter is sufficient warning to those who do not commit themselves to Jesus Christ. “The alternative of resurrection to life or resurrection to judgment in this passage is both an assurance and a warning to every reader. The message of this text is actually a call to integrity with God and humanity. The opponents of Jesus were the religious persons of his day. The point of the discussion, therefore, is that Christian readers are called to understand clearly that opposition to Jesus or affirmation of Jesus and his ways have immense eschatological consequences” [NAC].

5:30 - I CAN DO NOTHING. *“I can do nothing on My own. I judge only as I hear, and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”* Jesus returns to the first person after having used “the Son” from John 5:19 until this verse. “Here Jesus repeats in the first person (as in John 8:28) the statement made in verse John 5:19 about the Son. In John 5:30 is used by Jesus 16 times and not at all by Jesus in the Synoptics. It occurs in the Synoptics only in Mat 8:8; Luke 7:7” [ATR].

I JUDGE ONLY AS I HEAR. Barnes writes, “To hear expresses the condition of one who is commissioned or instructed. Thus (John 8:26), ‘I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him;’ John 8:18, ‘As the father hath taught me, I speak those things.’ Jesus here represents himself as commissioned, taught, or sent of God. When he says, ‘as I hear,’ he refers to those things which the Father had showed him John 5:20--that is, he came to communicate the will of God; to show to man what God wished man to know” [BARNES].

RIGHTEOUS. His judgment is righteous (dikaia). All judgements should be righteous, but only His judgment is absolutely righteous. Jesus is incapable of anything less than perfect righteousness.

THE WILL OF HIM WHO SENT ME. Jesus has already stated two things very clearly: (1) He and the Father are One, yet (2) judgment has been given to the Son. At first, the reader might be surprised that Jesus would say, “I can do nothing on My own”, but we must remember that we worship a triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To isolate one from the other is to violate divine revelation. The Son has the authority to judge, to call people to come out of graves (5:28-29), but He does not act independent of the Father.

“This verse is transitional; it concludes the section on Jesus’ unity with the Father (vv. 19-30). The section ends the way it began, with the point that the Son **can do nothing** apart from the Father (cf. v. 19). His **judgment**, as everything He does, **is** from the express will of the Father. He is the perfect Spokesman for the Father and His effective Executive. Jesus’ will is to do the Father’s will (cf. 4:34; 8:29), which shows that He has the same nature” [BKC].

Several years ago, Dr. Jimmy Draper, then President of LifeWay Christian Resources, shared with

members of the board of trustees what he considers the “Baptist Essentials”. I contacted Dr. Draper and asked for permission to use his list and he graciously granted me permission any time. He stressed that there are many “distinctives” but these are “essentials”:

- 1) Salvation by grace through faith, plus nothing.
- 2) The Lordship of Jesus Christ
- 3) Sufficiency of Scripture
- 4) Autonomy of the Local Church
- 5) Religious Liberty
- 6) Trinitarian view of God (One in essence, three in person)
- 7) The Great Commission

We must not lose sight of the Trinity when we study the New Testament. This writer understands that many people hold a unitary view of God. They see God as playing the role of the Father in the Old Testament, the Son during the earthly ministry of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit from Pentecost forward. Francis Schaeffer said that it was when he came to understand the trinity that he moved from being an agnostic to a theist. He realized that God was complete within the Godhead, therefore, He did not create man because he needed someone with whom He could have fellowship. There is perfect horizontal fellowship within the Trinity.

The Five Witnesses to Jesus

5:31 - IF I TESTIFY OF MYSELF. *“If I testify about Myself, My testimony is not valid.”* Even though it may seem that Jesus is moving on to a new subject, this statement (in fact, the entire passage, 5:31-47), is based on the statement He has just made (5:30). “If I testify of Myself” is the condition of the third class, undetermined, but with the prospect of determination. The condition of the third class is a statement that may be true or it may not be true. Circumstances will determine that. The point here is that Jesus knew His testimony was not valid (according to the Law) if it stood alone.

John has informed his readers that “This is why the Jews began trying all the more to kill Him: not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” (5:18). He has made a bold statement, and now He challenges these Jews who are experts in the Law by citing the law concerning one’s testimony.

“The defense here began with a restatement of the issue in preparation for the calling of witnesses. There is first an admission of a presupposition that is based on the accepted legal code of the Torah, the foundation book of the Jews who were Jesus’ opponents. In cases where there is a need for verifiable testimony, it is necessary that there be two or three witnesses to provide corroboration of the matter (cf. Deut 19:15). That principle was expected to be firmly observed, particularly in capital

cases (Num 35:30; Deut 17:16; cf. Heb 10:28), and that principle was accepted as a basic thesis by Jesus (Matt 18:16; John 8:17) and by the early Christians like Paul (2 Cor 13:1). It was assumed that corroboration would assure the courts and others that the ninth word of the Decalogue (Exod 20:16) had been safeguarded because bearing false witness was regarded as an act of personal treason (Prov 25:18)” [NAC].

All who believe in Jesus Christ know He came with the full authority of the Father, and that everything He said was true. However, His point here concerns the Jewish law. His testimony was not valid before a court of the Jews without a supporting witness. “The Lord now concludes his defense by providing the Jews with a five-fold witness. They had questioned his authority and assaulted his identity. In response, Jesus indicated that he had five very reliable witnesses” [NCWB]. They are:

- 1) John the Baptist (5:33-35)
- 2) Jesus’ own works (5:36)
- 3) The Father himself (5:37)
- 4) The Scriptures (5:39, 40)
- 5) Moses (5:45-47).

Jesus appealed to five witnesses, “all of which “were accessible to the Jews” [NCWB]. Without a witness His claims concerning His relationship with the Father would have been invalid.

5:32 - ANOTHER WHO TESTIFIES. *“There is Another who testifies about Me, and I know that the testimony He gives about Me is valid.”* By “Another” He means the Father, not John the Baptist, who is mentioned in verse 33. Jesus says, “If I bear witness of myself (Ean egô marturô peri emautou). Condition of third class, undetermined with prospect of determination (ean and present active subjunctive of martureô). The emphasis is on egô (I alone with no other witness)” [ATR]. The Father will be mentioned again as One who will provide a valid testimony (5:36-38; 8:12-19). Jesus points these Jews to “God the Father, who, by his Spirit in your prophets, described my person, office, and miracles. You read these scriptures, and you cannot help seeing that they testify of me:- no person ever did answer the description there given, but myself; and I answer to that description in the fullest sense of the word. See John 5:39” [CLARKE].

If you are ask someone to be a witness for you in court you want to be sure the witness is a valid witness. My father once told me he was asked to be a character witness for a man who was accused of murdering his step-father. The man pleaded self-defense and my father was called as one of the a character witnesses. He answered the attorney’s questions, but told me he actually believed the accused man had deliberately set the man up and killed him because he had learned that the man had abused his mother. The attorney didn’t ask my father’s opinion, and an opinion was all he had. He had no proof. Jesus could call on an omniscient Witness whose testimony is true.

5:33 - JOHN. *“You have sent [messengers] to John, and he has testified to the truth.”* Jesus had gone to see John the Baptist and he had declared Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (1:29). The sanhedrin had sent representatives to question John. Robertson writes,

“Ye have sent (humeis apestalkate). Emphatic use of humeis (ye) and perfect active indicative of apostellô, **official and permanent fact and so the witness of the Baptist has to be recognized as trustworthy by the Sanhedrin.** The reference is to the committee in John 1:19-28” [ATR, bold added by this writer]. So, the sanhedrin had a valid witness in John the Baptist who could support what Jesus says about Himself.

5:34 - MAN’S TESTIMONY. *“I don’t receive man’s testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved.”* The Jewish authorities had investigated John the Baptist, and they had investigated Jesus. At first, they may have been simply looking for the truth, but as time passed and they had not been able to refute His message or discredit Him personally, they began to seek ways to kill Him that would not get them into trouble with the Roman authorities (5:18).

SO THAT YOU MAY BE SAVED. Jesus makes His purpose in coming into the world clear: He came “to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10). He gave His testimony so that people would be saved. His great desire was to see even those who were plotting His death saved.

5:35 - A BURNING AND SHINING LAMP. *“John was a burning and shining lamp, and for a time you were willing to enjoy his light.”* We must distinguish between Jesus, the Light of the World, and John the Baptist, “a burning and shining lamp.” The idea is “The lamp in the room (Mark 4:21). This is an old word for a lamp of candle (Matt. 5:15). It is:

“Used of Christ (the Lamb) as the Lamp of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:23). Lampas (Mat 25:1, 3, etc.) is a torch whose wick is fed with oil. **The Baptist was not the Light (to phôs, John 1:8), but a lamp shining in the darkness.** ‘When the Light comes, the lamp is no longer needed’ (Bernard). ‘Non Lux iste, sed lucerna.’ Jesus by his own claim is the Light of the World (John 8:12; John 9:5; John 12:46). And yet all believers are in a sense ‘the light of the world’ (Mat 5:14) since the world gets the Light of Christ through us” [ATR, bold added by this writer].

Jesus said that His followers are a light unto the world, but there is a distinction between Jesus as the Light of the World, and His disciples who are a light to the world. The sun gives off light, but the only thing the moon can do is reflect the light of the sun. John the Baptist came to herald the coming of the Light of the World, and in doing so he manifested the light of heaven in his life and message.

God had sent John the Baptist as a “burning and shining light” into a world that was darkened by sin. People were living in darkness, but these people had listened to John the Baptist, “and willingly rejoiced (ethelesate agalliathenai) during his hour (hora), his burning testimony (5:35) obviously had no lasting effect upon them. The themes of witness, light, and truth are all linked here in support of the claims of Jesus. But the reader is quickly reminded that the authority of Jesus is not dependent on human acknowledgment. If that were the case, then the hope of human salvation would be in trouble (5:34) [NAC]. Salvation is from God and is not based on any man or woman’s testimony.

FOR A TIME. When John first began preaching about the coming Messiah, the people flocked

out to hear him and for a time they “were willing to enjoy the light.” One question comes to mind when we read this statement. Did Jesus mean that they had enjoyed the light manifested by John for a time, but had then become disillusioned and left him, or does it simply denote the brevity of his ministry?

6:36 - A GREATER TESTIMONY. *“But I have a greater testimony than John’s because of the works that the Father has given Me to accomplish. These very works I am doing testify about Me that the Father has sent Me.”* Literally, it is “But I have the witness greater than John’s.” What testimony could have been greater than that of John’s? His works! Jesus’ ministry, Person, and purpose had been authenticated by His works.

Jesus has mentioned His own testimony (5:31); He has alluded to the Father’s testimony (5:32); and pointed to the testimony of John the Baptist (5:33). Now, he points to a greater testimony than that of John the Baptist. He is moving from a human testimony “to the more significant witness of his ‘works’ (erga). This term is used in the Gospel to describe the powerful acts of Jesus done on earth in cooperation with the Father (5:36; cf. 5:20; 9:4; 10:25, 32, 37–8; 14:10–11; 15:24). These works are not to be seen as ends in themselves but testify to the fact that Jesus is on a mission (‘sent’) from the Father” [NAC].

THE FATHER HAS SENT ME. This is the “perfect active indicative of *apostello*, which emphasizes “the permanence of the mission. Cf. John 3:17. The continuance of the witness is emphasized in John 5:32; John 8:18” [ATR]. The Father had sent Jesus and empowered Him to do the mighty works they had witnessed, such as the healing of a man who had been lame for 38 years (5:1-15). Jesus said, “These very works I am doing testify about Me that the Father has sent Me.” Of all people in the world, those Jewish religious leaders should have recognized the fact that the works Jesus had done in their midst testified of the Father. They rejected the testimony of the Father, while professing to serve Him.

5:37 - THE FATHER. *“The Father who sent Me has Himself testified about Me. You have not heard His voice at any time, and you haven’t seen His form.”* Jesus has pointed to two witnesses already: (1) John the Baptist (5:33-35), (2) Jesus’ own works (5:36) and now, (3) The Father. Jesus testifies about Himself, but His testimony is not valid according to the Law without corroborating witnesses. He has already mentioned two witnesses, and now he points to the Father, Who testified about Him.

YOU HAVE NOT HEARD. “You have not heard His voice at any time, and you haven’t seen His form.” These Jewish leaders are plotting to have Jesus killed, but He fearlessly charges that the Father had testified of Him, but they had not heard God and they had not seen Him. The Old Testament is filled with prophesies of Jesus, but these people hardened their hearts against that revelation, in part because to accept it would be a threat to the religious rituals, ceremonies, and rules to which they were committed.

It is difficult for the enemies of Christ to accept this testimony. The first reason is that the witness is

God, and human beings do not have direct physical contact with God. No one has personal contact with God through the sense of hearing or the sense of sight. Returning to the Prologue again, we are reminded that no one other than the Son has ever seen God (1:18), even though the Israelites had the Old Testament records of numerous people who had heard God speak and a number of people had seen various manifestations of His presence, as well as visions and dreams through which He spoke to them. “But all of these statements are basically proximate descriptions of encounters with God by using human sense terms that are foundational to human thought. They emphasize a relationship with God, who is in fact beyond the realm of full human comprehension or physical sensing” [NAC]. We will remember that God spoke audibly to Adam, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, and others, and these Jews who heard Jesus speak were aware of the fact that God spoke concerning the Messiah. However, the Jews to whom Jesus was speaking did not accept the clear testimony of passages like Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, or other Messianic prophecies.

We might add that there is another problem, and that is that some people claim personal visions, messages, and encounters of various kinds with God. Some of those claims are rather bazaar, to say the least. Those claims may confuse some people. I saw a few minutes of a televised sermon in which the pastor apparently claimed that he had gone to heaven and returned. He was laughing and joking about it, and the large congregation was laughing as an audience laughs and applauds when people are being entertained. That was enough to convince me this was a hoax. Think of the visions, visits, and revelations people like Isaiah received and the way they responded. The very first thing they had to be told was, “fear not”!

At this point, Jesus has said, “The Father himself--hath borne witness of me. This God had done, 1st. By the miracles which Jesus had wrought, and of which he was conversing. 2nd. At the baptism of Jesus, where he said, ‘This is my beloved Son,’ Mat 3:17. 3rd. In the prophecies of the Old Testament. It is not easy to say here to which of these he refers. Perhaps he has reference to all” [BARNES].

YOU HAVEN’T SEEN HIS FORM. The Bible is clear: “No man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18, KJV). The word “form” here, does not denote God himself. Rather, “It refers to the visible manifestation of himself; to the appearance which he assumed... It is applied to the visible symbol of God that appeared in the cloud and that rested on the tabernacle, Nu 9:15,16. It is the same word that is applied to the Holy Spirit appearing in bodily shape like a dove, Luke 3:22. Jesus does not here deny that God had appeared in this manner, but he says they had not seen--that is, had not paid attention to, or regarded, the appearance of God. He had manifested himself, but they disregarded it, and, in particular, they had disregarded his manifestations in attestation of the Messiah” [BARNES]. We must not leave this verse without reminding ourselves that in Old Testament a word is often used which means to hear with a mind to obey. Furthermore, Jesus said, “The one who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

5:38 - YOU DON’T HAVE HIS WORD. “*You don’t have His word living in you, because you don’t believe the One He sent.*” Jesus is addressing “the Jews”, Jewish religious leaders, who were “trying all the more to kill Him” (5:18). No one, except Jesus, knew more about the Old Testament Scriptures than these people. Yet, Jesus charges that God’s Word did not live in them. In Verse 37,

He charged that “You have not heard His voice at any time, and you haven’t seen His form.” This verse helps explain that statement. The word of God did not live in them. It did not live in them, He said, “because you don’t believe the One He sent.” For more on the word living in believers, see John 10:35; John 15:3; John 17:6; 1John 1:10; 1John 2:14.

Jesus here mentions a very important reason why those religious leaders did not accept the testimony of the Father about Jesus. The key was that “His word” was not “living” in them, and He announced that the reason His word was not living in them was “because you don’t believe the One He sent.” The Word of God does not live in anyone who does not believe in Jesus Christ.

“Jesus turned a defense into a charge. His testimony, he argued, would not work with them because they would not let it work. Accordingly, they were unable to experience the kind of encounters (“hear” and “see” God) that marked the lives of the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets. The maxim that often has been applied to the post-Old Testament (intertestamental) era and could apply to these opponents was: There was no new word from God to them. They relied on tradition and could not accept the testimony of the in-breaking of God into their lives” [NAC].

This absolutely refutes any suggestion that Jesus is not the only way to God, or the only way one may go to Heaven. Even though America was never intended to be a theocracy, the Founding Fathers made sure this nation was founded on Christian principles. There was a Christian consensus in America until some time around World War II, but Francis Schaeffer stated that America entered the post-Christian period in our history in 1935 (England in 1895). This passage from a Christian consensus to a post-Christian America was not that obvious in the Bible Belt until some time in the late fifties. Reality slapped the church in the face in 1962 and 1963 when prayer and Bible reading were taken out of public schools, decisions my liberal Systematic Theology professor applauded. Since that time, America had moved deeper and deeper into the post-Christian period in her history, and we are paying a price for it today.

In post-Christian America, the last thing many people want to hear is that Jesus is the only way, though He is (Acts 4:12). America detests exclusivity and loves diversity. Jesus invites diverse individual to come to Him for His salvation, but He excludes anyone who does not embrace Him exclusively. If you don’t believe in the Son you don’t know the Father.

5:39 - THE SCRIPTURES. *“You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, yet they testify about Me.”* Jesus began this discourse by stating, “If I testify about Myself, My testimony is not valid” (5:31). The Law required two or more witnesses, so Jesus presented His witnesses. He has pointed to (1) John the Baptist (5:33-35); (2) Jesus’ own works (5:36); and (3) The Father himself (5:37). Now He moves on to the fourth witness, the Scriptures (5:39, 40). This new witness to which He appealed was nothing less that **the very Scripture of which these religious leaders boasted!** “They spent their time “diligently study[ing] the Scriptures” (eraunate tas graphas) because the major focus of the rabbis’ work was the study of the Torah. It was regarded by them as the dearest part of this life and their means to the assurance of life in the world to come (m.‘Abot 2:7–8). What they sought by their study of the Scriptures, Jesus

said, could only be found in him, the one who gives eternal life (e.g., John 3:16; 17:2). But they would not accept his witness (5:40) or his claims based on Scripture (5:39)” [NAC].

YOU THINK. Jesus charged, “you think you have eternal life in them...” They boasted of their knowledge of the Scriptures, even though they spent more time dealing with the rabbinical law. They deceived themselves into thinking they had eternal life because they knew the Scriptures, but they did not have eternal life, He declared, “because you don’t believe the One He sent” (5:38).

When Mitt Romney announced that he was running for the presidency in 2008, it spawned a debate over Mormonism. Many insisted that Mormonism is simply another Christian denomination, while others were just as insistent that it is not. Who was right? The Jesus of the Bible is not the Jesus of Mormonism. Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee was strongly criticized for asking if it is true that Mormonism teaches that in eternity past Jesus and Lucifer were brothers. Mormons are quick to declare that they are Christians, but if they do not embrace Jesus by grace, through faith, plus nothing, they do not know Him.

THEY TESTIFY ABOUT ME. Let us be very clear: the Old Testament testifies about Jesus. In Genesis, He is the Creator (John 1:1f), and He is the Promised One who will destroy Satan (Gen. 3:15). In Exodus, He is the Redeemer, the Atonement, the Lamb. In Ruth He is the Kinsman Redeemer. In Job 9:33, He is the Judge (Mediator, Daysman). In Psalm 22, He is on the Cross, centuries before crucifixion was used to execute criminals. In Isaiah 53, He is the Suffering Servant. Those Jewish authorities knew the Scripture that testified about Jesus, but they believed only what they wanted to believe. In Zechariah, He is Prophet, Priest, and King. In Malachi, He is the coming one.

Jesus does not state what Scripture He has in mind here, but it seems obvious that He is calling attention to Messianic prophecies. “Luke provides an example of this type of thinking in the postresurrection story of Jesus teaching two of his followers as he reviewed texts from “Moses and all the Prophets” (Luke 24:27) that bore witness to him (see the Emmaus story in Luke 24:27). Matthew offered some insight into the type of texts that might have been in mind in his thirteen fulfillment texts” [NAC]. Early Christians developed lists of Old Testament prophecies they believed to have been Messianic, and modern believers agree, for the most part. Jesus, however, did not point out specific texts here. Knowing these religious leaders it was obviously enough to point to the body of Messianic prophecies as a whole.

5:40 - YOU ARE NOT WILLING. “*And you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.*” They had no excuse. They knew the Scripture but failed to find Jesus in them. They were the recognized authorities on the Scriptures, but they applied them as it served their purpose. They were not willing to come to Jesus. Why? For one thing, they considered themselves the authorities on all things religious, and they saw Jesus as an unsophisticated Galilean. Their egos got in the way of their faith. “The tragic irony of the Jewish leaders’ rejection of Christ lay in their willful inability to identify Jesus as the Messiah despite their professed expertise in the OT Scriptures (5:39, 40, 45-47)” [NCWB].

THAT YOU MAY HAVE LIFE. There is no eternal life apart from Jesus, and they were too religious to come to Him! “This is the tragedy of the rejection of Messiah by the Messianic race” (Bernard). See John 1:11; Mat 23:37 (kai ouk êthelêsate, and ye would not). Men loved darkness rather than light (John 3:19). That ye may have life (hina zôên echête). Life in its simplest form as in John 3:36 (cf. John 3:16). This is the purpose of John in writing the Fourth Gospel (John 20:31). There is life only in Christ Jesus” [ATR]. The self-proclaimed experts in the Scripture were blind to the truth, rejected Jesus, and refused to go to Him for eternal life.

Commenting on verses 39-40, the author of the material in the Bible Knowledge Commentary writes:

“The Jewish religious leaders studied the Old Testament with great diligence. They believed that if one could comprehend the words of the text, he would gain a share in the world to come. They considered those ignorant of the Law to be under a curse (7:49). Similarly many people today think Bible study is an end in itself rather than a function leading to the knowledge of God and godliness. Somehow a veil was over the minds of these Jewish scholars (2 Cor. 3:15), and they failed to see that Jesus is the Promised One. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, the true righteous Servant of Yahweh, the coming Prophet, the Son of Man, the Davidic King, and the promised Son of God and great High Priest. In spite of the clarity of the revelation, they refused **to come to Him for life** (cf. John 3:19-20)” [BKC].

5:41 - I DO NOT ACCEPT. “*I do not accept glory from men...*” This statement may surprise some people, because we are often taught that God deserves glory and praise, and that He demands it. So, what is He saying here? Robertson explains: “Mere honour and praise Jesus does not expect from men (verse John 5:34). This is not wounded pride, for ambition is not Christ’s motive. He is unlike the Jews (John 5:44; John 12:43; Mat 6:1) and seeks not his own glory, but the glory and fellowship of the Father (John 1:14; John 2:11; John 7:18). Paul did not seek glory from men (1Th 2:6)” [ATR].

The word “glory” appears 341 times in the HCSB, and in most cases the emphasis is upon what Jesus seems to be rejecting here. How do we interpret this? Jesus is deserving of glory, and throughout all eternity all the redeemed of the Lord will glorify Him. At the same time, He does not desire glory from those who reject Him. He does not desire the kind of glory movie stars crave. He neither needs nor wants the glory that is earthly or of the flesh.

5:42 - BUT I KNOW YOU. “*(B)ut I know you—that you have no love for God within you.*” Language is important. The late Dr. J. Hardee Kennedy, an outstanding Hebrew and Old Testament scholar, who served as Dean of the School of Theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary when I was a student there, presented an overview of the Book of Isaiah for a group of pastors in Monroe, Louisiana a few years after I graduated. He read, “The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s feeding–trough, [but] Israel does not know; My people do not understand” (Is. 1:3). Dr. Kennedy pointed out that the first use of the English word “know” means to recognize, whereas the second Hebrew word for “know” means to know experientially. Those people knew

about God, they recognized the things pertaining to God, they just didn't know Him, and for that reason, even as they professed knowledge of Him, they were in open rebellion against Him.

The descendants of those people the Lord addressed in the Eighth Century B. C., stood before Jesus with murder in their hearts, while pretending to do be doing God a service by killing Him. Jesus probably recognized some of those religious leaders who were recognized authorities on the Law and Prophets, but beyond that, He knew them. He said, "But I know you" (alla egnôka humas). This is the perfect active indicative of the word to know (ginôskô), which carries the force of "I have come to know and still know you" [ATR]. This is the knowledge of personal experience. John has already written, "Jesus, however, would not entrust Himself to them, since *He knew them all* and because He did not need anyone to testify about man; for **He Himself knew what was in man**" (2:24-25, bold added by this writer).

NO LOVE FOR GOD. Jesus, who knew what was in the heart of each of those Jewish leaders, said, "you have no love for God within you." They had no love toward God, even though they were the recognized authorities of all things pertaining to the Jewish religion. We may look to "Luke 11:42 for this phrase in the same sense (only other instance in the Gospels, but common in 1John (1Jn 2:5; 1Jn 3:17; 1Jn 4:7, 9; 1Jn 5:3) and in 2Th 3:5; 2Co 13:14; Rom 5:5. The sense of God's love for man occurs in 1Jn 3:1; 1Jn 4:9, 10, 16; John 15:9 of Christ's love for man. These rabbis did not love God and hence did not love Christ" [ATR].

Barnes summarizes verses 41-42 this way: "In this passage we see,

"1st. That we should not seek for human applause. It is of very little value, and it often keeps men from the approbation of God, John 5:44.

"2nd. They who will not believe on Jesus Christ give evidence that they have no love for God.

"3rd. The reason why they do not believe on him is because they have no regard for his character, wishes, or law" [BARNES].

SPECIAL NOTE: When I was writing the verse by verse study on the Gospel According to Luke in THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK series, I asked the question, "Where have all the demons gone?" Jesus saw demons everywhere He went, and He identified them. And they knew Him! Why do we not see recognize demons today? Jesus did not eliminate them, so they must still be with us. We can be sure they recognize Christ in us, but if He is really in us, should we not recognize the presence and work of demons today?

Now, I have another question: Where have all the religious hypocrites gone? Where have all the people gone who profess to love the Lord, but in fact love only themselves, their institutions, rituals, and ceremonies. If you cross those people you may soon learn where all the demons have gone! We must remind ourselves that Jesus still knows what is in each person's heart and mind.

5:43 - I HAVE COME. "*I have come in My Father's name, yet you don't accept Me. If someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him.*" The Messiah for whom they had prayed was

standing before them. The One whom they believed would come and reclaim all the territory conquered by David stood in their presence, and yet refused to accept Him. Earlier, He had cautioned His disciples not to tell of His miracles. The time had not yet come. Now, He openly challenges those who seek to kill Him. The modern reader can hardly imagine the incongruity of a carpenter from Galilee challenging the religious authorities. A slap in the face would have been less shocking to these men.

IN MY FATHER’S NAME. Jesus had come with all the authority of the Father. “Among the rabbins, it was essential to a teacher's credit that he should be able to support his doctrine by the authority of some eminent persons who had gone before. Hence the form, Coming in the name of another” [CLARKE]. Today, a person’s name distinguishes him or her from other people. It is interesting that many young people and young adults introduce themselves to strangers by their given name only. A young man may visit a new church and introduce himself to the pastor or a Sunday School teacher by saying simply, “I’m John”, as though it never occurs to him that there might be several people named John in that congregation.

Many of these young men and women who introduce themselves like that seem to have had no training in etiquette, yet they see nothing wrong with what they are doing. My son John is still a young man, but he recently told me about trying to introduce a young man to a friend. The young man interrupted him to say, “I’m Bill.” My son was not too surprised at the young man’s lack of social skills. It would also be interesting to know if those who so introduce themselves might prefer a church where, “no one knows whether you are there or not.” They seek anonymity, whereas their Christian parents and grandparents valued fellowship.

In the Bible, one’s name was often much more significant. A person might have been named for a family member, or he may have been given a name that reflected something of his nature or character. Jacob received his name because he was born with his hand on Esau’s foot. The name means “heel grasper”, or one who follows after another to trip him up, which was especially appropriate for the youthful Jacob. God changed his name to Israel, which means “prince with God.” Vine explains the use of “name” in the Bible in various ways, including this: “for all that a ‘name’ implies, of authority, character, rank, majesty, power, excellence, etc., of everything that the ‘name’ covers: (a) of the ‘Name’ of God as expressing His attributes, etc., e.g., Matt. 6:9; Luke 1:49; John 12:28; John 17:6, 26; Rom. 15:9; 1Tim. 6:1; Heb. 13:15; Rev. 13:6” [VINE - Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words]. Robertson adds: “Seven times Jesus in John speaks of the ‘Name’ of the Father (John 5:43; John 10:25; John 12:28; John 17:6, 11, 12, 26). See John 1:12 for use of onoma (Luke 1:49)” [ATR].

YET YOU DON’T ACCEPT ME. The Gospel of John has been called the Gospel of Rejection (see 5:40; John 1:11; John 3:11, 32; John 12:37). “The tragic irony of the Jewish leaders’ rejection of Christ lay in their willful inability to identify Jesus as the Messiah despite their professed expertise in the OT Scriptures (5:39, 40, 45-47)” [NCWB]. For the modern reader it is still a challenge to understand the significance of what Jesus has just said. He came in the full authority of His Father.

“Jesus was aware of the earnest Jewish longing and search for a Messiah, and he recognized his

opponents' personal hopes for gain (5:43). Therefore he summed up their problem in believing him as a problem of their self-centeredness—"accept [i.e., "seek"] praise [doxa] from one another" and not from God (5:44; cf. 12:42–43). Accordingly, he understood how the final verdict with God would turn out. They were doomed!" [NAC].

In the Muslim world, what Jesus said might cause a riot, with the street filled with angry, shouting men, bent on killing the Him. The rabbis in Jerusalem were much more subtle than that. Not only were they of a different temperament, they were trained in God's Law and applied it in a legalistic sense. Furthermore, they knew any kind of riot would bring down the wrath of Rome on them. That, in fact, finally happened when they had a group to conspire to kill Paul while he was being escorted by Roman soldiers. Not too many years after that, they would revolt. Rome placed Jerusalem under siege, breached the walls of the city, and destroyed the very temple they so religiously defended.

IF ANOTHER COMES. Jesus had come in the name of the Father and they had rejected Him. Yet, "If someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him", Jesus declared. This is the condition of third class, meaning that one may or he may not (such was a possibility). In fact there have been many self-proclaimed Messiahs throughout history. We are told that even as Titus and his Roman army laid siege to Jerusalem, there were self-proclaimed Messiahs within the walls of the city. According to tradition, these false Messiahs burned the food supplies of their opponents to garner support for themselves, not knowing that the walls were about to be breached and the temple destroyed (A. D. 70).

5:44 - HOW CAN YOU BELIEVE? *"How can you believe? While accepting glory from one another, you don't seek the glory that comes from the only God."* It is important to understand what Jesus was saying to these people. The emphasis in the Greek is on "you"; as in "**you being what you are.**" These religious leaders "were not true Jews (Rom 2:29; Esth 9:28) who cared for the glory of God, but they prefer the praise of men (Mat 6:1; Mat 23:5) like the Pharisees who feared to confess Christ (John 12:43)" [ATR].

GLORY. These Jewish authorities sought glory from one another, but did not see "the glory that comes from the only God." What exactly does that mean? Did Jesus mean that they did not glorify God, or that they did not receive glory from Him? The first part is rather easy: they sought glory, honor, and recognition for themselves. They honored those who honored them, or who might honor them in the future. Barnes captures the idea:

"Who are studious of praise, and live for pride, ambition, and vainglory. This desire, Jesus says, was the great reason, why they would not believe on him. They were unwilling to renounce their worldly honours, and become the followers of one so humble and unostentatious as he was. They expected a Messiah of pomp and splendour, and would not submit to one so despised and of so lowly a rank. Had the Messiah come, as they expected, with pomp and power, it would have been an honour, in their view, to follow him; as it was, they despised and rejected him. The great reason why multitudes do not believe is their attachment to human honours, or

their pride, and vanity, and ambition. These are so strong, that while they continue they cannot and will not believe. They might, however, renounce these things, and then, the obstacles being removed, they would believe” [BARNES].

FROM THE ONLY GOD. Any student of the Scripture is familiar with the word “glory”, and no doubt has a general understanding of the meaning and significance of the word. But what exactly does the word mean? I checked Vines and found a long article, of which only an excerpt follows here:

"glory' (from dokeo, 'to seem'), primarily signifies an opinion, estimate, and hence, the honor resulting from a good opinion. It is used (1) (a) of the nature and acts of God in self-manifestation, i.e., what He essentially is and does, as exhibited in whatever way he reveals Himself in these respects, and particularly in the person of Christ, in whom essentially His 'glory' has ever shone forth and ever will do, John 17:5, 24; Heb. 1:3; it was exhibited in the character and acts of Christ in the days of His flesh, John 1:14; John 2:11; at Cana both His grace and His power were manifested, and these constituted His 'glory;' so also in the resurrection of Lazarus, John 11:4, 40; the 'glory' of God was exhibited in the resurrection of Christ, Rom. 6:4, and in His ascension and exaltation, 1Pet. 1:21, likewise on the Mount of Transfiguration, 2Pet. 1:17..." [VINES].

QUESTION: Has Jesus here given us a word picture of what happens when those who profess faith in Him become more interested in ritual and ceremony than a personal relationship with Him? Are we willing to read His words here and apply them to ourselves and our church today?

QUESTION: Was Jesus able to eliminate self-glory while He was on earth, or is there still a temptation to seek glory from others? The answer is obvious when we see people who seem to feel that they are super saints, but have little or no time for those who cannot honor them. I drove to Jackson, Mississippi with my son Mark, who had been asked to attend a funeral with a friend. The message delivered by a young pastor was outstanding, and when I saw him standing alone in the foyer as I was leaving the sanctuary, I walked over, introduced myself, and thanked him for the service. He made it through the introduction gracefully, but when I commented on the message, he was already looking over my shoulder as he said, "Thank you, Mr. Sanders." His attitude was one of dismissal! I learned later that a friend who served with me on the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources was there that day. He was pastor of one of the largest churches in the state and he was well known to this family. It amused me to ponder what kind of response my friend would have gotten had he walked up to speak to this young pastor.

Pastors and denominational workers have no immunity to the temptation to seek glory for themselves. A friend and I observed a man who came on a board on which we both served. He introduced himself to everyone and visited with people during breaks and after sessions. Within a couple of years, he was chairman or vice-chairman of a committee, received recognition for his service, which led to more responsibility and more recognition. After a few more years, this man was friendly with his inner circle of friends. A friend who had observed this change called it to my

attention. I had observed the same thing but had never commented on it.

Self glory is the antithetical to the glory of God. One never honors God when he is seeking honor and glory for himself. Not only is one who seeks glory for himself denied that blessing, he hinders others by self-glorification. Those who are called to serve are often praised by others, and there is genuine temptation to believe the those praises. I preached many funeral sermons when I was pastor of one church, and I don't know how many time I heard someone say, "That was the best funeral service I have ever heard." I was standing by when a guest speaker came to our church to preach the funeral sermon for a former member. As soon as the service was over, I heard one of our members say to this visiting preacher, "That was the best funeral sermon I have ever heard." Certainly, neither of us should have believed the appraisal!

5:45 - DO NOT THINK. *"Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope."* Jesus said, "Do not think", which is a "Prohibition with *mê* and the present imperative" [ATR], which carries the force of "Don't think that I will accuse you!" "Do not suppose that I intend to follow your example. They had accused Jesus of breaking the law of God, John 5:16. He says that he will not imitate their example, though he implies that he might accuse them" [BARNES].

YOUR ACCUSER IS MOSES. To the modern reader this might seem strange, but those religious leaders knew what Jesus was saying. They were condemning him on the basis of the Mosaic Law. They professed to be the authorities on the Mosaic Law, but they stood condemned by it. How so? Moses wrote of the coming Messiah and Jesus of Nazareth was the One of whom Moses wrote, yet these people rejected Him. "He wrote of the Messiah, clearly foretold his coming, and commanded them to hear him. As they did not do it, it might be said that they had disregarded his command; and as Moses was divinely commissioned and had a right to be obeyed, so his command reproveth them: they were disobedient and rebellious. He wrote of me. He wrote of the Messiah, and I am the Messiah, Ge 3:15 12:3; comp. John 8:56 Ge 49:10 De 18:15" [BARNES].

These authorities on the Mosaic Law were condemned by the words of Moses, even as they professed to be authorities on the Law. "For these Jews to be accused by Moses, the object of all their religious boastings, would be a hard blow" [NCWB]. They trusted in the Mosaic Law, but "To hope in Moses was to hope in what Moses gave—namely, the law (see Rom. 2:17). But the law cannot give life; rather, it condemns" [NCWB]. Another writer adds:

"Moreover, he told them he would not have to take the stand against them in the ultimate court of destiny. That role had already been accepted by Moses (5:45). W. Meeks sees the reference to Moses here as being in line with the Jewish tradition where Moses served in a continuing role of intercession on behalf of the people of Israel. Whereas the Jews expected Moses to be their supporter and plead with God on their behalf, Jesus announced to them that Moses would serve instead as their accuser (cf. Deut 31:19 and the farewell song of Moses that follows)" [NAC].

5:46 - IF YOU BELIEVE IN MOSES. *"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me,*

because he wrote about Me.” Jesus used the condition of second class (assumed to be false, or unfulfilled) “with imperfect indicative in both protasis and apodosis and an in apodosis. This was a home-thrust, **proving that they did not really believe Moses.** For he wrote of me (*peri gar emou ekeinos egrapsen*). Deut 18:18 is quoted by Peter (Acts 3:22) as a prophecy of Christ and also by Stephen in Acts 7:37” [ATR, bold added by this writer]. For more on that thought, see John 3:14 where Jesus speaks of the bronze serpent, and 8:56, where he speaks about Abraham foreseeing His day.

5:47 - IF YOU DON’T BELIEVE. “*But if you don’t believe his writings, how will you believe My words?*” For us, Jesus’ line of thought is very logical. If those recognized experts in the Law really believed Moses, they would believe Him, because Moses **wrote** about Him. Jesus does not cite any particular passage from the Pentateuch, but they should have been familiar with passages such as Gen. 3:15; 22:18; 49:10; Num. 24:17; Deut. 18:15). Nor, does He mention “any specific types (such as the Passover, the manna, the rock, the offerings, or the high priesthood). He simply assumed the Old Testament clearly points to Him. Since Moses’ revelation was rejected (cf. Luke 16:29-31), Jesus’ words were rejected also. Later Jesus said that Isaiah had written about Him (John 12:41)” [BKC].

HIS WRITINGS. To those who professed to be experts on the Law, there was no greater authority than Moses. The “writings” of Moses were binding and authoritative because we are often told that Moses wrote what God told him to write. Joshua wrote that he was careful to obey everything the Lord told Moses to write (Josh. 1:17).

MY WORDS. The contrast between **Moses’ writings** (*grammasin*, from *grapho*, to write) and **Jesus’ words** (*remasin*, from *eipon*) is significant and intentional. Robertson points out that “Gamma may mean the mere letter as opposed to spirit (2Co 3:6; Rom 2:27, 29; Rom 7:6), a debtor's bond (Luke 16:6), letters or learning (John 7:15; Acts 26:24) like *agrammatoi* for unlearned (Acts 4:13), merely written characters (Luke 23:38; 2Co 3:7; Gal 6:11), official communications (Acts 28:21), once *hiera grammata* for the sacred writings (2Ti 3:15) instead of the more usual *hai hagiai graphai*. *Graphê* is used also for a single passage (Mark 12:10), but *biblion* for a book or roll (Luke 4:17) or *biblos* (Luke 20:42)” [ATR]. Jesus did not have to tell these self-proclaimed experts in the Law that He is referring to the Torah. They understood that all too well, and they were enraged by what He said. Early in His ministry, Jesus very specifically cautioned His followers not to publicize His mighty works. Word, He knew would reach the ears of these very people who are now plotting to kill Him. When His time came (Matt. 26:18), He would no longer avoid open conflict with the Jewish authorities. Note that there was response from these rabbis to these words from Jesus.

SPECIAL NOTE: There is a strong summary of this chapter in the New American Commentary: “The present chapter, however, concludes with a final question which leads to the realization that the need for defense is not with Jesus but with the opposition. If Jesus’ accusers in fact did not obey/believe (follow the way of) Moses, who was their basic support for tradition, then why should anyone expect them to accept Jesus and his words (5:47)? This question was therefore an open challenge to the opponents. Thus an important option is set forth: who is to be believed?” [NAC].

“The first stage of the Festival Cycle has thus been completed. It was played out at Jerusalem in a pathetic setting of helpless people, undoubtedly for John a symbolic picture of Israel’s spiritual condition. When Jesus acted and healed the man, the scene moved inside the temple, but the picture of Israel’s spiritual condition, represented by the Jews, remained in a pathetic state. The Son who acted powerfully as God’s agent on earth was rejected by tradition-bound opponents who might as well have been categorized as living among the hopeless sick at the Pool of Bethesda. The entire story is set in the context of a dispute concerning work on a festival day, interpreted by John as a Sabbath controversy because according to Leviticus 23 festivals are related to Sabbath as holy convocations to the Lord, on which one should do no labor. The chapter is thus a moving illustration of Jesus as Lord of the festivals and of the fact that he came to his own people but they did not receive him (1:11)” [NAC].

In this passage we see that an institutionalized religious can seriously hinder, or prevent a personal relationship with the Lord. Rituals and ceremonies not only do not guarantee a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, they may actually hinder or prevent it. No one could have been more religious than these Jewish leaders, and no one could have been further from Him. The recognized authorities in God’s Law did not know the God of the Law. They were in rebellion against God.

It would be easy to dismiss this as little more than a warning against ancient legalism, or misguided devotion, but to do so is to miss the application for us today. For some, ritual and ceremony may still hinder a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. One can “take communion” or be baptized without having a personal relationship with Him.

SPECIAL REMINDER: In the Prologue, John declares, “**In the beginning was the Word**, and the Word was with God, and the **Word was God**. He was with God in the beginning. **All things were created through Him**, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created. **Life was in Him**, and that life was the light of men” (1:1-4, bold added by this writer). This mighty declaration, as this writer stated in comments on those verses, drives the final nail in the coffin of Gnosticism, Eastern Mysticism, New Age religious beliefs, all pagan religions, and any cult that parades under the banner of Christianity.

Everything Jesus declared in this chapter affirms His identity as the Son of God, the One sent by the Father to pay the price for our redemption, as stated in earlier passages (see 1:12; 3:16-18). Jesus, having identified Himself to the Jewish religious leaders, went on to provide them with witnesses as to His identity: (1) John the Baptist, (2) His works, (3) the Father, and (4) the Scripture. He was sent by the Father to do the work of the Father (John 3:16).

CHAPTER 6

The Fourth Sign

Jesus Feeds a Huge Crowd

CHAPTER NOTE: The Believer's Study Notes remind us that "the fourth and fifth sign-miracles are located in this chapter. They are the feeding of the 5,000 and the walking on water" [BSB]. The New American Commentary offers the following introduction to Chapter 6:

"The Festival Cycle now moves into the second stage. In this chapter the evangelist introduced his second major "inclusio," which runs from the beginning of chap. 6 with the identification of Passover (6:4) to the conclusion of chap. 11 with the announcement that Jesus' final Passover was near (11:55).

"The scene also shifts from the pathetic paralytic and the hopeless Jewish traditionalists of Jerusalem in chap. 5 to the hungry Galileans of chap. 6. In this context reminiscent of Israel's first generation, the crossing of the sea (6:1) and the coming of the crowd out to a lonely arid mountain region (6:3) formed a picture-perfect setting for considering how Jesus could be related to the stories of the exodus. Therefore it should be no surprise that the stories of Jesus in this chapter deal with a miraculous feeding and the control of the sea. Moses had been mentioned as a witness in the concluding arguments of the last chapter (5:45-46). Now the evangelist introduces the New Moses in the wilderness" [NAC].

6:1 - AFTER THIS. "*After this, Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias).*" Robertson points out that "after this" is "A common, but indefinite, note of time in John (John 3:22; John 5:1; John 6:1; John 7:1). The phrase does not mean immediate sequence of events" [ATR]. Of course, that venerable scholar of the first half of the Twentieth Century was right, for it appears that a whole year had lapsed since the **third sign**, the healing of the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda. Interestingly, this miracle, the feeding of the 5,000 men, plus the women and children (possibly as many as 20,000 people), is the only event of any kind recorded in all four Gospels before the Lord's final visit to Jerusalem (Mark 6:30-44; Mat 14:13-21; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13). To keep things in perspective, we might remind ourselves that during the interim Jesus had sent His disciples on an evangelistic tour of Galilee, and they had returned to report to Him. "It was the passover time (John 6:4) just a year before the end" [ATR].

SEA OF GALILEE. John and his brother James had grown up fishing on the Sea of Galilee with their father Zebedee. He is now writing around A. D. 86, sixteen years after the destruction of the Jerusalem and the temple, and a number of years after the martyrdom of all the other apostles. In the final chapter of this Gospel account of the life and ministry of Christ, Jesus had told Simon Peter what kind of death he would die for Him (crucifixion), and Peter had pointed to John and asked, what about him.

Jesus answered, "**If I want him to remain until I come,**" Jesus answered, 'what is that to you? As

for you, follow Me.’ So this report spread to the brothers that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not tell him that he would not die, but, ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?’ (John 21:22-23, bold added by this writer). John, of course, did not remain alive until the return of the Lord, as we are fully aware, but Jesus did keep him around to write this account, as well as the Three Epistles of John (about A. D. 88), and the Revelation (around A. D. 96).

As he writes this, John has lived in Ephesus for many years; he is writing from that city, and this Gospel would be read in churches that were predominantly Gentile. These people would not know the remote fresh water body Luke calls a lake, but which the Jewish writers, Matthew, Mark, and John grew up calling the Sea of Galilee. It is called Gennesaret in Luke 5:1 and Sea of Tiberias in John 21:1. The name Tiberias came from the name of “a town on the lake’s west shore built by Herod Antipas” [BKC] around A. D. 22.

6:2 - A HUGE CROWD. “*And a huge crowd was following Him because they saw the signs that He was performing on the sick.*” John is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who was fully aware of the circumstances, but John is also an eyewitness and a participant in the events of which is he writing. The fact that he is an eyewitness makes the story even more interesting, and it would surely have made it more believable to the early readers. John often provides us with details that remind us that we are reading genuine space/time history.

THE SAW THE SIGNS. John was there and he heard the people talking. No doubt, he was asked a lot of questions by some of the people in that “huge crowd” that followed Jesus that day. They had seen “the signs that He was performing on the sick” and there was a spirit of excitement and anticipation as they rushed around the north end of the Sea of Galilee to see what He might do next. We shall see that they were wondering if He was about to declare Himself the Messiah and organize an army that would drive the Romans out of their land. The level of excitement was so great that thousands of people rushed from their homes and followed Him without thought of food.

6:3 - JESUS WENT UP. “*So Jesus went up a mountain and sat down there with His disciples.*” Jesus and the twelve apostles walked up the hillside to the east of the Sea of Galilee. After the feeding of the multitude, Jesus would send His disciples away and dismiss the multitude, and then He would go up farther onto the mountain. This mountain was probably “in the desert of Bethsaida, in the territories of Philip, tetrarch of Galilee. Our Lord withdrew to this place for a little rest; for he and his disciples had been so thronged with the multitudes, continually coming and going, that they had not time to take necessary food” [CLARKE].

SAT DOWN. Jesus had picked out an appropriate place and sat down with His disciples on the side of the mountain. They would rest there, but He may well have planned to teach them something about His plans. They had arrived at a chosen site and were planning to rest there.

6:4 - THE PASSOVER. “*Now the Passover, a Jewish festival, was near.*” Some see this as the second of the three Passovers John mentions (see also, 2:13, 23), but Robertson writes that “This is probably the third passover in Christ’s ministry (John 2:13 and one unmentioned unless John 5:1 be

it). In John 2:13, here, and John 11:55 (the last one) the adverb *eggus* (near) is used. John is fond of notes of time. Jesus failed to go to this passover because of the hostility in Jerusalem (John 7:1)” [ATR]. Robertson is probably right, but whichever position is right, we would agree that “The time was appropriate for the sign-miracle of feeding and the Bread of Life Discourse which follows” [BSB]. Passover recalled a deliverance (from slavery) and a coming Deliverer (the Messiah). How ironic that while great crowds were preparing to celebrate Passover, the Lord’s Passover was sitting on a hillside above the Sea of Galilee. They would eat unleavened bread, but the Bread of Heaven would feed thousands with a child’s lunch, and call to the mind the manna God had sent in the wilderness.

6:5 - WHEN JESUS LOOKED UP. *“Therefore, when Jesus looked up and noticed a huge crowd coming toward Him, He asked Philip, ‘Where will we buy bread so these people can eat?’”* Jesus has withdrawn from public to spend some private time with His disciples, and probably some personal time with the Father. Before long, He looked up and noticed a “huge crowd coming toward Him.” The “curious throng was not that easily dissuaded, for they followed him even to his secluded hideaway” [NCWB]. This, as we shall see, really was a “huge crowd”, especially when we remember that this crowd came from small towns and villages in the area.

HE ASKED PHILIP. “Instead of repelling the people angrily for their invasion of his privacy, Christ first healed the sick among them (Matt. 14:13, 14) and then turned to Philip with the compassionate words, ‘Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?’” [NCWB].

6:6 - TO TEST HIM. *“He asked this to test him, for He Himself knew what He was going to do.”* We are not told that Jesus anticipated that the crowd would follow Him to this secluded spot on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, but when He saw them He knew exactly what He was going to do. We should not be surprised that Jesus would test His disciples. In John’s account, Jesus raised the question about food for the multitude, but in Mark 6:35–37, we are told that it was the disciples who brought up the need for food to feed the multitude. In response to their question, Jesus said, “You give them something to eat” (Mark 6:37). In this account John “made sure he interpreted Jesus’ question for the reader. It was not a question for information but a question to probe whether or not Philip understood who Jesus was (6:6)” [NAC].

“John only records Jesus’ question to Philip, the company intermediary and logician: “Where shall we buy bread ...?” (v. 5, 7; cf. other places where he is mentioned at 1:43–46; 12:21–22; 14:8–9). Then the accounts essentially converge, with Philip’s reply in John 6:7 being credited to the disciples generally in Mark 6:37” [NAC].

6:7 - PHILIP ANSWERED. *“Philip answered, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread wouldn’t be enough for each of them to have a little.’”* “Two hundred denarii is approximately two-thirds of a man’s yearly wages (Matt 20:2), and yet it would be insufficient to feed 5,000 men plus the women and children” [BSB]. Philip’s response was to immediately begin calculating the cost to provide a small amount of food for such a large multitude. He was so focused on the immediate

need that he failed to figure Jesus into the equation. Before the day was over, Philip and the others would understand that what Jesus has to offer is always adequate.

“To be fair to Philip, Jesus’ question was a leading one, and Philip’s mind followed the easy path. But the answer was not what Jesus was seeking. For Philip, however, the answer was hopelessness. Andrew, the helper, tried to solve the problem in another way. He began immediately to search for picnic resources in that barren place, but his search also ended in failure, according to his thinking. All he found was a boy in the crowd who had a lunch with barley loaves (the bread of the poor) and two small, dried fish (emphasis on small, 6:9). Andrew’s answer was also hopelessness” (NAC).

6:8 - ANDREW. *“One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him...”* Andrew’s name appears in three different passages in the Gospel of John. In 1:40: “Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Him.” Then we learn in 1:44 that “Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter.” Later, John relates another incident that connects Philip and Andrew: “Now some Greeks were among those who went up to worship at the festival. So they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and requested of him, ‘Sir, we want to see Jesus.’ **Philip went and told Andrew;** then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus” (John 12:20-22, bold added by this writer).

Preachers throughout the years have held Andrew up as an example of one who lived to bring people to Jesus. He seemingly never resented the fact that his brother was always in the spotlight while he was in the background. He seemed to be happy to serve the Lord and to bring people to Him. One very successful ministry, OPERATION ANDREW, has perpetuated that image of Andrew.

6:9 - THERE IS A BOY HERE. *“There’s a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish—but what are they for so many?”* Philip, with the best of intentions, failed the test Jesus had given His disciples. Who could have imagined what Jesus would do? Now, Andrew points out a boy “who has five barley loaves and two fish”, but immediately he adds, “but what are they for so many?” Some may assume that Andrew anticipated the miracle that followed, but we are given no indication of that. Jesus gave them a simple test, “But first **Philip and then Andrew** failed this gentle test of their faith in the time of need, for both of them overlooked the power of the Master and instead answered with the pessimism of despair” [NCWB].

The modern reader may be amazed at what Jesus did with such a small amount of food. However, there is another point here that one may consider. Not only was the lunch small, it was also a lunch of the poor in the land. “Barley scarcely bore one-third of the value of wheat in the east: see Revelation 6:6. That it was a very mean fare appears from Ezekiel 13:19, where the false prophetesses are said to pollute the name of God for handfuls of barley, i. e. for the meanest reward. And Plutarch, in Apoph. p. 174, speaking concerning the flight of Artaxerxes Mnemon, says he was reduced to such distress as to be obliged to eat barley bread” [CLARKE].

6:10 - JESUS SAID. *“Then Jesus said, ‘Have the people sit down. There was plenty of grass in*

that place, so they sat down. The men numbered about 5,000.” Jesus was in control and everything He did was controlled, organized, and orderly. When we compare this to the Synoptics, it is easy to picture the people sitting in orderly grids, as Jesus had instructed them. “As the Good Shepherd, Jesus made the “sheep” (Mark 6:34) **sit down** in green pastures (cf. Ps. 23:2). According to Mark 6:40, the people were seated in groups of 50 and 100. This made the crowd easy to count and the food easy to distribute” [BKC, bold in the original]. The people sat on the ground in such a manner that the disciples could pass among them in an orderly manner, probably walking in lanes between the clusters of people.

PLENTY OF GRASS. Is this worth a comment? Absolutely! As John tells us in the introduction to the First Epistle of John, he was one of the eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus, including the various signs of which he writes. What we are reading is space/time history and this observation speaks of an eyewitness to the events of that day. It is a natural observation from one who was there. Clarke wrote: “Perhaps newly mown grass, or hay, is meant, (so the Vulgate faenum,) and this circumstance marks out more particularly that the passover was at hand. In Palestine the grass is ready for mowing in March; and this miracle seems to have been wrought only a few days before the commencement of that festival: see John 6:4” [CLARK]. Having grown up on a farm, I would take issue with Clarke. Even newly mown hay begins turning brown very quickly, but if John was going to comment on the ground on which the people sat, he could just as easily have written that they sat on newly mown hay. We might add that if they had sat on newly mown hay, there would have been sharp, prickly vegetation sticking up everywhere.

THE MEN NUMBERED ABOUT 5,000. John uses “hoi andres”, to denote men, as distinct from women. The practice of counting, or estimating the number of people present at any event in that time by counting the number of men was common. This was, after all, a time when there was a court for men and a court for women in the temple complex, and men and women were separated in the synagogues. It was probably after the people were seated in groups of fifty to one hundred that it was determined there were about 5,000 men. “Matthew (14:21) indicates that the number did not include women and children. If that is the case, the number present at this event could have reached ten, fifteen, or twenty thousand people—an incredibly large gathering” [NAC].

6:11 - JESUS TOOK THE LOAVES. “*Then Jesus took the loaves, and after giving thanks He distributed them to those who were seated—so also with the fish, as much as they wanted.*” Apparently, the young boy willingly gave Jesus his lunch of five barley loaves and two dried fish, or perhaps he gave them to Andrew, who in turn gave them to Jesus.

AFTER GIVING THANKS. In one sense, one may conclude that the words “giving thanks” serves no purpose other than a reminder that we should give thanks for our food before we eat. However, some Bible students have concluded that there is a deeper meaning, or a serious application we should make from this. Here, we read that Jesus “gave thanks” (eucharistein, 6:11; the Synoptics have ‘blessed,’ eulogein) and distributed the food. Dodd and others have argued that John’s use of eucharistein at this point implies a eucharistic (sacramental) understanding of the text. But Audet and others have reminded readers that the Hebrew barak (‘bless’) probably stands behind both Greek words and that such linguistic distinctions probably were not significant until the second century”

[NAC].

“Since the area was desolate and the time was Passover, **Jesus** was like Moses with the people in the wilderness who needed a miraculous feeding. The miracle itself was not described by John. **Jesus... gave thanks**, but no eucharistic implications are obvious as many argue in this chapter. Among devout Jews the giving of thanks was the norm before and after meals. As Jesus **distributed** the food (with the aid of the disciples [Mark 6:41]), the miraculous multiplication took place” [BKC].

DISTRIBUTED. Jesus distributed the fish and bread to the disciples, who in turn, distributed it to the gigantic crowd (for that day and place). The disciples more than likely passed between the grids of people seated on the grass and handed out the food. We may be safe in assuming that the people were discussing what was happening, both among themselves and with the apostles. This may have had a bearing on events that followed.

6:12 - WHEN THEY WERE FULL. “*When they were full, He told His disciples, ‘Collect the leftovers so that nothing is wasted.’*” They were completely filled: “(hôs de enepîsthêsan). First aorist (effective) passive indicative of empimlêmi, old verb to fill in, to fill up, to fill completely. They were all satisfied” [ATR]. As the water pots involved in the first sign were filled to the brim, these people were totally filled. No one wanted more, and we can be sure that what Jesus offered them would have been sufficient for ten times that number, and more.

John will remind us in 1 John 1:1ff that he and the other apostles were personal witnesses to what took place. If an editorial note had been needed he could have provided it as easily as he noted that there was plenty of grass there, or the number of fish and rolls in the boy’s lunch. “The words, **when they had all had enough to eat**, show that John intended to stress that a miracle took place. Some scholars try to explain away the miracle by saying that this was merely a sacramental or symbolic meal. Others say the “miracle” was in the people’s sharing. But these rationalizations are far from the clear meaning of John’s words” [BKC, bold in the original].

COLLECT THE LEFTOVERS. The implication is clear: If there had been more, there would have been enough for all of them. The ecologist might conclude that Jesus was looking out for the environment, and He would certainly have had a greater respect for the environment than any human being, since it is His environment. Jesus certainly would have shown proper respect for the owner of the land. However, there were no soft drink containers, no plastic wrap, no napkins, or anything else that was not biodegradable. Theologically speaking, we may certainly conclude that what Jesus offers is always adequate, with a significant surplus left over. His supply is inexhaustible.

6:13 - FILLED 12 BASKETS. “*So they collected them and filled 12 baskets with the pieces from the five barley loaves that were left over by those who had eaten.*” Following the feeding of the 5,000 men plus women and children, the disciples collected 12 small baskets of food - not scraps or garbage, but good food. Following the feeding of the 4,000 men plus women and children, they picked

up 7 large baskets of food. I tend to agree with those who claim that “The disciples’ gathering of the **12 baskets** of fragments was part of their education, to show them that He is more than adequate for their needs. Later He appealed to their spiritual stupidity (cf. Mark 8:17-21). Even though the disciples were closer to Jesus than the crowds, they too were in spiritual blindness (Mark 6:52)” [BKC]. New American Commentary notes that

“The NIV has ‘wasted’ here, but the Greek verb *apolluein* is theologically a far more significant word in this chapter than is implied by the NIV rendering. The concern in this chapter involves “lost” or “perishing” food (6:12, 27) and people (6:39). Indeed, later Jesus will mention in his prayer that none had been “lost,” except the son of doom (17:12). Preservation of the church (probably here symbolized in the twelve baskets) was an important concern for this evangelist (cf. a similar concern in 1 John 2:19; 2 John 8)” [NAC].

The statement that the preservation of the church may have been symbolized in the 12 baskets may need some explanation. The number 12 was the number for organized religion. There were 12 tribes in Israel, a number which was maintained by the Lord, even when the tribe of Levi was not given an inheritance like the other tribes. Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh were each given an inheritance to bring the number back to 12. Jesus called 12 apostles. The number (or some multiple of it) is seen often in the Revelation (12 gates, 24 elders, 144,000 saints).

6:14 - SAW THE SIGN. *“When the people saw the sign He had done, they said, ‘This really is the Prophet who was to come into the world!’”* They had already seen other signs (water changed to wine, a nobleman’s young boy healed from a distance, a man lame for 38 years healed), and now they have all seen and benefitted from another amazing sign. This was especially spectacular.

THE PROPHET. It is not surprising that these people who had followed Jesus with such determination and enthusiasm because of the healing miracles they had seen would have concluded that He really was the Messiah for whom they had prayed. They may well have been asking questions of the disciples as the food was being distributed, and there is no doubt that as beneficiaries of and witnesses to this sign, they would have concluded that Jesus “really is the Prophet who was to come into the world.” Moses had called on the Lord in the wilderness and He had provided the bread (manna) that sustained them. Now, Jesus has fed a multitude with a child’s lunch. Who, they wondered, but “the Prophet” who had been promised could do such a thing?

It is critical that we understand what is happening here because it will have an impact on the fifth sign. “The well-fed throng recognized the authenticity of Christ’s miracle, so they correctly identified Jesus as the predicted ‘Prophet’ of Deuteronomy 18:15-18 and rushed to acclaim Jesus as their miracle-working King” [NCWB]. Robertson agrees: “There was a popular expectation about the prophet of Deut 18:15 as being the Messiah (John 1:21; John 11:27). The phrase is peculiar to John, but the idea is in Acts (John 3:22; John 7:37). The people are on the tiptoe of expectation and believe that Jesus is the political Messiah of Pharisaic hope” [ATR]. The statement that Jesus must be “the Prophet who was to come into the

world”, “has all the earmarks of a confession like that of the Samaritan affirmation (4:42) in which there is a faith assertion that Jesus was the expected one (ho erchomenos, “the coming one”) who was to be like the prophet Moses (cf. Deut 18:15)” [NAC].

6:15 - JESUS KNEW. *“Therefore, when Jesus knew that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He withdrew again to the mountain by Himself.”* As we have seen in other places, Jesus knew what was in every person’s mind and heart, and He was not about to be deceived, and He would not deceive others. He acted immediately to block their effort.

MAKE HIM KING. They were about to “take Him by force to make Him king”! How could they do that? They could have gone to the upcoming Passover and proclaimed Him king before the city of Jerusalem and all the thousands of Jews who would be present for Passover week. “Tragically, they missed completely the true redemptive purpose of the Prophet in their presence, and Christ was forced to withdraw into seclusion and prayer. **What a calamity to acknowledge Christ as a “great Prophet” but reject him as the Savior of our souls!”** [NCWB, bold added by this writer].

This was a large crowd and they were excited by what they had witnessed, but where did they get the idea to take Him and make Him their King? Was that thought planted by some outspoken leaders from among their number, and if that was the case, is it possible that Jesus’ well meaning apostles may have encouraged them? We shall see. For now it is enough to understand that “This marks the highpoint of Jesus’ popularity and a great temptation for Him. Could He have the kingdom without the Cross? No. Jesus’ kingdom would be given to Him by the Father (cf. Ps. 2:7-12; Dan. 7:13-14). It will not come from this world (John 18:36). The path of the Father’s will lies in another direction. Before He can be the reigning Lion of Judah, He must be the Lamb who bears the sin of the world (1:29)” [BKC].

THE WITHDREW AGAIN. He perceived their intent, dismissed them and withdrew again to a private place on the mountain. He had obviously gone back down the mountain to meet the people when He saw that they were following Him (before He fed them).

BY HIMSELF. Jesus, after what must have been an exhausting ministry on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, had withdrawn, with His disciples, to a secluded place on a mountain on the east side of the Sea. The large crowd had followed Him, possibly wondering even then if He was the promised “Prophet” (Deut. 18:15). Then He had taken a child’s lunch of two fish and five pieces of bread and fed 5,000 men, plus women and children (possibly 20,000 people). Jesus quickly picked up on the talk about making Him their king, and He did three things: (1) He sent His disciples away (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:45), (2) He dismissed the crowd, and (3) He withdrew again to the mountain from whence He had seen the crowd coming to find Him. “He was alone in every sense, for no one but the Father understood him at this stage, not even his own disciples. He went up to pray (Mark 6:46; Mat 14:23)” [ATR]. He needed time alone with the Father.

The Fifth Sign

Walking on Water

NOTE: We also find the account of Jesus walking on the water in both Matthew (14:22-32) and Mark (6:45–52). There are a few slight variations between Synoptic accounts and the account here in John. For example, the disciples at first thought Jesus was a ghost when they saw Him walking on the water. “There is also an important variation in the transition statement in Mark and Matthew, where Jesus’ activity in the hills is identified as that of praying (cf. Matt 14:23; Mark 6:46). Whereas those Gospels focus on the aspect of Jesus’ departure as a desire for spiritual retreat, John’s focus is on Jesus’ effort to avoid involvement in political revolution” [NAC]

6:16 - WHEN EVENING CAME. “*When evening came, His disciples went down to the sea...*” We will want to understand something of the time here. When Jesus understood that the crowd wanted to take Him and make Him their king, He acted quickly. First, He sent the disciples away, and then He dismissed the crowd. This writer assumes, from all the accounts, that the people would have had time to get home, and the disciples should have arrived safely on the other side of the lake. Something had gone wrong, for they did not go “down to the sea” until “evening came”. Robertson offers the critical help, beginning with the Greek: “(hôs opsia egeneto). ‘The late hour’ (hōra understood), and so in late Greek the adjective is used as a substantive. **It is late evening (real evening), not the early evening in mid-afternoon** (Mat 14:15). The disciples were in no hurry to start back to Bethsaida in Galilee (Mark 6:45), Capernaum in John (John 6:17) [ATR, bold added by this writer].

Some believe Jesus sent the disciples into the storm so He could show them that He would come to them in the storms of life. More realistically, it seems that **they got caught up in a deadly storm because they disobeyed Jesus**. During World War II, there was a time when my father was in the army, my mother and brother James were living with her sister at Big Creek, near Calhoun City, Mississippi, and I was living with my Great Aunt Effie, walking to school at Pitsboro, where I was in the second grade. My father came home on furlough before shipping out for Germany and they picked me up one Saturday so I could visit with my family.

My father, my Uncle Labern Coker, and two or three other men decided to take us to a mill pond so we could play in the water. None of us had learned to swim at the time. The other men stayed on the deep side of the pond and my father and Uncle Labern took James, Juanita, and me around to the shallow side opposite them. There may have been another child or two, but I only remember James and Juanita. Uncle Labern showed us how far we could wade out into the water. He made it a point to tell us that there was an eighteen foot drop-off just ahead of us. We were sufficiently warned about the drop-off, and my father told me to watch James.

They rejoined the other men on the opposite side of the large pond, but I immediately began wondering what they meant by “an eighteen foot drop-off”. I told James to stay where he was, and I began sliding one foot out toward that invisible drop-off, and then the other. I remember thinking that I would soon touch an edge, like the edge of a chest or table. I would feel it with my foot and then return to James and Juanita.

It may have been that adventurous attitude, or it may have been determination to “see for myself”, but whatever it was that motivated me, I found myself in trouble before I knew what was happening. Instead of a sharp drop-off, I suddenly stepped on a slight slope and immediately slipped into the deep water. Daddy and Uncle Labern would tell the rest of the story from their perspective. My father was standing in waste deep water talking with the other men on the bank when one of them looked up, pointed, and yelled, “He’s drowning!” Uncle Labern dived over my father into the deep water, and I suppose others rushed around to the shallow side. They said that I had fought back to the surface “a dozen times”, but the last time, only the top of my head broke the surface. Then, I felt hands catch me around under my arms and push me to the surface.

My Father saved me and got me into the shallow water. Uncle Labern was saying, “Spit, spit.” He was trying to determine whether or not I had inhaled any water. I had not! I had not strangled on it because until the last time, when I had gotten my head out of the water I took a deep breath. They sent us kids home and I ran ahead of James and Juanita and found my mother, and her sister, Aunt Lorene, visiting with other ladies on the porch. I told them I had almost drowned. Their reaction? They all began laughing! Someone said, “It couldn’t have been too bad. You are still chewing gum!” Within a few minutes, the men arrived and told them what had happened, and it was obvious that they were shocked. It had been a close call. It might have been a fatal mistake.

Now, let me stress that I didn’t come close to drowning because my father had neglected me. I could not blame the other children for my near disaster. There was no way they could have stopped me. No one could have defended what I had done on the basis of an inquiring mind. I disobeyed my father and it almost cost me my life. **I disobeyed him with my eyes wide open.** His orders were as clear as a bell, yet I had to see for myself. **Jesus’ disciples got caught in a violent storm because they disobeyed Him.** They should have been safe on the other side. However, in spite of their disobedience, He came to the and He saved them. The question is, why had they disobeyed Him? We shall see.

6:17 - STARTED ACROSS THE SEA. *“(G)ot into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. Darkness had already set in, but Jesus had not yet come to them.”* Robertson calls this the “Picturesque imperfect” [ATR]. The HCSB captures the meaning, “darkness had already set in, but Jesus had not yet come to them.” Darkness had overtaken the disciples while they were in the boat, but Jesus had not come to them. Is it possible that they could have been on the other side of the lake before dark? Or did Jesus send them away knowing they would be caught in the storm. We shall see.

6:18 - A HIGH WIND. *“Then a high wind arose, and the sea began to churn.”* The Sea of Galilee is in a deep gorge, surrounded by hills. Winds can sweep down from the mountain above the east side of the Lake and churn the surface of the water into a raging sea in a matter of minutes.

“Even today the situation is similar. Power boats periodically are warned to remain docked as the winds whip the water into foamy white caps. Imagine then what it would be like to be in wooden boats propelled by sails and oars. It is a small but treacherous lake that Josephus indicated was about 4.6 miles by 16.1 miles.

Contemporary measurements, however, would put the maximum size at about 6.9 miles by 12.6 miles, though recent heavy water usage in modern Israel has reduced it slightly from those dimensions” [NAC].

6:19 - AFTER THEY HAD ROWED. *“After they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea. He was coming near the boat, and they were afraid.”* Here, I am going to part company with some scholars who are so much deeper than I that I don’t deserve to carry their briefcases. It is claimed by some that the disciples had made little progress because of the violent storm. That would assume that they had immediately obeyed Jesus, gone to the boat, gotten into it, and headed across the lake. It is my contention that if they had obeyed Him they would not have been caught in the middle the sea in a storm.

There are still many valid lessons to be learned from this experience. While it may well be true that these disciples were (1) in the dark spiritually, (2) tossed on a stormy sea in the middle of the night, and (3) scared out of their wits, we will save that for the homiletics class. The fact remains that if they had listened to Jesus they should have been safe on the other side instead of in the middle of a storm in the middle of a sea (which Luke calls the Lake of Galilee - he knew a sea when he saw one).

THEY SAW JESUS WALKING ON THE WATER. They saw Jesus walking **on the water, not toward the water**, has some liberal scholars (who want to demythologize the Scripture) have claimed. We do not need to change the prepositions to correct John’s account. **If they were three or four miles from the shore, they would not have seen Jesus walking toward the water in the middle of the night in a violent storm.** I have been looking for a place to use the word “preposterous” for some time and I think this is an appropriate place to drop it! We might add ludicrous, or absurd, for it is that, and more. It is a devilish attack on the Word of God to claim that Jesus was walking toward the sea. John was there and he knew what he was writing, but regardless of that, John was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that speaks volumes to those who believe in the Inspiration of Scripture.

The Greek (rendered “they saw Jesus walking on the water”) vividly preserves “the emotions of the disciples. Walking (peripatounta). Present active participle in the accusative case agreeing with Iêsoun. Drawing nigh unto the boat (eggus tou ploiou ginomenon). Present middle participle of ginomai describing the process. ‘Coming near the boat.’ They behold Jesus slipping closer and closer to them on the water” [ATR]. To say that what they saw was dramatic would be an understatement.

THEY WERE AFRAID. “They were afraid (ephobêthêsan). Ingressive aorist passive indicative of phobeomai, ‘they became afraid.’ Sudden change to the regular historical sequence” [ATR]. “At this point the boat was a little more than halfway across the lake. In spite of their close relationship to the Son of God, the disciples still reveal spiritual immaturity and insensitivity to the presence of God in their midst. Christ would remind them and us that in the storms of life, such as this one and those that lie ahead, we should ‘not be afraid’ (v. 20), but rather “believe’ (v. 30) in Him who feeds the multitudes, walks on the water, and calms the sea” [BSB].

It is amazing that they were afraid of perishing in the stormy sea, yet when they saw Jesus, the only One who could save them, their response was greater fear. We should remind ourselves that Peter and Andrew, James and John had made their living fishing on this very body of water. They knew the Sea of Galilee, and they knew how quickly a storm could come up with such force that it could sink a boat with all in it. It is understandable that Matthew, a tax collector, might be scared, but all of these disciples were afraid because of this storm. When he saw Jesus approaching them, yet not knowing Him at first, they were petrified.

Once when I was home from college or seminary, our neighbor, Louis Carlisle, told me that he had decided to do some commercial fishing with his brother Tom after they had all their cotton picked and soybeans cut. They made their own 16 foot boat, so they believed it to be safer than a typical john boat. One night they were running their lines on the Mississippi River when they got caught in one of those whirlpools for which that awesome river is known. Louis said that he had sat in the front of the boat and held on for all he was worth while Tom operated the outboard motor. He had been particularly impressed with what Tom had done. The whirlpool was so deep that Louis could look to his right or left and see nothing above the surface, nothing but a wall of water. He said that Tom did not try to fight it, he simply ran the boat around inside the whirlpool, following the direction of the vortex. Gradually, he maneuvered the boat to the top of the vortex, and then he cut away from it.

These men were commercial fishermen, yet this was a terrifying experience. My father and I once talked about someone's fear. I had a lot of opportunities to watch my father and often wondered if he knew what fear was. The only thing I was sure of was that I knew what fear was, and that included fear for one who didn't seem to fear for himself. On more than one occasion, I had seen my father rescue a family on our farm from a drunk husband and father who was threatening to shoot them with a shotgun. The nearest law enforcement office for the county was 25 miles away and there were no telephones in our community. The land owner took care of problems. If called, a deputy would come out, but there would be a significant delay, perhaps a fatal delay before he arrived on the scene. My father would walk out into a field and talk a drunken man into giving him the gun, and then stay with the family until the danger had passed. At times, he brought family members to our home where my mother bedded them down on "Baptist pallets".

That day, as we were talking, which means that I was probably talking and he was listening, he suddenly surprised me when he said, "Son, I don't laugh at someone who is afraid. I was afraid one time." I was so amazed that I neglected to ask him when. I remembered having the living daylight scared out of me more than once. I did not ask when he had been afraid, and later I wished I had. I did begin trying to recall anything that might explain what he meant. Then I remembered that during WW II, he had crossed the Atlantic going to Europe and then returning months later. Going one way, there was a fire on board and the captain gave orders to prepare to abandon ship. He had no life preserver with him, but when he saw that a few bigger soldiers pushing aside smaller men, he told me that he stood with his hand on a handrail and held some back so weaker men could get up the steps. He was about thirty, while some of them were 19 or 20 years old.

On the other voyage, their ship was caught in the tail end of a hurricane and he was pulling guard duty. He looked out and saw the ship tossing into one huge trough after another, and then rolling

from side to side. He had worked in a shipyard in Mobile before being drafted and he told me he remembered their telling them that if the ship did turn over in the ocean it would right itself. He said, "I had stopped wondering if it was turn over. I knew it was going to turn over. I was just wondering if it would right itself." Finally, he told me, he left his guard post and joined the captain and top army officers in the captain's quarters. He said that not one officer spoke a word to him and as he watched them he could tell that they were afraid. That, I concluded, must have been when he became afraid.

6:20 - IT IS I. *"But He said to them, 'It is I. Don't be afraid!'"* Jesus's did not call a bunch of wimps to follow Him. These disciples were strong, and they were normally courageous, but they had become afraid because of this storm, and when they saw Jesus walking on the water, as though He was going to walk right by them, they were even more afraid. Interestingly, John does not tell that the disciples thought Jesus was a ghost, as did the Synoptics, Matthew (14:26) and Mark (6:49).

In the Bible, when a sinful person receives a visit from the Lord, or from an angel of the Lord, the first thing the Lord (or His representative) said was, "Fear not." When God called out to Adam and Eve after the Fall, they tried to hide from him. Noah and Abraham feared the Lord. Jacob knew the fear of the Lord: "When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.' He was afraid and said, 'What an awesome place this is! This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven'" (Gen. 28:16-17).

Moses, Joshua, and David knew the fear of the Lord, but were encouraged not to be afraid. Isaiah was blessed with an unforgettable visit from the Lord in the year King Uzziah died, he cried, "Woe is me, for I am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, [and] because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts" (Is 6:5). Mary knew this fear of the Lord when He sent his angel with word that she would be the mother of the Messiah: "Then the angel told her: Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (Luke 1:30). John would know fear as he was receiving the Revelation, but it was not the fear of the unknown. It was a sense of reverential awe in the presence of the risen Lord. The fear that night in the storm was not a sense of holy awe, but panic. The fear those disciples experienced when they saw Him quickly changed into a reverential fear.

6:21 - THEY WERE WILLING. *"Then they were willing to take Him on board, and at once the boat was at the shore where they were heading."* Technically, "They began to be willing" to take Him on board" (this is the inchoative imperfect" [ATR]. At as they realized that it was Jesus walking on water, they began to be willing to take Him on board. Remember that the storm was still raging at this point. This may suggest that one after another of the disciples were willing to taken Him on board as they recognized Him. We can imagine that as they recognized Jesus, they were more than "willing to take Him on board."

AT ONCE THE BOAT WAS AT THE SHORE. This is especially interesting. Does this simply mean that they made normal progress, without further interference? Does it mean that the storm had been driving them that quickly toward the shore? Clarke has another suggestion: "How far they were from the place at which they landed, when our Lord came to them, we know not. But the evangelist seems to speak of their sudden arrival there as extraordinary and miraculous" [CLARKE].

SPECIAL NOTE: John does not mention the calming of the sea, or account of Peter walking on the water or the calming of the sea. We find that in Matthew:

“Immediately Jesus spoke to them. “Have courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’ ‘Lord, if it’s You,” Peter answered Him, ‘command me to come to You on the water.’ ‘Come!’ He said.

“And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid. And beginning to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’

“Immediately Jesus reached out His hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those in the boat worshiped Him and said, ‘Truly You are the Son of God!’” (Matt. 14:27-33)/

The New American Commentary offers the following commentary on the fourth and fifth signs:

“The important element in the theophany is the identification of the appearing figure (e.g., Exod 3:6, 14; Judg 6:21–22; Isa 6:5; Rev 1:18). In the present story the words are ego eimi (“I am”). Many have debated whether the ego eimi here is merely a self-identification statement, “It is I” (cf. NIV 6:20). The reason for the present review of the theophany pattern is to suggest that the identification cannot be other than a divine identification statement. Moreover, given the use of “I am” (ego eimi) throughout this Gospel, it seems to me that the connection with the identification of God’s name at Exod 3:14 argues strongly for “I am.”

“As indicated in the introduction to chap. 6, these two stories involving an eating event and the control of water provide an excellent reflection of a Passover perspective. But these two stories when set together also provide an interesting introduction to the first of the “I am” theological statements of Jesus. The feeding event supplies the theological vehicle, “bread,” and the greeting or address of Jesus in the water story supplies the familiar “I am” formula. When the two are combined, the theological assertion becomes “I am the bread of life” (6:35) [NAC].

The Bread of Life

6:22 - THE CROWD. *“The next day, the crowd that had stayed on the other side of the sea knew there had been only one boat. [They also knew] that Jesus had not boarded the boat with His disciples, but that His disciples had gone off alone.”* Is there a contradiction here? Did Jesus not dismiss the crowd? He did, but that does not mean all of them left! “Although the geography is a little vague... Some people apparently remained overnight on the eastern side (‘the other side,’ 6:22) of the lake below the Golan Heights” [NAC]. They may have had time to have made it back to their

homes on the western side of the lake if they had left when He dismissed them, but they had apparently waited to see what He might do next.

JESUS HAD NOT BOARDED THE BOAT. Since the people had tried to take Jesus and make Him their king, it seems logical to assume that a significant number of the people may have lingered near the grassy plain at the foot of the mountain where Jesus had miraculously fed them with a child's lunch. They would have known that Jesus had sent His disciples away, and that He had withdrawn to the mountain. In which case, a significant crowd may well have expected to see Jesus, when He returned from the mountain. Perhaps they had not given up on their hope that He would declare Himself their king. They knew He had ordered His disciples to get into the boat and return to Capernaum (6:16), but they obviously did not understand why.

6:23 - BOATS FROM TIBERIAS. *“Some boats from Tiberias came near the place where they ate the bread after the Lord gave thanks.”* It seems that those who had returned to Capernaum after Jesus had dismissed them had told others how Jesus had fed the great multitude with only two fish and five small loaves of bread. This may well have generated a frenzy of activity as a significant number of people got into boats and headed back across the lake “from Tiberias” on the western side, back to the site of the miracle. When Jesus was not to be found on the eastern side where the feeding took place (6:23), the people crossed back over to Capernaum on the northwestern side of the lake. They would have known that Jesus made the home of Andrew and Peter his headquarters when he was in Capernaum. The circumstance provided sufficient motivation for their frenzied search for Jesus. They hated Rome; they hated being subject to any foreign power; they hated paying tribute to Rome; and they hated having Gentiles living in the land and controlling their lives.

All we have to do to picture their frantic search for Jesus, from one side of the lake to the other is to picture scenes telecast from time to time from the Middle East when incredibly large crowds fill the streets of a city, either shouting in anger or crying out in religious fervor, and at times it is hard to tell the difference. In these modern scenes, it might be added, the Israelis seem much more in control than their Muslims counterparts. Those ancient Israelites had been under the domination of Rome for as long as they could remember, and Rome gave no indication they were leaving. These people fervently prayed for the Messiah, the Son of David, a political/military Messiah, who would come and deliver them from Rome and reestablish the kingdom of David.

These people were ready for an insurrection that would have brought the wrath of Rome down on them. There would have been a bloodbath, had not Jesus acted wisely.

6:24 - SAW NEITHER JESUS. *“When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor His disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.”* This crowd, consisting of both those Jews who had probably remained on the eastern side of the lake overnight, and those who had returned by boat the next day, searched for Jesus without finding either Him or His disciples. “They had a double motive apart from the curiosity explained in verse John 6:22. They had clearly not given up the impulse of the evening before to make Jesus king (John 6:15) and they had hopes of still another bountiful repast at the hands of Jesus as he said (John 6:26)” [ATR]. Since they did not find Jesus on the east side of the lake, they assumed He had returned to Capernaum, the headquarters for

His Galilean ministry.

6:25 - THEY FOUND HIM. *“When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “ Rabbi, when did You get here?”* They probably went directly to the home of Andrew and his brother Simon Peter (and Peter’s wife, and possibly her mother, whom Jesus had healed).

RABBI, WHEN DID YOU GET HERE? They had sought Him on the other side of the lake before returning to Capernaum, and now that they have found Him they asked when He had crossed back over the lake. **“The searchers were delighted to have found him,** but Christ did not bother to explain his miraculous crossing of the lake to them because he knew they were already unduly enamored with the novelty of his miracles” [NCWB].

6:26 - I ASSURE YOU. *“Jesus answered, “ I assure you: You are looking for Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled.”* Jesus always had an answer. If an ordinary man “has all the answers”, shun him! But Jesus knew what the people around Him were thinking. In addressing this crowd, He uses the familiar expression, “I assure you” (verily, verily in the KJV) we find some 26 times in the Gospel of John. He “spoke these words four times in this discourse (6:26, 32, 47, 53). This drew attention to the importance of what He was about to teach. He rebuked them for their materialistic motivation and their lack of spiritual perception. They **saw miraculous signs,** but to them it was only an easy meal” [BKC]. They failed, however, to see what it signified, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say they saw the miracle but missed the sign.

THE SIGN. When Jesus had given these people physical food to eat the day before, He was giving them a spiritual sign, but they had missed the message completely. “Jesus confronted the sensation-seekers with a blunt appraisal of their superficiality. Their motive for seeking him was entirely carnal—they wanted more food” [NCWB]. They had pursued Jesus with all the enthusiasm of a beagle chasing a rabbit, and when they found Him they asked, “Rabbi, when did You get here?” As He did on other occasions (see 1:48; 2:19; 3:3; 4:10), Jesus ignored their question and went straight to the more important issue. “They had asked him about chronology, and he confronted them with the basic reason for their chasing after him. The familiar double amen (‘truly,’ which the NIV again renders ‘I tell you the truth’) formula once more announces the presence of a crucial idea from Jesus” [NAC].

As their forefathers had eaten the manna that sustained them in the wilderness and then rebelled against the Lord, these people had eaten the bread and fish, but the totally missed the significance of the sign. As we have seen already, They were chasing after Jesus, from one side of the Sea of Galilee to the other, and back again, because they thought they had found a source of physical food (their daily bread), not because they saw the sign. “The KJV erroneously reads “miracles” here (6:26). The people certainly saw the miracle (in fact, their stomachs digested it) but they failed to recognize the sign in the miracle. The meaning of ‘sign’ in this Gospel is that it points beyond the physical, concrete reality to the reality of revelation. It provides insight into who Jesus is” [NAC].

What a sad commentary on the attitude of that crowd that Jesus was the only One there who

understood the significance of the sign. Let us not, however, think we are more intelligent than those people. We have the New Testament, which they did not have, and we have the Holy Spirit to guide our understanding and application of the Scripture, yet the masses today miss the eternal truth of the Word of God. Tragically, many who claim membership in a local church seem as blind as the world. In fact, according to some reports, almost 80% of the people in America identify themselves as Christians, yet they do not worship, do not tithe, do not study the Bible, do not pray, and some of those people criticize, and even persecute those who do. Professing Christians are included among the number who advocate same-sex marriage, watch “R” rated movies, use profanity and obscene language, watch pornography on the Internet, and vote for candidates who support abortion. Those people are sinning against a far greater light than those people who were chasing after Jesus hoping He might give them more bread.

6:27 - DON'T WORK. *“Don’t work for the food that perishes but for the food that lasts for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal of approval on Him.”* The day before, these same people were hungry. Now they are both hungry and exhausted. But, Jesus said, “Don’t work for the food that perishes.” “He was not condoning laziness. Rather He was saying that people should expend their efforts for what will last forever. ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’ (Matt. 4:4)” [BKC]. Physical food benefits one for a brief period, but Jesus offers them something that lasts forever.

GOD THE FATHER. Jesus stressed the truth they had missed: “because God the Father has set His seal of approval on Him.” Robertson points out that this is literally, “For this one the Father sealed, God.” This is the first aorist active indicative of *sphragizō*, to seal. “Sealing by God is rare in N.T. (2Co 1:22; Eph 1:13; Eph 4:30). It is not clear to what item, if any single one, John refers when the Father set his seal of approval on the Son. It was done at his baptism when the Holy Spirit came upon him and the Father spoke to him. Cf. John 5:37” [ATR]. From this sign, the people should have learned that God the father was authenticating His Son as the Bread of heaven. When they ate physical food they would hunger again, but when they received the Son of Man they would receive “the food that lasts for eternal life.”

6:28 - THE WORKS OF GOD. *“What can we do to perform the works of God?” they asked.* They were asking the right question, but they were short-sighted. This is the “present active deliberative subjunctive of *poieō*, ‘What are we to do as a habit?’” [ATR]. They were not simply asking what they should do on this one occasion, but what they should begin doing and continue doing in the future.

6:29 - THE WORK OF GOD. *“Jesus replied, ‘This is the work of God: that you believe in the One He has sent.’”* This was another of those times when Jesus did not answer as they expected. In fact, His response to their question was “a flat contradiction of their thinking. They could not please God by doing good works. There is only one **work of God, that is,** one thing God requires” [BKC, bold in the original].

THAT YOU BELIEVE. They need to “believe in the One” God has sent. “Because of their sin people cannot please God by doing good works for salvation (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

God demands that people recognize their inability to save themselves and receive His gift (Rom. 6:23) [BKC]. They could not save themselves by doing good works, they must believe in Jesus for salvation. Good works are not the root of salvation, but the fruit of it (Eph. 2:8-10).

6:30 - WHAT SIGN THEN. *“What sign then are You going to do so we may see and believe You?” they asked. “What are You going to perform?”* It is interesting that they would ask Jesus to perform another sign when they had totally missed the message of the sign He had given them the day before. Their question shows that they had missed the significance of the feeding of the multitude. They had seen the miracle, the sign they had not seen.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO PERFORM. When I was in my mid-thirties, I was pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Nederland, Texas, when I had the privilege of attending a Pastors conference where the late Vance Havner was scheduled to speak. When I was in seminary I often heard people quote Vance Havner, I would attend evangelism conferences where speakers would quote R. G. Lee, W. A. Criswell, and Vance Havner. Everywhere I went I hear people quote the great evangelist and conference speaker who was known both for his wit and his wisdom. I was not about to miss the opportunity to meet Vance Havner and hear him in person.

As he grew older, Dr. Havner became more and more disturbed by some things he was witnessing in churches. He expressed his concern about churches that were resorting to entertainment to reach people instead of preaching the Gospel. He told humorous stories about churches that would bring in a pony and have him count to three by pawing the floor, or a dog that would perform tricks. He made popular saying like, “We sing ‘Standing on the Promises’, but we are just sitting on the premises.” Here is another one that is vintage Vance Havner: “We sing, ‘I Stand Amazed’, but we had rather sit amused.” If those ancient Jews would demand signs and miracles when they were standing in the presence of Jesus, I suppose we should not be surprised that many people today would rather see a performance than hear a sermon about repentance.

6:31 - OUR FATHERS ATE MANNA. *“Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, just as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”* The modern reader may not connect the feeding of the multitude with the manna with which the Lord blessed His people in the wilderness, but those Jews who had chased down Jesus did indeed make that connection (see Ex. 16; Num. 11:7). They had seen a great miracle, but they apparently thought this was nothing greater than what their forefathers had seen in the wilderness, when, through the agency of Moses, God gave them manna from heaven for forty years. They even quoted the Scripture to Jesus! They said, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat” (Ps. 78:24; 105:40).

They remembered that God had given their forefathers manna from heaven, but they had apparently not been taught that the manna God sent their forefathers only sustained the people, it never satisfied them. Perhaps they thought Jesus’ feeding was “less significant because manna fed the whole nation for 40 years. But they missed two things. First, many of the Israelites who were fed 40 years did not believe. The important thing is not the magnitude of the sign but the perception of its significance (cf. Luke 16:29-31). Second, both Moses and Jesus were

authenticated by God's signs; therefore both should be listened to and believed" [BKC]. Perhaps they were thinking that God gave their forefathers manna for forty years, whereas Jesus had only fed them one time.

6:32 - MOSES DID NOT GIVE YOU. *"Jesus said to them, 'I assure you: Moses didn't give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the real bread from heaven.'" Jesus' purpose was not to denigrate or belittle Moses, but (1) to emphasize the fact that Moses was not the source of the manna in the wilderness; and (2) to emphasize that Moses was not the one who had provided "the bread from heaven."* "It does not appear that Jesus intended to call in question the fact that their fathers were fed by the instrumentality of Moses, but to state that he did not give them the true bread that was adapted to the wants of the soul. **He fed the body**, although his food did not keep the body alive (John 6:59), **but he did not give that which would preserve the soul from death**" [BARNES, bold added by this writer].

6:33 - THE BREAD OF GOD. *"For the bread of God is the One who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* The translators of the HCSB have done a good job here. "In the Greek, the verbs are in the present tense, emphasizing that Christ, as the true manna, is continually given as the ever-present bread. Just as the manna came down every day to supply the sojourning Israelites, the Lord, as the real manna, comes down from heaven and keeps on giving life to the world" [NCWB]. I can remember hearing people pray in a worship service, "Lord, give us manna from heaven." Some times, something in my mind would say, "Lord, please don't do it!" Manna was food for the wilderness! I don't want to spend forty years of my life eating the food of the wilderness when I can feast on milk and honey in the Land of Promise.

The people who ate manna every day for forty years griped, complained, threatened Moses, and rebelled against the One who provided the manna. God has something better in mind for His children, just as He had something better in mind for those two million people in the wilderness with whom He entered a covenant relationship. They would have been in Canaan within two years had they not rebelled against the Lord. Instead, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years until all those 20 years old and older had died.

The Lord has something better in mind for us than manna, but if we persist in wondering in the wilderness of doubt, fear, gossip, back-biting, and abuse of leaders, we had better thank God for the manna! Those who had rebelled were not sent back to Egypt, they were sustained by manna in the wilderness, but were only sustained! They did not know the joy of His fellowship, which He offered freely when God told Moses to build a tabernacle for Him among His Chosen People so He could live among them (the tabernacle was a symbol of His presence with them). They made a choice and the consequences of their choice was that they only knew the sustenance of the Lord, never the abundance of the Lord.

Daniel knew the "abundant compassion" of the Lord (Dan. 9:18). Paul found God to be "abundant in mercy" (Eph. 2:4). Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor 9:7-8, KJV). Remember the 12 baskets full of food the disciples gathered after the people were

filled? There is always more than enough (an abundance) in Christ.

6:34 - GIVE US THIS BREAD. *“Then they said, ‘Sir, give us this bread always!’”* These people were no doubt feeling the hunger pang again. Jesus had fed them bread and fish the day before, but now they have walked (or rowed) many miles and they had to be hungry again. The question is, are they now asking for another meal, for a perpetual supply of bread, or spiritual sustenance “always”? The woman at the well in Samaria wanted a constant flow of water so she would not have to continually go to the well and draw the water (John 4:15). These people request a perpetual supply of the bread of which Jesus is speaking. But, did these people want spiritual bread, or are they still seeking literal bread for the body?

The sad thing about this story is that they heard the words directly from the mouth of Jesus and totally missed His message because of the sin that was in their hearts and because their hearts controlled their minds. We can understand how those ancient people could misunderstand Jesus, but what about people today who have easy access to the New Testament in their own language, and trained pastors to teach them, but still show no more understanding of the Bread of Life than those people who besieged Jesus with their appeal, “Sir, give us this bread always!”? There are people who will go to church when there is a “fellowship meal”, a pizza party, or a children’s program, but never “darken the doors of the church” to hear someone preach about the Bread of Heaven.

6:35 - I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE. *“I am the bread of life, Jesus told them. ‘No one who comes to Me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in Me will ever be thirsty again.’”* What was Jesus’ response to their request for more bread? I have been looking forward to this from the time I began this series from the Gospel According to John many months ago! Jesus said, **“I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE.”** This is **the first of the I AM sayings of Jesus in John.** They wanted physical bread, He offered them Himself. “This corrected two more errors in their thinking: (1) The food of which He spoke refers to a Person, not a commodity. (2) And once someone is in right relationship to Jesus, he finds a satisfaction which is everlasting, not temporal” [BKC]. We will see six I AM saying in John:

1. “I AM the Bread of Life” (6:35, 41, 48, 51).
2. “I AM the Light of the World” (8:12).
3. “I AM the Door of the sheep” (10:7, 9).
3. “I AM the Good Shepherd” (10:11, 14).
4. “I AM the Resurrection and the Life” (11:25).
5. “I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (14:6).
6. “I AM the true Vine” (15:1, 5).

NO ONE...WILL EVER. Jesus, in the same breath with which He said, “I am the bread of life”, explained the significance of that statement: **“No one** who comes to Me **will ever be hungry, and no one** who believes in Me **will ever be thirsty again.”** There! We have it straight from our Savior’s mouth. He couldn’t have been any clearer if He had said, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand.” But He did say that, didn’t He (see John 10:28). “No one” denotes all who believe in Jesus Christ.

The NKJV renders it: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and

he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” It is very difficult for the Western mind of the Twenty-first Century to appreciate the significance of this statement spoken to First Century Jews in Galilee. “Bread of Life” means bread which provides life. Jesus is man’s necessary “food.” In Western culture, bread is often optional, but it was essential then. “Jesus promised, **He who comes to Me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty.** The ‘nevers’ are emphatic in Greek” [BKC, bold in the original]. Jesus did not say, that those who believe in Him will never hunger “as long as...”. Nor, did He say, they will never thirst “until...” It is a serious challenge for mortal man to wrap his mind around that, but we have it straight from the mouth of Jesus. In Jesus we will never hunger or thirst for eternal life because we will have it in abundance.

It is interesting that the subject has been “bread” up until this statement, but now Jesus expands it to include both eating and drinking. Once again, we can see that these people should have connected this to the accounts in Exodus that involve both eating and drinking. Remember, they are the ones who brought up Moses and the Exodus: “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness” 6:31). The New American Commentary notes adds:

“This combination was familiar to the Jewish people because the exodus stories contained miracles of both food and drink (e.g., Exod 16:15 and 15:24–25; 17:6). This combination of eating and drinking was not merely an expression of general life-sustaining activity (e.g., Luke 5:30; 12:19); it also was related to religious worship as in the golden calf episode (Exod 32:6). In 1 Cor 10:1–9 Paul united in one brief passage the manna, the water from the rock, and the golden calf with eating and drinking, and in so doing he illustrated how deeply ingrained these images were in the thought patterns of Israel” [NAC].

This will not be the last time we find an emphasis on eating and drinking in the Scripture, for it has eschatological implications (see Rev. 21:6; 22:2). “So it is no surprise that the images were adopted by Jesus as a symbolic representation of one’s relationship to him...and as an ordinance of the Christian’s hope of experiencing the coming of the Lord (1 Cor 11:26)” [NAC]. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life”, and though He did not say it, there is the clear implication that He is also the water of life. He promised the woman at the well that if she asked Him for the water He had to give, she would never thirst again (Ch. 2).

When I was a student at Mississippi College, I worked summers for the Quitman County, Mississippi Agricultural and Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), a department of the Department of Agriculture. Later, I did some part time work for the in statistical research for the Crop Reporting Service (USDA). One day, we were in a training class and the teacher explained that we would no longer be using the word “surplus” because of what the word might suggest to the average American. Instead, we were to use the term “abundant supply”! That, the USDA reasoned, would sound better to the farmers, whose farm operations they were controlling by limiting the number of acres they could plant. Jesus has promised an “abundant supply” to all who believe in Him. We will never hunger and we will never thirst.

6:36 - YOU HAVE SEEN ME. *“But as I told you, you’ve seen Me, and yet you do not believe.”* They had eaten the bread but did not understand that He is the bread of life. They had seen Him when He fed the huge crowd, but they did not believe in Him. They loved the performance, and wanted more. They were filled with the bread, but now they want more.

6:37 - EVERYONE THE FATHER GIVES ME. *“Everyone the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out.”* The NASB renders it, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.” Here we have the “Collective use of the neuter singular, classic idiom, seen also in John 6:39; John 17:2, 24; 1Jn 5:4” [ATR]. Interestingly, “In the Greek, the pronoun for “that” is in the neuter case and singular. It encompasses the one corporate entity of all believers. This unified entity was given as a gift from the Father to the Son (see comments on 6:39 and on 17:2, 24)” [NCWB].

There is another point here that we should not miss, and that is that the coming of believers to Jesus “is here described as a gift of the Father. For all the Christological emphases in this Gospel, it remains uncompromisingly theocentric. Those who argue for an exceedingly high (and therefore late) Christology in John often fail to note sufficiently this theocentricity” [NAC].

AND THE ONE WHO COMES TO ME. “Here the Lord shifts from the impersonal neuter pronoun to the personal masculine pronoun. Each believer within that corporate whole receives Jesus’ personal attention. He (or, she) can be assured that he will never be cast out” [NCWB]. Jesus here answers all those whose excuse is that they have been too bad for God to save them. When I was growing up, I participated in the Junior Memory Drills and Bible Drills in my local church, in the local county, the district, and in the State Convention of the Mississippi Baptist Training Union. One of my all time favorite memory verses was John 6:37b: “And him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out” (KJV).

Does this statement mean that anyone, no matter how vile or evil, may go to Jesus without fear that he will be turned away? Absolutely. My good friend Wayne Whiteside goes on a regular basis to visit prisoners on death row in Texas prisons. These men are awaiting execution for incredibly violent crimes (even multiple murders). He has had the privilege and joy of seeing a number of these men turn to Jesus in faith and be saved. I personally saw two murderers turn to Jesus in the Hinds County Jail in Jackson, Mississippi a number of years ago. I also had the privilege of talking with both of those men later in Camp 4 of the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, and they were both excited about what the Lord had done for them when they believed in Jesus Christ. I saw others who had committed vile sins turn to Him. He never turns anyone away. It is not a matter of how evil the person is, but how great His grace is!

Is it possible that this promise also means that all who believe in Jesus and receive new life in Him will never be turned away later, even if they miss too many worship services, use His name in vain, or committed some particular sin one time too many? The context here is clear, and if not, John 10:28 affirms what Jesus says here. That, however, does not cheapen grace, it magnifies it! We must remember that before one is saved he is in danger of standing before Jesus Christ as Judge (John

5:26ff). After one is saved, he stands before God, our heavenly Father whose discipline is a serious matter.

6:38 - I HAVE COME. *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”* This Galilean crowd did not understand who He was, or why He had come, but Jesus never lost sight of either for one moment. He came, He came from heaven, and He came for a purpose. But, what is the will of the One who sent Jesus? Clarke wrote that Jesus means that “I am come, not to act according to human motives, passions, or prejudices; but according to infinite wisdom, goodness, and mercy. Jewish passions and prejudices would reject publicans and sinners as those alluded to, and shut the gate of heaven against the Gentiles; but God's mercy receives them, and I am come to manifest that mercy to men” [CLARKE].

6:39 - THE WILL OF HIM. *“This is the will of Him who sent Me: that I should lose none of those He has given Me but should raise them up on the last day.”* In verse 38, Jesus said, “not to do My will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” In this verse, Jesus tells us what the will of the Father is.

THAT I SHOULD LOSE NONE. “None of those” denotes the ones the Father gives to the Son. It is the will of God the Father that the Son should not lose any person the Father had given to the Son. Rather, it is the will of the Father that He “should raise them up on the last day.” Again, here “The neuter is used to keep the consistency with the previous remarks concerning the one corporate entity. Christ is saying that he will raise up the entire whole, each and every one included” [NCWB]. Barnes has written that it is , “Literally, ‘I should not destroy.’ He affirms here that he will keep it to life eternal; that, though the Christian will die, and his body return to corruption, yet he will not be destroyed” [BARNES].

6:40 - THIS IS THE WILL OF MY FATHER. *“For this is the will of My Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”* There are people who are always speculating about the will of the Father. Jesus had perfect knowledge of His will. The Father is sovereign in all things and His is here announced by His Son: and His Son is His will!

THAT EVERYONE WHO SEES THE SON. “Jesus now shifts from the corporate to the individual—from the corporate resurrection to the individual’s resurrection” [NCWB]. It is the will of the Father that everyone who “sees the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life.” Is it any wonder this is called the Evangelistic Gospel, or that John is called the Evangelist? This is consistent with the stated purpose of this Gospel account: “But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name” (20:31).

It is interesting, as the NAC points out, that “In the preceding verses Jesus referred to himself in the first person whereas in the middle of v. 40 the third person ‘the Son’ is used, followed by a return shift in the final clause, ‘I will raise him up at the last day’ [NAC]. However, no special significance will be give to that fact at this point.

I WILL RAISE HIM. “An individual can know if he will be raised on the last day if he knows that he has eternal life here and now. The possession of eternal life now is a guarantee of participation in the future resurrection” [NCWB]. There is both assurance and security in one’s salvation. Only those who are given to Jesus by the Father, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, will receive eternal life. We come to Him by grace, through faith (Eph. 2:8; Gal., 2:16). All who receive eternal life will be “raised on the last day”. This writer has some strong conviction about end-time issues, but regardless of one’s eschatology position, all true believers may join together in singing “Blessed Assurance”.

6:41 - THEREFORE. “*Therefore the Jews started complaining about Him, because He said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.”*” The word “therefore” is used often in Scripture to hold before us an incident that has been related, or an argument that has just been made, and then introduce a conclusion or a consequence. Jesus had fed the five thousand men, plus women and children, the day before (on the east side of the Sea of Galilee); they had chased Him down on the west side of the lake the next day, demanding more bread (or another supernatural display). They had seen the miracle, but totally missed the “sign”. Jesus had referenced the manna the Lord had given them in the wilderness, only to stress that God would give them bread from heaven if they believed in Him. They asked for this bread and Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” (vs. 35). “Therefore” transitions us from the statement, “I am the bread of life”, to the reaction of “the Jews” to His claim.

THE JEWS STARTED COMPLAINING. This Jewish writer is not anti-Semitic! He is simply relating to the churches planted throughout the Gentile world that the Jews to whom Jesus spoke began complaining. Remember that Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had already begun plotting against Him because He had told a man He had healed to pick up his bedroll and carry it on the Sabbath, and then He had claimed to be the Son of God, the Messiah. The Jews to whom Jesus is now speaking are Galileans; they were not from Jerusalem, or even from Judah, but they were strongly influenced by those religious leaders.

BECAUSE HE SAID. These simple Galilean Jews were all for what Jesus had done, and begged for more bread, but they didn’t like what He was saying at all. He had said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven”, a statement that obviously shocked them, and in a brief period of time, enrage Jewish leaders.

6:42 - JESUS THE SON OF JOSEPH. “*They were saying, ‘Isn’t this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can He now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?’*” These people, or some of them, knew Jesus and they knew His family. They had followed Him from Capernaum to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, where He had miraculously fed them, and then the next day they had chased Him down on the northwestern side of the lake, where they began begging for more bread. However, when Jesus offered them Himself instead of more bread, the crowd turned ugly. They became a hostile crowd of unbelievers, grumbling “because of Jesus’ proclamation of His heavenly origin. Like their ancestors in the wilderness, these Jews murmured (Ex. 15:24; 16:2, 7, 12; 17:3; Num. 11:1; 14:2, 27)” [BKC]. It is hard to believe it is the same crowd that had been begging Jesus for more bread.

SON OF JOSEPH. How could He possibly claim to be the bread from heaven if they knew Joseph, his father, who lived in Nazareth. Some of those people would also have known Mary and the brothers and sisters of Jesus. “Their thinking was seemingly logical: one **whose** parents are known could not be **from heaven** (cf. Mark 6:3; Luke 4:22). They were ignorant of His true origin and full nature. They said He was **the son of Joseph**, but they did not know of the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation. He had come **down** from heaven because He is the *Logos* (John 1:1, 14)” [BKC].

6:43 - JESUS ANSWERED THEM. *“Jesus answered them, “Stop complaining among yourselves...”* Initially, those standing closest to Jesus probably began complaining, and as word spread through the crowd, more and more of them began grumbling. Jesus tells them to stop complaining among themselves.

6:44 - NO ONE CAN COME TO ME. *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.”* This is a profound statement and every person needs to understand it. **No one discovers God!** One may “find religion” but **no one finds God**. We find the same thought expressed throughout this chapter: “Everyone the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out” (6:37-38). Later, He will say, “...This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless it is granted to him by the Father” (6:65).

THE FATHER WHO SENT ME DRAWS HIM. This does not mean that the Father drags one to Jesus against his or her will, but that He leads lost people to Jesus (through divine revelation) and empowers them to believe in Him. “The same point is repeated in verse John 6:65. The approach of the soul to God is initiated by God, the other side of verse John 6:37” [ATR]. This will be explained further along when we come to the Farewell Discourse in which Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to **convicts** lost people that they are dead in sin, **convinces** them that they may have forgiveness and cleansing (whereby the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed unto believers), and **enlightens** the heart so that the individual can see the eternal consequences resulting from his or her response.

In the very first sermon ever preached after the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). God the Father saves us when God the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and its consequences, and persuades us to believe in Jesus, the Son of God, so that we might have eternal life: “When He comes, He will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8). When one is dead in sin, he cannot find God and he cannot discern God. He is hopeless and helpless apart from the power of God that draws him to Jesus Christ, His only way of salvation. God might have provided an alternative way to life and heaven, but He chose the one and only way and that is Jesus Christ.

Not many years ago in America, people used the name Jesus Christ in public places. Then it became either Jesus or Christ, for fear that using the title Christ with the name Jesus would be a commentary on Jesus. Now, people who profess to be Christians in private only speak of “faith” in public: as in, he or she is a person of faith. I have an idea for a new bumper sticker: **His Name is JESUS, not “faith”!**

I WILL RAISE HIM. The only One who can get us into heaven is the One who came down from heaven (vs. 43). For the informed believer, it may be sufficient to say that, “In the present story (like God in the OT, who sought to silence the grumbling of Israel with the promise of food, Exod 16:1–12) Jesus sought to silence the grumbling of the Jews by reminding his opponents that his relationship with the Father had dire eschatological consequences for them (John 6:44)” [NAC]. However, to those who do not even know what the word “eschatological” means, we need to understand what Jesus is saying here. Eschatology, by the way, means the study of last things. What Jesus stresses here is that lost people are drawn to Jesus by the Father, and those who trust Him will be resurrected (6:39-40). They will spend eternity in heaven with Him, and all who believe in Him.

6:45 - THE PROPHETS. *“It is written in the Prophets: And they will all be taught by God. Everyone who has listened to and learned from the Father comes to Me...”* The word “Prophets” is used in the collective sense here (all prophecy points to Jesus). See Isaiah 54:13; Jeremiah 31:33, 34 for examples of prophecies that point to Jesus. Those Jews who were confronting Jesus went to the synagogue every Sabbath day where they heard both the Law and the Prophets read. They could not have been completely ignorant of what the Prophets said about the Messiah.

It is not surprising that Jesus would spend so much time on this subject as He addressed this crowd, but it is significant that so much space is given to His response in the Scripture. John would be inspired to write, “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if they were written one by one, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). That makes the repetition even more significant. This is a critical point: the Prophets, which the religious Jews professed to know better than any other people in the world, pointed them to Christ.

TAUGHT BY GOD. The teaching of which Jesus is speaking “is not by external instruction but by inward revelation, corresponding to the ‘drawing’ in the previous verse” [NCWB]. This is taught in Isaiah 54:13. This explains how a person with a very high IQ can spend a life time reading technical books, looking through a microscope, observing the universe through a powerful telescope, and lecturing on the origin of the universe, and still be totally blind where God is concerned.

My mother dropped out of school after the seventh grade. That happened a lot during the Depression. She had lived through both Prohibition and the Depression, and knew the shame of the former and the deprivation the latter. During Prohibition, a number of members of her family were involved in illegal activities, some on a really big scale. In my youth, I heard many stories about whiskey stills, revenue officers, trials, and prison life. My parents made it a point to keep us away from those who would have had a negative influence on us, but we did hear the stories, often from those with first hand accounts. My mother once told me that a conversation with a cousin, Kermit R. Cofer (later the Chief Justice of the Mississippi Supreme Court) when she was a young girl, helped guide her, but it was when she trusted Jesus Christ for His salvation and received the Holy Spirit in her heart that she began a pilgrimage with Him in faith.

My mother not only studied the Bible, she applied it in her daily life as very few people I have ever known. When she was diagnosed with a brain tumor, we began to go through the books at her store and it was then that we learned a lot about her personal ministry for the Lord. For example, she was

making car payments for one lady so she could visit her mother in a nursing home. She put another on her payroll so she could qualify for Social Security. She was the treasurer for her church and there were a few times when someone's check was returned for insufficient funds, and rather than embarrass them she went down to the bank and gave them the money necessary for the check to clear. I may have been the only one who ever knew that. Perhaps it was because she had just paid of an insufficient fund check for her pastor that she mentioned that. Do you suppose she was still teaching her son something important?

My mother lived to help others, and many people went to her with their problems. She had a wisdom that comes from the Lord, but because of her quest for knowledge about Him, she had taken her GED, and we found forms that led us to believe she was planning to enroll in college (in her fifties, which was especially unusual at the time). She was teaching a Sunday School class made up of well educated, sophisticated ladies when she lost her voice right in the middle of the class. That she had been taught by the Lord manifested itself during the next eight and one-half years (the surgeon gave her nine months at the outside!).

EVERYONE WHO HAS LISTENED. Jesus continued, "Everyone who has listened to and learned from the Father comes to Me." Robertson has written that the words, "And hath learned (kai mathôn)" is the "second aorist active participle of manthanô. It is not enough to hear God's voice. He must heed it and learn it and do it. This is a voluntary response. This one inevitably comes to Christ" [ATR]. No one can take credit for finding God. No one who prides himself in his knowledge of God can really appreciate this verse. Furthermore, anyone who attempts to come to the Father through any other person or any other means is very foolish.

6:46 -SEEN THE FATHER. "...(*N*)ot that anyone has seen the Father except the One who is from God. He has seen the Father." No one has ever seen the Father with their eyes (John 1:18), except the Son who is one with the Father; the One who is "from God". For more on this theme in John, see John 1:1, 14; 7:29; 16:27; and 17:8. He is the only One who has seen the Father, and the only way we will ever see the Father is to see (know) the Son (John 14:9). Moses had asked to see the glory of the Lord (Ex. 33:18) and he was blessed with a very limited view of Yahweh from the back, but no human being could look upon the face of the Father.

HE HAS SEEN THE FATHER. "Only the Son has seen the Father; therefore, the people should not think mistakenly that they could see and hear God himself directly. Only the Son had this privilege" [NCWB]. Only the Son "has seen the Father." How often our attention is called back to the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel. Throughout this Gospel, our minds are drawn back to the very first verse: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

6:47 - ANYONE WHO BELIEVES. " *I assure you: Anyone who believes has eternal life.*" Jesus is very emphatic here. KJV has "verily, verily"; and the NKJV, "Most assuredly". Here, it is "I assure you." There is no possibility of our misunderstanding Him. Three things are communicated to us by the Son of God. (1) **Anyone.** If we accept Jesus and take this statement at face value, we answer a lot of objections at their conception. There is no effort to advocate or refute any particular

position with reference to election here, but this word tells us that “anyone” who believes God’s salvation. (2) **Believes**. Paul wrote to the church at Rome that whoever believe in Him has everlasting life (Rom. 10:13). (3) **Eternal life**. That is the only kind of life Jesus offers anyone (see John 3:16).

The late Dr. H. R. Herrington was pastor of First Baptist Church, Rayville, Louisiana for twenty-five years, and it was my privilege to serve on his staff, both while in seminary and after graduation. He preached a revival for me a number of years later, and during that revival he made a statement I have never forgotten. He said, “the only thing anyone must do to be saved is the one thing everyone can do, and that is to believe in Jesus Christ.” Intellectuals may stumble over God’s provision, but children as young as six years old have understood it. My sister Linda was six, my brother Mike was 7, my brother James was 8 when the believed. I was 12 when I was saved.

Combining these three points, this teaches that the statement, “Anyone who believes”, is (in the Greek) “a participial construction in the present tense, meaning that a believer is characterized by his continuing trust. He **has everlasting life**, which is a present and abiding possession. Jesus then repeated His affirmation, **I am the Bread of Life**” (see... v. 35)” [BKC]. Clarke writes, “The person who is saved is, (1) drawn by the Father; (2) hears his instructions; (3) accepts the salvation offered; (4) is given to Christ Jesus, that he may be justified by faith; (5) is nourished by the bread of life; (6). perseveres in the faith; (7) is not lost, but is raised up at the last day; and (8) is made a partaker of eternal life” [CLARKE, parenthetical designations by this writer].

If we may return to the word “anyone” for a moment, we would be foolish to pretend that this verse might not be used by both strict Calvinists and Arminian scholars to argue their positions. It is a temptation to simply refer the reader to the New American Commentary at this point, but after rereading the passage I have chosen to copy it and paste it here. The author of that volume of the NAC deserves all the credit:

“Debates have raged in theology concerning the significance of the “drawing” power of God and the “learning” from God in this text. **Those who are persuaded of an Augustinian/Calvinistic interpretation** emphasize the force of God’s supreme power in drawing persons to Jesus. Those who are committed to an Arminian interpretation emphasize that the drawing power of God is on individual persons and that persons need to believe (cf. 6:47). In this discussion the “you” of the negative imperative in the text of v. 43 most naturally is addressed to the Jews who are the grumblers but goes beyond to address the reader as well. The “you” of v. 47 is important here as well and introduces a general statement that relates believing to eternal life. The force of these texts, therefore, is really neither an affirmation of strict Arminianism nor Calvinism. The Calvinists attach this discussion to texts such as 10:25–29 whereas the Arminians unite this passage with other texts such as 12:32; 15:5–6. **The solution to such problems normally is best found in a modified Arminian-Calvinistic position that maintains the biblical tension of the divine and human aspects of salvation found in this text.** Salvation is never achieved apart from the drawing power of God, and it is never consummated apart from the

willingness of humans to hear and learn from God. **To choose one or the other will ultimately end in unbalanced, unbiblical theology.** Such a solution will generally not please either doctrinaire Calvinists nor Arminians, both of whom will seek to emphasize certain words or texts and exclude from consideration other texts and words. But my sense of the biblical materials is that in spite of all our arguments to the contrary, **the tension cannot finally be resolved by our theological gymnastics.** Rather than resolving the tension, the best resolution is learning to live with the tension and accepting those whose theological commitments differ from ours” [NAC, bold added by this writer].

6:48 - I AM. *“I am the bread of life.”* This is a repetition of the First I AM Saying (6:35), and the very act of repeating something like this should hold our attention long enough to appreciate the gravity of the statement. John wrote that if everything Jesus said and did were recorded the whole world couldn’t hold the books it would take to record them. In that case, when something is repeated it stands to reason that it is significant. **These people had seen the miracle** of the feeding of the multitude, but **they had missed the sign** (that which it signified). Jesus is saying, “I alone afford, by my doctrine and Spirit, that nourishment by which the soul is saved unto life eternal” [CLARKE].

6:49 - YOUR FATHERS. *“Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.”* Vincent translates it “Are dead”, and adds, “The aorist points, not to their present condition but to the historical fact; they died” [Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament, The Bible Navigator - after this, VINCENT]. Rush Limbaugh has made statements on his popular radio program and then explained that he was using the absurdity to illustrate the absurd. Jesus, while not resorting to the absurd, is stating the obvious. That their forefathers ate manna in the wilderness was a well known historical fact. That they died was undeniable. The manna did not prevent death, it only sustained life for a period of time. Those who eat the spiritual manna Jesus offers will never die (spiritual). Barnes notes three lessons we may learn from what Jesus says here:

“1st. That that is not the most valuable of God's gifts which merely satisfies the temporal wants.

“2nd. That the most distinguished temporal blessings will not save from death. Wealth, friends, food, raiment, will not preserve life.

“3rd. There is need of something better than mere earthly blessings; there is need of that bread which cometh down from heaven, and which giveth life to the world” [BARNES].

6:50 - THIS IS THE BREAD. *“This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that anyone may eat of it and not die.”* Jesus has just said, “I am the bread of life” (vs. 48). Now, He says, “this is the bread that comes down from heaven.” There can be no mistaking the fact that He is speaking of Himself. In verse 41, Jesus said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven”; in 6:40, He promised to raise all who believe in Him.

ANYONE MAY EAT. Both the Calvinist or the Arminian may quote Him here, but what Jesus says is clear enough: “anyone may eat of it and not die.” He has already stated it positively, now He states it negatively. Those who eat of the bread that comes down from heaven will never die. We must not forget the wilderness backdrop in this discourse. “Life and death was the issue in the wilderness, and the same was true in this story that began with bread on the barren slopes of the Syrian hills. The physical bread on the hills would not guarantee life any more than the manna did. But the bread about which Jesus was speaking was quite different. This bread from heaven was the answer to death (6:50)” [NAC]. No one who takes in Jesus, by grace, through faith, will ever die spiritually.

6:51 - THE LIVING BREAD. *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.”* Jesus shows here the qualities of a great teacher, and illustrates why He was called Rabbi. With illustration, enlightenment, illustrations, repetition, and constantly expanding illumination and amplification, He makes His point so clearly that it would seem impossible for any intelligent person to miss it, if in fact they do not yield to Satan and reject His message. He has said, “I am the bread of life” (6:35). In verse 41, He said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” Now, He says, “I am the living bread.”

Jesus spoke those words and they are recorded here by John under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But Jesus said many things that were true and important that are not recorded either in the Synoptics, or by John. Why then do we have such a long passage on this I AM saying? Why the repetition? The Holy Spirit inspired the words of Scripture, so He must have controlled the composition and format.

“This verse is another of the typical Johannine saddle or linking texts. It serves as an additional summary or conclusion to 6:41–50 and as the introduction to the argument of 6:52–59. Accordingly, this verse reasserts the “I Am” idea concerning bread, the origin of Jesus from heaven, and the provision of life here described as “forever” (“unto the ages,” *eis ton aiona*). Then the verse moves the reader’s thinking forward to the next issue of the debate, which involves a new perspective on gift” [NAC].

LIVE FOREVER. Once again, Jesus stressed that “If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever.” How could those people, of all people on earth, miss what He was saying. These are the Chosen People, whose ethnic roots go back to Noah, through Shem; whose national roots go back to Abraham (who believed God); whose covenant roots go back to Moses (to Sinai and the manna in the wilderness); whose political hopes were rooted in a conviction that a descendant of David was coming to restore their territory and their national pride. If any people on earth should have understood what Jesus was saying they should have understood. However much they wanted a messiah, they were not looking for a Messiah who had come offering Himself as the “living bread”.

MY FLESH. Jesus said, “The bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” He came in the flesh, and His body would be sacrificed for our sins. Why the emphasis on His flesh here? **Does that not follow the theme of the Prologue to this Gospel,** which refutes any and all heresies that claim that the Son of God did not come in the flesh? John 1:1ff declares that Jesus came in the

flesh. 1 John 1:1 declares that truth in the face of an incipient Gnosticism that denied that He came in the flesh. Here, Jesus states the truth so emphatically that it is hard to believe anyone there would miss it. It is even more amazing that, with the complete New Testament, people still miss the point, or see it but deny the truth and reject the implications of it.

Eternal life is available to all who will take Jesus into their lives, but only eternal death to those who refuse to do so. Reading this, it is hard to believe anyone would reject Jesus, yet, with far more information today, not only does the world reject Him, many who think of themselves as Christians reject Him. They embrace form, ritual, and ceremony in His name, but they know nothing of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

In the weeks after Alaska Governor Sarah Palin was picked by Senator John McCain as his vice presidential running mate, the attacks on Governor Palin were vile, vicious, and relentless. Committed Christians were often surprised, and at times shocked. It would be interesting to know how many of those bitter attacks came from people who identify themselves as Christians.

How do we explain that? The answer, though tragic, is really very simple. The prince of this world offered Jesus the world if He would do things his way. Jesus said, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" The devil is still offering the world to those who follow him, especially to those who would corrupt the church, the body of Christ. He will reward (temporarily) those who follow him with excitement, pride, and all sorts of "causes" which will make them feel they are serving God. He can fill the pulpits of the land with anyone from Fidel Castro, who once spoke at a church in Harlem, to a Jeremiah Wright who shouts vile, racist, anti-Semitic remarks, and profane heresies while people shout and applaud. Then there are those tel-evangelists who refuse to preach on sin, demand, repentance, or announce the consequences of rejecting Jesus Christ, because they "just want everyone to feel good." One man told this writer where he went to church and went on to explain that his church had split over something he considered insignificant years ago, "and", he added, "it hasn't been the same since then." Another man told this writer he went to a large mega-church, and then added, "You can get lost in the crowd. Nobody knows if you are there."

6:52 - THE JEWS. *"At that, the Jews argued among themselves, 'How can this man give us His flesh to eat?'"* Some modern Jews have charged Jesus (and Christians) with being anti-Semitic. A popular Hollywood actor produced a movie, THE PASSION OF CHRIST, a few years ago, and many people in the media were asking whether or not the movie was anti-Semitic because it portrayed the Jews as plotting against Him and forcing the Roman governor to have Him crucified. Jesus was a Jew. John was a Jew, inspired by the Holy Spirit to write a Gospel message that would be read by countless millions of Gentiles, from that day until the end of time. The Land of Israel, even today, is but a tiny strip on any map of the world. The designation, "the Jews" was used for the reader's information, not to provoke anti-Semitism.

ARGUED. The Greek word (emachonto) could be used to denote a brawl (see Acts 7:26), or armed combat. Here it means to wage a war of words (see also, 2Tim. 2:24). These people had already been murmuring among themselves (John 6:41), now "they began bitter strife with one another over the last words of Jesus (John 6:43-51), some probably seeing a spiritual meaning in them. There was

division of opinion about Jesus in Jerusalem also later (John 7:12, 40; John 9:16; John 10:19)” [ATR].

“How can?” (Pôs dunatai;) is “The very idiom used by Nicodemus in John 3:4, 9. Here scornful disbelief” [ATR]. Throughout this passage, **we must remember that both Jesus and this crowd have referred to the manna God gave their forefathers in the wilderness some 1400 years earlier.** Various Bible students remind us of the parallel between the two incidents. God had given their ancestors manna from heaven. How did they respond? They grumbled, complained, and threatened their leaders. Jesus had fed this huge crowd with a child’s lunch the day before, and now they want more. When Jesus did not grant their request for more bread, and when He rejected their efforts to make Him their military/political leader (like David), they began to murmur (vs. 41), and now they are arguing among themselves.

“This man” (houtos) is used in a contemptuous manner, as in verse John 6:42. “His flesh to eat (tên sarka autou phagein). As if we were cannibals! Some MSS. do not have autou, but the meaning is clear. The mystical appropriation of Christ by the believer (Gal 2:20; Eph 3:17) they could not comprehend” [ATR]. “This bread” denotes the bread from heaven Jesus offered them. This was a large crowd, and when they heard Jesus declare Himself to be the bread of life, they began arguing among themselves about what He meant. “How,” they argued, could he offer them “His flesh to eat?” Once again, **they had seen the miracle, they never saw the sign.**

6:53 - UNLESS YOU EAT. “So Jesus said to them, “I assure you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life in yourselves.” In the KJV, Jesus begins with the words, “Verily, verily”, whereas the HCSB has “I assure you.”

“Jesus’ response to their arguing was to formulate another double amen (‘I tell you the truth’) saying in this context. The saying actually extends for six verses and involves a number of word interplays that are both important and complex and that provide a fertile field for theological argument and misunderstanding. The interplay of eating flesh and drinking blood could easily have seemed to the Jews to be a cannibalistic statement. But it was no doubt for John **a theological symbol referring to the acceptance of the death of Jesus, the Son of Man (6:53)**” [NAC, bold added by this writer].

Jesus stays on message. Lest we sympathize with the crowd because they could not understand what Jesus was saying, we must stop and consider how patiently He dealt with them. The miracle is that He came in the first place (John 3:16), and the amazing thing here is that He repeated His message a number of times. These people are the descendants of those who ate the manna in the wilderness and that was on their minds. Jesus had stressed to them that Moses had not given their ancestors the manna, God had. They, of all people should have understood Him, but they continued to argue among themselves.

Jesus tries again to teach them the significance of the miracle they had experienced, the sign they had witnessed. He said, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have

life in yourselves.” Admittedly, this was not something they heard every day, but neither were thousands fed with a child’s lunch ever day. These people were as blind as their ancestors who had eaten the manna in the wilderness. He certainly did not mean that they should eat His physical body! Paul was inspired to explain what He meant in his first letter to the church at Corinth: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16).

6:54 - ETERNAL LIFE. *“Anyone who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day...”* With these words Jesus both taught the people and extended an invitation to them. That invitation is still extended to “anyone” who enters into fellowship with Him (1 Cor. 10:16), by believing in Him. Any person who confesses his sin and places absolute faith in Jesus Christ to save him or her receives eternal life.

“Jesus demanded that they **eat his flesh and drink his blood** in order to appropriate eternal life. Since he spoke of the blood as being separated from the flesh, he was speaking of death. Christ himself, by virtue of his sacrificial death, is the spiritual and eternal life of men; and unless men appropriate this death in its sacrificial virtue, so as to become the very life and nourishment of their inner man, they have no spiritual and eternal life at all” [NCWB].

Scripture explains Scripture better than any earthly teacher. Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, provides the explanation we need here: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. With the heart one believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses, resulting in salvation” (Rom. 10:9-10).

I WILL RAISE HIM UP ON THE LAST DAY. “Faith in Christ’s death brings **eternal life** (cf. vv. 40, 47, 50-51) and (later) bodily resurrection (cf. vv. 39-40, 44)” [BKC]. Everyone takes Jesus into his or her life will be raised “on the last day.”

SPECIAL NOTE: Jesus nowhere teaches that one can receive eternal life through eating bread and drinking grape juice (or wine) in a formal ceremony. No one is saved through the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, any more than one can be saved by baptism.

“This can never be understood of the sacrament of the Lord’s supper. 1. Because this was not instituted till a year after; at the last Passover. 2. It cannot be said that those who do not receive that sacrament must perish everlastingly. Nor can it be supposed that all those who do receive it are necessarily and eternally saved. On the contrary, St. Paul intimates that many who received it at Corinth perished, because they received it unworthily, not discerning the Lord’s body: not distinguishing between it and a common meal; and not properly considering that sacrifice for sin, of which the sacrament of the Lord’s supper was a type: see 1 Corinthians 11:30” [CLARKE].

“Christ uses bold imagery to picture spiritual appropriation of himself who is to give

his life-blood for the life of the world (John 6:51). It would have been hopeless confusion for these Jews if Jesus had used the symbolism of the Lord's Supper. It would be real dishonesty for John to use this discourse as a propaganda for sacramentalism. The language of Jesus can only have a spiritual meaning as he unfolds himself as the true manna" [ATR].

6:55 - MY FLESH IS REAL. "(B)ecause My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink." "Just as good food and drink sustain physical life, so Jesus, the **real** (reliable) spiritual **food** and **drink**, sustains His followers spiritually. His **flesh** and **blood** give eternal life to those who receive Him" [BKC]. Today, we open the Bible to a certain book, then turn to a certain chapter and look at a particular verse. Jesus did not speak in chapters and verses, so we must learn to look at the entire passage when He is speaking, and keep everything in context. He is repeating Himself for the sake of emphasis to a crowd that is murmuring and arguing. The amazing thing is that the Son of God is patiently explaining divine truth to these people. We must read the entire passage for the full message.

We should return to the Prologue to this Gospel from time to time. In John 1:1-18, the Scripture destroys Gnostic claims that Jesus did not come in the flesh, as well as all derivatives of that heresy. His body was real and his blood was real. When they hanged Jesus on the cross, they pierced real flesh, and when they pierced His side real blood flowed out. His body was broken for us, and His blood was shed for us. When we believe that, and believe that God raised Him on the third day, we receive eternal life (Rom. 10:9-10).

6:56 - THE ONE WHO EATS. "*The one who eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in Me, and I in him.*" These people are hearing something that is disturbing to them, but if they had understood the sign they should have understood what He was saying. The Believer's Study Bible carries the following note on verses 51-56:

"Jesus specifies the meaning of "bread" by reference to His body, which was to be sacrificed for sin. Again the analogy of the necessity of food intake for life is carried over as a parallel to receiving Christ for spiritual life. Whoever partakes of Christ experiences now the sustaining life of the age to come (v. 54; cf. 3:16, 36). The statement was obviously shocking. The intent is to enable the disciples to comprehend fully the necessity of assimilating the life of Jesus into their own lives. Also, the statement tends to eliminate neutrality concerning Jesus. The immediate result was the rejection of Jesus' claims by those who only sought physical provision (v. 66)" [BSB].

SPECIAL NOTE: The modern reader who opens a Bible and reads, "The one who eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in Me, and I in him", might understandably be confused. We must remember, however, that these people had seen Jesus feed 5,000 men plus women and children with two fish and five rolls, and they themselves had brought up the feeding of their ancestors in the wilderness with manna from heaven. Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived and He knew these people. He knew what they were thinking He knew they had missed his point. The modern

reader must be encouraged to read this entire passage in its context.

6:57 - THE LIVING FATHER SENT ME. *“Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on Me will live because of Me.”* This statement is made no where else in the New Testament [Vincent]. However, in 5:26, Jesus said, “For just as the Father has life in Himself, so also He has granted to the Son to have life in Himself” (5:26). Jesus is one with the Father (1:1ff), and He shares the life of the Father. The life He possesses is unique in that there is no possibility of spiritual death for Him.

THE ONE WHO FEEDS ON ME. We should “note the change from “eat my flesh and drink my blood” (in previous verses) to simply “feeds on Me.” This helps us understand that the expression “eat my flesh and drink my blood” is a metaphor for appropriating the person Jesus Christ” [NCWB].

Jesus is following the rabbinical method of teaching. The people did not have a New Testament to carry around with them, so the teacher would repeat the points and offer illustrations (or parables) to help the people remember the lesson. These people had eaten the physical bread He had given them the day before, and now they want to see Him do it again, or even better, they want Him to declare Himself the political/military Messiah of their hopes and dreams. He is saying that as they had eaten the bread He had given them and been filled, they must now take Him into their hearts by faith.

WILL LIVE. Literally, it is “even that one will live because of me.” “As Jesus lived in union with the Father and depended on his life, so the eater of Jesus will live in union with Jesus and depend on his life. This union and life-dependency is elaborated later in Jesus’ illustration of the vine and the branches (see 15:1-17)” [NCWB].

6:58 - THIS IS THE BREAD. *“This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the manna your fathers ate—and they died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.”* With these words, Jesus concludes a discourse with a huge crowd of people who had seen the miracle of the feeding of 5,000 men, plus women and children (possibly as many as 20,000 people). They had chased Him down the next day because they had seen the miracle and wanted to make Him their king so that He might drive off the Romans. He charged that they only wanted bread, but instead of more bread, they received a powerful lesson as to His identity. He is the bread of life, and all who believe in Him receive eternal life. So, this verse is a “Summary and final explanation of the true manna (from verse John 6:32 on) as being Jesus Christ himself” [ATR]. Then, what is the significance of this rather lengthy discourse on the bread of life? The symbols in the Gospel

“always remained derivative representations of the great Passover event in Jesus. The symbols are not ends in themselves, nor are they or can they be made powers in themselves. These elements can indeed symbolize the eternal and actual bread that came down from heaven (6:58), but they must never take the place of the living Lord, the one who was sent by God and who gave his flesh and blood for the life of the world (6:59). Inwardly digesting him is the way to life. Eating and drinking elements of physical food, even God-given physical food, does not guarantee life: [NAC].

6:59 - HE SAID THESE THINGS. *“He said these things while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.”* “These things” refer to the things He has said so forcefully and dramatically to this crowd He had miraculously fed. **They saw the miracle**, and ate the fish and bread, but **they never saw the sign**, even when He explained it by stating, “I am the bread of life.” Here, John tells us that Jesus taught “these things” in the synagogue in Capernaum. By “these things” he has to mean the truth that He is the bread of life, the bread from heaven.

“He often spoke in Jewish synagogues, where men had opportunities to give expositions and exhortations (Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-28; Acts 13:15-42). The services were not as formal as those of traditional American churches; “laymen” usually spoke. The conclusion to Jesus’ exposition and exhortation, based on the **manna** incident from Exodus 16, repeats the major themes: Moses’ bread did not give lasting life (salvation does not come by the Law); God has given the genuine life-giving **Bread... from heaven**; those who trust Jesus have eternal life” [BKC].

Many of the People Desert Jesus

6:60 - HIS DISCIPLES. *“Therefore, when many of His disciples heard this, they said, ‘This teaching is hard! Who can accept it?’”* “Therefore” transitions the reader from the encounter between Jesus and the large crowd that followed Him from the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee where He had fed the multitude (and where they had wanted to make Him their king), to the western side where they anticipated more miracles, to the synagogue where Jesus spoke more formally to them. He said the same thing to them in the synagogue that He had said to them when they first chased Him down the day after He had fed the huge crowd with a child’s lunch.

With this Jewish crowd, the natural back-drop was God’s gift of manna 1400 years earlier when Moses was leading them in the wilderness. Now, the Son of God had given them bread, and then explained that He is the bread of life, the very bread of heaven. He made an effort to explain this to the excited crowd, but they were blinded by their own desire for a totally different kind of Messiah. Then, Jesus had taught them the same thing in the synagogue. How could they have missed His meaning? They wanted a military Messiah who would come and deliver them from Rome. One wonders what they would have said if He had told them it would be 1900 years before Israel would be an independent nation again.

John calls these people disciples, and they were, in a sense. The word disciple means both one who follows another, and one who learns from another. Ideally, a disciple was one who followed another to learn from him. This crowd had followed Jesus to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee with great anticipation, and then they had rushed back to the western side with even greater enthusiasm. They were following Him, but they were not learning from Him.

THIS TEACHING IS HARD. What Jesus had said was simple enough for a child to understand, yet these people had missed it - **they saw the miracle, but missed the sign** and its significance. A

significant number of these disciples were disappointed in what Jesus had said to them. “Yet at the very beginning of his message Christ had explained that eating the bread of life meant receiving him as the Son of God and appropriating eternal life (6:35-40). Had Christ’s hearers been properly attentive to his words, they would never have suggested the grotesque thought of eating Christ’s literal flesh (6:52)” [NCWB].

When I was a student at Mississippi College, and when I first enrolled in New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, I worked for the Quitman County, Mississippi ASCS (a division of the USDA) every summer. I have many memories from those days, and many of them have to do with farmers who seemed about as blind spiritually as those ancient Jews. One day, I was assigned a large plantation west of Marks, MS, and when I drove out to the farm I discovered that the owner had driven down from Memphis. Normally, we worked with his manager, named Mike Kawalski. Mike was Polish and didn’t always understand me. I introduced myself to the owner and he asked a number of questions, mostly about me. I told him the Lord had called me into the ministry and I was attending Mississippi College, and planning to go on to do graduate work at the seminary.

The very gracious man expressed his admiration for one so young who would devote himself to such a worthy cause. I will never forget the look in his eyes, the expression on his face, nor the change in his voice when he spoke. It was very obvious that the man did not get it. It was as if he was saying that I was going to waste my life, but he admired me for it!

The words of Jesus Christ still seem hard to many. It is understandable for lost people, but very sad when it come from people who profess to know Him. Why is it that so many people who profess to have belong to His kingdom refuse to live in the heart of His kingdom. Rather, they seem determined to live so close to the borderline that one can hardly distinguish them from those on the other side. They look like the people on the other side, act like them, and at times smell like them. When they are confronted with the Word of God it is obvious that they find His words too hard for them. Sadly, many of those church members are lost. They do not know Jesus Christ any more than those ancient Jews did.

6:61 - JESUS, KNOWING. *“Jesus, knowing in Himself that His disciples were complaining about this, asked them, ‘Does this offend you?’”* John, now the lone surviving apostle, must have told this story, and quoted Jesus many times during his ministry at Ephesus, which probably included counseling and teaching people throughout the region. He also had the Synoptic Gospels to read to the people. Paul, the man who had planted the church and served as pastor for three years, had been martyred over twenty years before John wrote this Gospel account of the life and works of Jesus. In addition to his personal knowledge as to the events, and his memory of word spoken by Jesus, John was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so it was the Holy Spirit who determined the content of this Gospel.

One thing that stands out in this Gospel is that Jesus knew what was in the minds of those around Him: “...He did not need anyone to testify about man; for He Himself knew what was in man” (John 2:25). Jesus knew what these “disciples” were thinking, so He asked, “Does this offend you?” The word He used (skandalizei) means to cause one to stumble, as in John 16:1: “I have told you these

things to keep you from stumbling.” Grown men and women still stumble over Scripture a child can understand!

6:62 - SON OF MAN ASCENDING. *“Then what if you were to observe the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?”* If they were “offended” when He said He had come down from heaven, what would they say if they were to observe Him ascending back into heaven? Many of His true disciple would indeed see Him ascend back into heaven.

WHERE HE WAS BEFORE. Jesus here answers critics of all ages who try to deny His true character, nature, and person. He was a real person, with a real human body, and anyone who denied that did not know Him. John would, within about two years, be inspired to write, “This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (1 John 4:2).

Jesus, the Son of God, is one with God (John 1:1), and as such He was the One who created all things (John 1:2). His disciples saw Him in the flesh (John 1:14), so they knew He had come in the flesh. What He stresses here is an amplification of what we read in the Prologue to this Gospel. In this statement, Jesus answers pagans and all other critics who would deny His eternal existence with the Father, His coming in the flesh, or His return to heaven. Jesus states clearly in His own words his pre-existence. See also, John 3:13; John 17:5 (as well as the Prologue to this Gospel, John 1:1-18).

6:63 - THE SPIRIT. *“The Spirit is the One who gives life. The flesh doesn’t help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”* The NASB renders it, “It is the Spirit who gives life.” There are differences of opinion as to what (or whom) Jesus had in mind when He used the word “Spirit”. The HCSB translators obviously assumed that the Holy Spirit was intended, which explains the capitalization of both “Spirit” and “One”. I had the privilege of meeting with Dr. Ed Blum, the General Editor of the HCSB when he met with the Broadman and Holman Committee at a meeting of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources. The translation was in its early stages at the time. Later in the day I had an opportunity to sit with him at a table after lunch and listen to his explanations about some unique features of the HCSB, including the bold print in the New Testament when a speaker was quoting from the Old Testament. Personal pronouns are capitalized when they denote the Lord. Thus, the word Spirit is capitalized,

The issue here is that the Holy Spirit had not come (at Pentecost) yet, Jesus says, “The Spirit is the One who gives life.” Barnes explains the problem with our assumption that the Holy Spirit is intended here:

“These words have been understood in different ways. The word ‘Spirit,’ here, evidently does not refer to the Holy Ghost, for he adds, ‘The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit.’ He refers here, probably, to the doctrine which he had been teaching in opposition to their notions and desires. ‘My doctrine is spiritual; it is fitted to quicken and nourish the soul. It is from heaven. Your doctrine or your views are earthly, and may be called flesh, or fleshly, as pertaining only to the support of the body. You place a great value on the doctrine that Moses fed the body; yet that did not

permanently profit, for your fathers are dead. You seek also food from me, but your views and desires are gross and earthly” [BARNES].

Another writer sums it up well: “The whole essence of his message was ‘spirit,’ not flesh—spiritual, not material. And his words themselves should be taken spiritually, not literally. They were words of life, words that imparted life” [NCWB].

SPIRIT AND LIFE. Jesus added, “The flesh doesn’t help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” Paul was inspired to amplify these words: “yet we know that **no one is justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.** And we have believed in Christ Jesus, **so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law,** because by the works of the law no human being will be justified” (Gal 2:16, bold added by this writer). He then added:

“You foolish Galatians! Who has hypnotized you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was vividly portrayed as crucified? I only want to learn this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now going to be made complete by the flesh?” (Gal 3:1-3).

6:64 - SOME...WHO DON’T BELIEVE. “*But there are some among you who don’t believe.*’ (For Jesus knew from the beginning those who would not believe and the one who would betray Him.)” Jesus offered them the words of life, words that give life (vs. 63), but if one does not believe His words, there is no life. “Failure to believe kills the life in the words of Jesus” [ATR].

FOR JESUS KNEW. This is absolutely amazing. In fact, it is incredible! However, we should not be surprised to read here that Jesus knew from the very beginning who would believe and who would not, as well as the one who would betray him. This is an historical note John adds, both for the benefit of those believers who first read these words in the closing years of the First Century, as well as the modern reader. Jesus has supernatural knowledge, as evidenced a number of times (1:47; 2:24-25; 6:15).

6:65 - NO ONE COMES TO ME. “*He said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless it is granted to him by the Father.”* As mentioned previously, Jesus follows the rabbinical method of teaching in that He resorts to a great deal of repetition, but radically departs from the rabbis of the day, both in content and purpose. What He says here is a repetition of something He has already said (see 6:45). The point He is making, if I may resort to repetition, is that no one “finds” God. Apart from divine revelation, no one would ever come to know there is a God, that he needs God, or that he might have a personal relationship with Him. “A man can’t come to Christ without a divine revelation” [NCWB]. Jesus had been teaching them that “divine enablement was necessary for people to **come to** faith (v. 44). The apostasy here (v. 66) should not be surprising. Believers who remain with Jesus evidence the Father’s secret work. The unbelieving crowds are evidence that “the flesh counts for nothing” (v. 63) [BKC].

6:66 - FROM THAT MOMENT. *“From that moment many of His disciples turned back and no longer accompanied Him.”* What a tragic statement! What a heart-breaking scene. **They saw the miracle, but could not see the sign!** They wanted a show, and they wanted physical bread, but they did not want to follow Jesus. “His rejecting their desire to make Him their political king; His demand for personal faith; His teaching on atonement; His stress on total human inability and on salvation as a work of God—all these proved to be unpalatable for **many** people. They gave up being **His disciples** (‘disciples’ here refers to followers in general, not to the 12 Apostles; this is evident in v. 67) [BKC].

One who has grown up in church, attending Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and worship services all his or her life might wonder how these people could turn away from Jesus like that. The simple fact is that many today are committing the same sin, and when they turn from Him they are sinning against a much greater light. Those people had never seen a copy of the New Testament and the Holy Spirit had not come to convict them, as He has convicted people since Pentecost. They had no copy of the Bible they could read in their own language anytime they chose. Today, millions of young people are going to church, hearing the Gospel, participating in special events, parties, and mission trips where they are exposed to the Gospel, yet when they finish high school and go off to college they leave the church in shocking numbers. They turn away from the Lord.

6:67 - JESUS SAID. *“Therefore Jesus said to the Twelve, “You don’t want to go away too, do you?”* Once again, Jesus asked the right question at the right time. John does not tell us that all those people who had eaten the bread and fish Jesus had miraculously given them the day before did a spectacular about-face and marched away from Him. However, the crowd, once they heard what He was really offering them, dispersed in such a way that it was obvious that they would not be following Him any more. Jesus had fed 5,000 men plus women and children the day before, and their response was to try to take Him and make Him their king. They wanted someone to would drive off the Romans and clear the land of Gentiles. He had sent them away, but many of them had apparently seen Him move back up the side of the mountain and decided to remain there to see what He would do when He came back down.

The next day, when they saw they had missed Him, they took off for the western side of the Sea of Galilee, and searched until they found Him, and when they found Him they demanded more bread. The modern day American can hardly imagine what it would mean to these people for someone to give them their daily bread. Bread made up a far more important part of their diet than it does the modern American’s today. Bread really was the staff of life. This excited crowd had chased Him down, asking for more bread, and no doubt hoping to see more miracles. They had seen the miracle, but missed the sign (the significance of it). Jesus offered them Himself. When they got the picture, they began leaving and continued leaving until Jesus was alone with the twelve apostles. He watched the crowd leave and then turned to them and asked, ““You don’t want to go away too, do you?””

Remember that the twelve had been caught up in the excitement the day before, and they had apparently helped stir up the crowd. Why else would Jesus tell them to get into the boat and go to the other side before He dismissed the crowd? Now, as the apostles stood watching the crowd turn and leave Jesus, one can imagine the emotions of those apostles. Jesus knew what each one was thinking,

but His question challenged each one of them to make sure their commitment was genuine. We remember that Judas was counted among the twelve, and though he did not leave Jesus that day, he was never a true follower. Many today leave the church when they see what Jesus offers, but a few may stay in the church today only to serve the cause of Satan, though they would never admit to that.

6:68 - PETER ANSWERED. *“Simon Peter answered, ‘Lord, who will we go to? You have the words of eternal life.’”* It is the theory of this writer that Peter may have been the oldest of the disciples of Jesus, and he was obviously the most outspoken. When the leaders of the synagogue at Capernaum asked if they paid their temple dues, Matthew writes: “Jesus turned to Simon Peter and said, ‘Then the sons are free,’ Jesus told him. ‘But, so we won’t offend them, go to the sea, cast in a fishhook, and catch the first fish that comes up. When you open its mouth you’ll find a coin. Take it and give it to them for Me and you” (Matt 17:26-27). It is possible that this meant that only Jesus and Peter were old enough to have to pay the temple dues, though this not conclusive proof.

WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE. Peter, not surprisingly, replied, “Lord, who will we go to? You have the words of eternal life.” We would agree that it was Peter’s character “to be first and most ardent in his professions” [BARNES]. The modern day believer should consider Jesus’ question often, and if we truly believe in Him, we will say, as Peter did, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

There is no indication that the apostles ever considered leaving Jesus, but “if such a thought as desertion crossed their minds when the crowd left, they dismissed it instantly. They had made their choice. They accepted these very words of Jesus that had caused the defection as ‘the words of eternal life’ [ATR]. Peter’s response “implied their firm conviction that Jesus was the Messiah, and that he alone was able to save them. It is one of Peter’s noble confessions--the instinctive promptings of a pious heart and of ardent love” [BARNES].

6:69 - BELIEVE AND KNOW. *“We have come to believe and know that You are the Holy One of God!”* Responding to Jesus’ question about whether or not the twelve would desert Him, Peter had said, “You have the words of eternal life” (vs. 68). He continues his great confession by saying, “We have come to believe and know that You are the Holy One of God!” To more fully understand what Peter was saying, consider Robertson’s explanation of the Greek: “We have believed (hêmeis pepisteukamen). Perfect active indicative of pisteuô, ‘We have come to believe and still believe’ (verse John 6:29). And know (kai egnôkamen). Same tense of ginôskô, **‘We have come to know and still know’** [ATR, bold added by this writer].

6:70 - ONE OF YOU IS THE DEVIL! *“Jesus replied to them, “Didn’t I choose you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is the Devil!”* Once again, we see that Jesus knew what each person was thinking. He was never deceived, any more that the Holy Spirit is deceived today. Adam Clarke paraphrased Jesus’ response like this: “Have I not, in an especial manner, called you to believe in my name, and chosen you to be my disciples and the propagators of my doctrine! Nevertheless, one of you is a devil, or accuser, enlisted on the side of Satan, who was a murderer from the beginning” [CLARKE].

6:71 - JUDAS. *“He was referring to Judas, Simon Iscariot’s son, one of the Twelve, because he was going to betray Him.”* John was inspired to give us the identity of the false disciple who would betray Jesus.

“In the light of John 13:2, 27, Satan’s working in Judas was tantamount to Judas being the devil. In 6:70 the Greek does not have the indefinite article “a,” so it could be translated “one of you is Satan (devil).” Jesus’ knowledge of **Judas** (who was called Judas Iscariot because his father was **Simon Iscariot**) was still another example of His omniscience (cf. 1:47; 2:24-25; 6:15, 61). **Later** in the Upper Room, Jesus again said **one of the Twelve** would **betray Him** (13:21). John called Judas “the traitor” (18:5). The disciples later could reflect on this prophecy of His and be strengthened in their faith. Judas was a tragic figure, influenced by Satan; yet he was responsible for his own evil choices” [BKC].

SPECIAL NOTE: In the Prologue to John, we learn that Jesus and the Father are One, and that Jesus was the One through whom the Father created the world. He came in the flesh to pay the price for our redemption, and all who believe in Him have eternal life (John 3:16). As we move forward in the Fourth Gospel, we find that all the signs and I AM saying affirm everything stated about Jesus in the Prologue.

If you do not know Jesus as savior and Lord, read John 3:16, confess your sins to Him, and ask Him to forgive you. If you know Him and know that you know Him, continue reading the Gospel According to John.

“The Lord bless you and protect you; the Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the Lord look with favor on you and give you peace” (Num 6:24-26).