

Notes from the Gospel of John

By James West

Background Information:

While John does not identify himself by name, he refers to himself as 'that disciple', and also 'that disciple whom Jesus loved'. At the end of the book, it becomes very clear who is writing (21:24). His emphasis upon love in all three of his epistles identifies him as the 'Apostle of Love'.

The place of writing may have been Ephesus, and the date may have been around 85 AD.

Concerning the intended readership of the book: 'No particular congregation is targeted. It does seem to have Gentiles in mind with its explanation of the feasts and usages of the Jews.' (*New Testament Bible History*, p. 91, Hester)

While the other three Gospels talk more about what Jesus did, John was most concerned about who Jesus is, and in bringing the reader to a point of decision: (i.e.) 'Will you believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God?' It is important to understand that 'Christ' (the Greek term) and Messiah (the Jewish term) mean the same thing: *the anointed one*. From the Old Testament Scriptures, the Jews had an expectation of a Messiah who would come and reign over them.

We could find the purpose of John's Gospel outlined in the following Scripture:

John 20:31: 'But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.'

Jesus' ministry was only 3 ½ years long, spanning from approximately 26 AD to 30 AD, and John mostly focuses on Christ's work in the region of Judea. It is interesting to note that John dwells much on the events surrounding the recurring annual Passover feast in the month of Nissan (March/April), which then became the time wherein Jesus was crucified.

John's gospel followed Roman time, measuring from midnight to noon, and then from noon to midnight, and this needs to be taken into account when we read about John's descriptions of time.

Chapter 1: 'But as Many as Received Him'

(v. 1) 'In the beginning was the Word...' Here we have a *state of being* verb. It expresses that when creation came into being, the Word already existed. See the following references, referring to Jesus' existence from eternity past: Micah 5:2 & John 8:58.

The Greek word *logos* means word, thought, or expression.

(v. 4) Only those who become partakers of eternal life, and participants in the divine nature can understand the light of Christ's own life in their souls. Everlasting life is the desired result of God's love. Jesus said: (John 10:10) '...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.' John 1:4 should be cross-referenced with 8:12. There we see that the condition required to have Christ's light upon our daily lives is to *follow* Him. First and foremost, the life of

discipleship is the pursuit of a Person. This entirely agrees with John 17:3, where we learn that this eternal life is bound up in *knowing* Him.

(vv. 10-12) Although men live and have their being in God, most do not recognise or know Him. But for those that do, they shall receive power to become sons, and to know Him as a Father.

(v. 13) 'Not of blood' probably refers simply to the fact that human lineage has nothing to do with *spiritual regeneration*.

(v. 14) Christ dwelt among men. His earthly walk was temporary, just like the Old Testament tabernacle. The word 'dwelt' could just also be understood as 'tabernacled' for a tabernacle (tent) is a temporary dwelling place. The tabernacle was, in fact, a picture of Christ, who is now the meeting place between God and men.

John was one of the three that beheld Christ's glory in the mountain of transfiguration, and he may be referring to that here.

'Only begotten' as it is used in Scripture, refers to the deity of Christ. He is more than just a son. He is God. The concept of the trinity is something inherent in the Scriptures, right from the very start. God said 'Let *us* make man in our image'. Even the word for God (Elohim) is plural, showing that He is three persons in one.

'Grace and truth': *Grace* can signify (1) Undeserved favour or (2) Moral beauty. Note that this grace is a further description of glory (see verse 14). *Truth* points to the fact that Jesus is the ultimate answer for mankind.

(v. 15) Jesus was 'preferred before' John. This literally means that He 'came in front of' John in terms of superiority. He also existed in eternity before John, although John was 6 months older than Jesus.

(v. 16) 'Grace for grace' is probably an expression, meaning 'an abundance of grace'.

(v. 18) God has been 'declared' or made known to us through Jesus Christ (v. 18 & Hebrews 1:1-2). God in His essential nature is a spirit, but He has manifested Himself in various ways throughout the Scriptures. Manifestations of God apart from the advent of Jesus Christ are called Theophanies or Christophanies. It is important to remember that when God became a man, He never ceased to be all that He was before.

(v. 21) The Jews wondered if John were Elias or 'that prophet' because of the following two Scriptures: Malachi 4:5 & Deuteronomy 18:15

(v. 23) John's description of himself was from Isaiah 40:3.

(v. 24) The Pharisees originate from the 400 silent years of history between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The name 'Pharisee' means 'separate or divide'. Their mis-guided purpose was to bring Israel back to a place of total conformity to the Mosaic law, in order to win God's favour.

(v. 27) A latchet is a thong or strap for fastening sandals.

(v. 29) While the Jews were looking for a prophet, an Elijah, or a king, John proclaimed to them a Saviour. While we need a ruler, we desperately need a Saviour.

(v. 36) John was overcome with admiration for the person of Jesus Christ.

(v. 38) A sure sign of salvation is a desire to fellowship with Christ. 'What seek ye?' Is this not a heart-searching question? Do we truly desire fellowship with Christ, or do we merely seek to placate our consciences? Do we simply seek relief from circumstances?

'The Christian life is first and foremost about God. It is not primarily about escape from everlasting torment or deliverance from life-dominating sins or freedom from unsettling emotions. Our despondency, anger, worry, fear, guilt, bitterness, lust, and so forth are indications that the dependent love relationship with God has grown cold – or has never been developed in the first place.' (Jim Berg, *Changed Into His Image*, p. 115)

(v. 39) This shows us that Jesus wants us to be with Him. The Son of God was willing to spend His precious time with these few individuals. John 1 speaks of the disciples' conversion, but Mark 1 speaks of their call to service.

(v. 42) Jesus wants to encourage us by showing us what we shall be in Him.

(v. 43) Jesus is the initiator in the discipleship relationship. He has laid hold on believers for His purposes. He wants us to be with Him, and to work with Him.

(v. 45) Nathaniel and Bartholomew were probably the same person.

(v. 47) How could Jesus say that Nathanael had no guile (deceit)? We know that the human heart is desperately wicked (Jer 17:9), but Jesus still saw in Nathanael a habitual discipline towards, and a desire for purity and holiness (Matthew 5:8). Jesus encourages the feeble efforts of the sincere disciple, and praises virtue, even though it be but a germ or speck in the eyes of God. We value diamonds, although they be very small. In like manner, God values what resembles His own beauty, though it be small. Not only was he without guile, but he demonstrated child-like faith, for we see that Jesus praises this in verse 50.

(v. 48) Jesus observes us, even when we feel that we are all alone. What joy it brings to His heart to see a person who delights in His ways, even when they are all alone and nobody is watching (Psalm 11:7).

Nathanael carefully evaluated the evidence, then decisively chose to believe. This is a good example. Jesus encouraged Nathanael by showing him that his faith would be rewarded with greater things. When we exercise faith, God shows us glimpses of greater things He wants to do for us.

Introduction & Chapter 1 Questions

1. *When, and from where was the book of John written? _____
2. *What is the reference of the verse that explains John purpose for writing? _____
3. John dwells much on the _____ surrounding the recurring annual _____ feast.
4. *John's gospel followed _____ time, measuring from _____ to noon, and then from _____ to midnight.
5. The Greek word *logos* means _____, thought, or _____.
6. The tabernacle was a _____ of _____, who is now the _____ between God and men.
7. The Hebrew word for God (_____) is _____, showing that He is three persons in one.
8. Manifestations of God apart from the advent of Jesus Christ are called _____ or _____.
9. The Jews wondered if John were Elias or 'that prophet' because of what 2 Scriptures?

10. The name 'Pharisee' means '_____ or _____'.
11. While the Jews were looking for a _____, an Elijah, or a _____, John proclaimed to the them a _____.
12. Jesus wants to _____ us by _____ us what we shall be _____.

13. Not only was Nathanael without _____, but he demonstrated _____
_____.

14. When we exercise _____, God shows us _____ of _____ things
He wants to do for us.

Chapter 2: Jesus' glory and authority manifested

(v. 1) 'The third day' probably means three days after the last event recorded in chapter 2, as it would take a few days to travel from Judea up to Galilee. Note, that John does not use his own name, or the name of Jesus' mother in his Gospel.

(v. 4) Commentators generally agree that the address 'Woman' was not rude, but was customary, and even respectful. 'What have I to do with thee?' '[This] was a common expression in Greek, that referred to a difference in realms or relations' (Edwin A. Blum, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Edited by Walvoord and Zuck). Mary was becoming anxious, it would seem, and Jesus would not have her to be anxious. Truly, Jesus wants what is best for us, but He will not be dictated to by us. We cannot profess to understand His plan. It should be enough for us simply to trust His will and timing.

In John, the *coming hour* is repeatedly referred to. We need to remember that God has a perfect time for everything, and that everything has been planned from eternity past. We need to believe that His time is best. The Scriptures abound with examples of saints who had to wait for God's perfect timing. To name a few:

- Noah – waiting for God to send the rain, and then waiting for Him to lead him safely out of the ark again
- Abraham and Sarah – waiting for Isaac to be born
- Joseph in prison – waiting for the fulfilment of his dreams
- The Jews in Egypt – waiting for deliverance
- Israel at the Red Sea – waiting for God to intervene
- Israel in the time of the judges – waiting for God to deliver them from their misery and servitude
- David – waiting for God to give him rest from Saul, and to bring him to the throne
- Elijah – waiting for the ravens to feed him, and for the word of the Lord to direct him
- Nehemiah – waiting to rebuild Jerusalem
- Job – waiting for God to turn his captivity
- The psalmist – waiting again and again for God's deliverance and perfect work
- The prophets – waiting for the coming messiah and kingdom
- Jeremiah – Quietly waiting for the salvation of the Lord
- Daniel – Waiting in the lions' den
- Habakkuk – Waiting for God's mercy on the land
- Simeon – Waiting for the birth of the Messiah
- The Lord Jesus – Waiting for the hour when He should be glorified
- Paul – Waiting for the time of his departure
- Believers today – waiting to meet the Lord in the clouds

(v. 5) Obeying whatsoever He says shows respect for His person, for His wisdom, His power, and His plan. There must be a cooperation with His plan. Mary's words to the servants were probably quite helpful, seeing that the servants might hesitate at drawing wine out purification jars.

(vv. 6-7) 1 firkin equals approximately 38 litres. This means that there was a total capacity of maybe 230 litres of water. Jesus is going to use these water-pots for something other than what was intended. They were used for washing of hands before meals, and one commentator suggests that they were used for the washing of eating vessels. At any rate, they were not designated for holding wine. Would the guests have been somewhat aghast if they had known that the wine was coming from these vessels? Blum remarks that for a Jew to knowingly do so would be unthinkable. Maybe that is part of the reason our Lord did it secretly. Are these vessels somehow a picture of Christ? – Lowly, dwelling in mortal flesh, yet showing us the new and living way, not consisting in laws and ordinances, but in the true and living way of the Spirit. Christ was indeed the greatest treasure that God could bring to mankind! See also comments on verse 10.

(v. 8) The governor was a guest selected to take charge of the feast.

(v. 9) The servants saw the miracle. Christ reveals His glory to the humble and lowly, just as with the shepherds at his birth.

(v. 10) When we cooperate with God's plan, we will see that He does all things very well. Maybe Blum is correct when he remarks: 'The significance of this miracle is that Christianity is an advance over Judaism. God has kept the best gift – His Son – until now' (Edwin A. Blum, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Edited by Walvoord and Zuck).

(v. 11) Jesus' disciples believed on Him because of the miracle. They had already accepted the call to follow him, but this miracle showed them something they had not fully understood until now, or it served to strengthen their faith somehow.

(vv. 12-13) Commentators seem generally agreed that 'his own city' refers to Capernaum, referring to Mark 2:1 and Matthew 9:1, and it seems that this was Christ's earthly headquarters. Jesus went and stayed there with his disciples, his mother, and his brethren for only a little while, as He soon went to attend the Passover at Jerusalem. Much of the book of John revolves around events during the Passover season.

On the tenth day of the month Nisan the Jews selected a lamb. On the fourteenth day they killed it, and put its blood on the doorposts. The evening following the Passover is the first night of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread.

(v. 14) Jesus cleansed the temple at least twice during His ministry. He is the one who searches the condition of those who profess to worship Him. He seeks for those who will worship in Spirit and in truth. He is described in Revelation as having eyes of fire. He is the One who searches the hearts (Jeremiah 17:10). '...And all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts...' (Revelation 2:23). Again and again, in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, Christ says, 'I know thy works...'

The Bible teaches us that believers are temples for the Lord. If the Lord came to check the condition of our earthly temples today, what would he find? 1 Corinthians 6:20 teaches us that God's children have been bought with a price. We know that price to be the blood of the Son of God.

The sellers were capitalising on the need that visitors had to buy sacrifices to offer, and so were in it for the money. The changers of money sitting: ‘...who changed foreign money into the current coin of the Jews, strangers coming, at this feast, from several parts of the world...’ (John Gill).

(vv. 15-16) You can be sure that the money changers had their money all in order, stacked neatly on the tables, in various categories, but it all represented idolatry. I believe Tozer wrote something along the lines that idolatry is to entertain thoughts of God that are unworthy of Him. These merchants and money changers thought that God could be served with their materialism. They thought He would be satisfied with their efficient ways of doing things. Many times we feel that as long as God is getting His part, then we can have our part too, with all our little idols stacked in nice little rows, each to serve our own interests in due turn, while we give tacit recognition to the idea that we are really actually here for something far greater. There are three categories of people in the world: First, there are those who are not interested in seeking the Lord with their whole heart. Then there are those who are interested in seeking the Lord with the whole heart. Then there are those who actually seek the Lord with the whole heart.

Christ is very deliberate in His wrath. He does not suddenly snap and think, ‘Why have I been putting up with half-hearted worship for so long?’ No, as soon as He sees such heedlessness, He gets to work, carefully preparing scourges, overturning tables, rising up early and sending prophets, stopping us in our tracks, frustrating our carefully laid plans, and surrounding us to conquer. The Lord is not the kind of person who will just sit around and hope problems go away! He is very jealous over us, for He created us for Himself, and redeemed us for Himself. He died, rose, and lives eternally, in order that we might live with Him. He is fully committed to cleansing these temples of anything that is displeasing to Him.

In Christ’s manly and human form, He displayed in a graphic and physical way the deep abhorrence that the Father feels every day at hypocrisy and sin when it is found in His people and in His church. In the court of the Gentiles, with so many people milling around, and surrounded by merchants and herds of animals, our Lord created great chaos. We see deliberate fury, generating chaos and upheaval in this man-appointed order of things. Jesus was not dispassionate. He was displaying full-blown human passion, channelled towards bringing glory to the Father. If there is to be any tearing down of strongholds around us, or breaking down of Satan’s inventions in the world around us, there must truly be a passion for God, first and foremost. Without a passion for the worship of the Father, all our religion will be for inferior and temporary reasons.

Jesus partially fulfilled Malachi 3:1-2 when He cleansed the temple.

Christ dealt severely with those who defiled His Father’s temple. Likewise, He will chasten Christians who defile their own bodies, which are the temples of the Holy Spirit. If Jesus was enraged at the defiling of an inanimate building, which served as a meeting place between God and men, how much more incensed and grieved must His Spirit be when we defile our bodies and minds, which are the temples of the Holy Ghost? Ephesians 4:30: ‘And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.’ He is also incensed when we defile the church of God through wrong doctrine, sin, sinful attitudes, and devouring words. One of the biggest things that grieves the Spirit of Christ is strife between brethren. It can be an all-out war, or it can be a cold and silent war. Think about that person that you try not to talk to very much in the church, and ask yourself who has the greater issue – you or that person? Nice words concealing malicious attitudes are like broken

pieces of pottery covered with silver dross. Oh, how it grieves Christ, and hinders the fellowship of the Spirit among the brethren!

(v. 17) The disciples remembered Psalm 69:9 at the time of Jesus' cleansing of the temple.

(v. 18) The Jews were too afraid to try and stop Jesus. All they could do was question His authority. His answer to them was cryptic, and He did not expect them to understand. However, they had rejected Him already in their hearts, and so they could not understand further light.

(vv. 20-21) The temple of Jesus' time was built by Herod the Great, and took 46 years to complete. However, Jesus was speaking about Himself. The temple ultimately pictured Christ anyway, but they could not see that at all.

(v. 22) It was the disciples who understood His cryptic saying, but only after He was risen from the dead. As you study the Bible, it will not all make sense at once, but as you continue to study, it will finally start coming together.

(vv. 23-25) Many believed in Jesus, but not savingly. He did not 'trust' their faith, as the Greek word implies, for they had not put their whole faith in Him.

Chapter 2 Questions

1. The address ' _____ ' was not rude, but was _____, and even _____.
2. In John, the _____ is repeatedly referred to.
3. 1 firkin equals approximately _____ litres.
4. The governor was a _____ selected to take charge of the _____.
5. The _____ saw the miracle.
6. Jesus' _____ believed on Him because of the _____.
7. *Much of the book of John _____ around events during the _____ season.
8. *On the tenth day of the month _____ the Jews selected a _____. On the _____ day they killed it, and put its blood on the doorposts. The evening following the Passover is the first night of the _____ Feast of _____.
9. _____ teaches us that God's children have been bought with a _____.
10. *There are three categories of people in the world:
 - a. Those who are _____ interested in seeking the Lord with their whole heart.
 - b. Those who _____ interested in seeking the Lord with the whole heart.
 - c. Those who actually _____ the Lord with the whole heart.

11. If there is to be any tearing down of _____ around us, or breaking down of Satan's inventions in the world around us, there must truly be a _____ for God, _____ and foremost.

12. Jesus partially fulfilled _____ when He cleansed the temple.

13. Christ dealt severely with those who defiled His Father's temple. Likewise, He will chasten _____ who defile their own _____, which are the _____ of the Holy Spirit.

14. The disciples remembered _____ when Jesus cleansed the temple.

15. The temple of Jesus' time was built by _____ the Great, and took _____ years to complete.

16. As you study the Bible, it will not all make _____ at once, but as you _____ to study, it will finally start _____ together.

Chapter 3: The Son of Man Must be Lifted Up

(v. 1) We can be pretty certain that Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, from what is recorded in chapter 7 (see especially verse 50). This was the highest court of the Jews, consisting of 70 members. These were the elite educated aristocracy of Israel. We know from Acts 23:6 that this council was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees. We are told in the present text that Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and being a ruler (probably describing his position within the council), he was no doubt a wealthy man. This same Nicodemus was verbally persecuted for defending Christ in the council in John 7:50-52. In 19:39 Nicodemus brings a mixture of myrrh and aloes to anoint the body of Christ.

(v. 2) It would seem that Nicodemus was trying to be careful, because of his position, and on account of his peers. One might think that he was a coward for coming at night, but at least he came! There are many who have questions, and would like to know the truth, but are not as bold to even come and ask, or to seek out the answers as Nicodemus did. Even many Christians are like Jesus' disciples, who, if they have a question or a problem, will not readily seek counsel, but will keep everything to themselves. The Bible teaches that a man of understanding will attain unto wise counsels. He will try to grasp what is being preached, or what advice is being given, and he will even go and seek it out, so as to procure wisdom for himself. Oh that there were more like Nicodemus today!

Nicodemus had a problem, in that he was approaching Christ without truly understanding or accepting who He was. We have an indication that there was some pride in him that Jesus wanted to deal with (see verse 10). He acknowledged that Jesus was a good man, a rabbi (teacher) sent from God, and that He had the ability to work miracles. What he had not acknowledged was that Jesus was the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. Until he accepted Who Jesus was, he would have difficulty believing the things that Jesus said (see verses 11 & 12).

(v. 3) Jesus began to target Nicodemus' total ignorance in the matter of regeneration. In order for Nicodemus' eyes to be opened to Who Jesus was, it would be necessary for Jesus to show him the utter ignorance and poverty of his own heart. All the while sinners think that they are ok, and that they understand the basics about religion, they remain un-humbled, and are still blind to the Gospel. It is necessary to point out to people that they are sinners, and on their way to eternal punishment. It is necessary to point out the deficiencies in their religion, and the blind spots in their thinking. It is necessary to bring them face to face with things they have not previously acknowledged or understood. It is not enough to simply add their brand of religion to the melting pot of ecumenical mish-mash. If there is not an understanding of the true facts of the Gospel, then there can be no true conversion.

Nicodemus, being a good Pharisee, hoped and longed for the kingdom of God to be established by the Messiah, and to be found righteous enough to enter into it. Jesus now showed him that without being 'born again', there would be no entering into the coming kingdom. The Bible teaches that without Christ, people are dead in trespasses and sins. The term 'born again' is tossed around these days with little or no understanding among many people who profess to be Christians. Jesus now shows Nicodemus that this spiritual rebirth is: 1. A product of the Holy Spirit; 2. A result of believing on the name of the only begotten Son of God; 3. Turning from sin.

(v. 4) Nicodemus demonstrates ignorance of this truth, but if he had truly understood Ezekiel 11:19, he would not have been so surprised to hear about the concept of a new birth, and man's need for the Holy Spirit to work a miracle in his heart.

(v. 5) 'Born of water' could possibly refer to physical birth, in which a child is born in a sack of water, or it could refer to the repentance ministry of John the Baptist. Edwin A. Blum comments: 'John the Baptist had stirred the nation by his ministry and stress on repentance... "Water" would remind Nicodemus of the Baptist's emphasis.' (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Edited by Walvoord and Zuck; see also Titus 3:5). If this second interpretation is correct, we must not make the mistake of believing that baptism saves a person. It is a work, and simply a picture of a spiritual reality. It is quite likely that Nicodemus was one of those who went to John to be baptised. If Nicodemus already understood something about repentance, then Jesus was showing him that it is also necessary to believe on the name of the Son of God (verse 36), in order to have eternal life (spiritual rebirth). I have vacillated between the two interpretations over time, but at the moment I tend to think that 'born of water' refers to physical birth, especially seeing that there is no reference to water baptism in the immediate context, and that what Nicodemus says in verse 4 seems to parallel the first part of what Jesus says in verse 5.

(vv. 6-7) Jesus didn't want Nicodemus to think that being born again had anything to do with fleshly birth. Being regenerated by the Holy Spirit has a spiritual result, and is not physical. However, Jesus tells Nicodemus not to marvel or be surprised at what he is saying. To better demonstrate the reality of spiritual rebirth, Jesus gives an illustration from nature.

(v. 8) You cannot see where the wind comes from, or where it goes to, but you can hear it in the trees when it arrives. So it is with the new birth. The Holy Spirit comes silently and does His powerful work of regeneration in a man's heart. The effects of this spiritual rebirth will be evident to the person and others around him, but just like the wind, the springs of the Holy Spirit's activity in a man are invisible and mysterious. It has to be this way, because it is a spiritual thing.

(vv.9-10) It seems that Nicodemus' answer here was inappropriate, and maybe even wilfully stubborn, because Jesus now begins to rebuke him. For all his education, and knowledge in the law of Moses and the prophets, and despite his position of leadership in the Sanhedrin, and his status as a Pharisee and a teacher, he was ignorant of the necessity of a spiritual rebirth. This would have been humbling for Nicodemus to hear, but it seems that his pride needed to be humbled.

(v. 11) Nicodemus would not receive something that he could not see. He was not willing to simply receive what Jesus said as the truth. He had not yet acknowledged that Jesus was the Son of God, and was therefore going to continue trusting His own intellect and rationality over and above what this well-meaning rabbi had to say. Until a person gets to the point where they are willing to acknowledge that God's Word is the truth, it will be very difficult to get anywhere with them. Until we accept that God's Word is the final and right answer, we will always be looking for a loophole, an excuse, and an alternative. Until we are ready to believe that there is a God in Heaven Who has revealed Himself through the Bible, we will not humble ourselves concerning what He says. Just this past week, there were two people that were more willing to talk and argue about the Bible than to

listen (even though they had read little or nothing of the Scriptures), and so I challenged them to read the Bible for themselves. God gave His Word, and He alone is the One Who can reveal truth to the heart.

(v. 12) The natural man cannot understand the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14), and he will continue to remain ignorant, until he acknowledges the preliminary truths that God reveals to Him in Creation, Conscience, and the Gospel. So it is with Christians. If we do not acknowledge and agree with what God is trying to show us right now, then we will become stalled and stuck in our walk with God. God wants to lead us higher and higher in our relationship with Him, and in our knowledge of truth, but we cannot if we don't accept what He's trying to show us right now.

(v. 13) Jesus had the authority and knowledge to speak about spiritual and Heavenly realities, because He is in Heaven. Even then, He was in Heaven, in that His Spirit, the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ) is omnipresent (everywhere at once). Nicodemus was being confronted with Jesus own Heavenly character and origin. Jesus begins to show him that the Son of man is also the Son of God.

(vv. 14-15) When Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21:9), it would have seemed like a foolish thing to look upon it, but all who did so were recovered of the deadly snake bites. In the same way, the preaching of the cross (Christ was lifted up on it) is to them that perish foolishness, but to those who believe, it is the power of God unto salvation and eternal life. The brazen serpent graphically demonstrates the truth of Galatians 3:13 and 2 Corinthians 5:21.

(v. 16) Jesus now spoke about the great love of the Father, whereby He sent His Son. Notice that the distinguishing feature of love is that it gives. Jesus showed that believing on the Son of God is the only way to escape eternal destruction ('perish' refers to this; see also 2 Thess 1:9) and obtain eternal life.

(v. 17) Jesus revealed the great mercy of God in sending His Son, not to destroy, but to save. In later life, think how much this must have meant to Nicodemus, to have a conversation in person with the Saviour of the world!

(v. 18) Jesus drove home the urgency of the necessity of salvation, showing the present condemnation of all who have not trusted in Christ.

(v. 19) This is not simply a statement that is true about some people. It is 'the condemnation' which is true of all the unsaved: Despite the light that men have, they choose darkness, because they want to hold on to their sinful ways. This applies to the criminal in jail. It applies to the self-righteous church attendee. It applies to all the unsaved.

(v. 20) Why is it that people don't go to the Bible, or go searching for ultimate truth and answers? It is because they basically want to continue to do evil, and to live life their own way. They know that if they come anywhere near Biblical preaching, or serious minded Christians, it will show them up, and they will not feel comfortable about that. Therefore, like cockroaches, they prefer to stay in the darkness. It facilitates their comfort, and their own desires. It doesn't challenge them or confront

them. It can be the same way, to a certain degree, with Christians who are not walking with the Lord.

(v. 21) If pleasing God is the most important thing in my life, then I will do what it takes to learn how to do that. I will expose myself to preaching that challenges me to go further in my walk with God, and to increase in fruitfulness, and not to stay in the spiritually cold regions, and not to slump into the slough of despond or the enchanted ground of sleepiness and slothfulness. I will seek for God Himself to break me of my stubborn ways, and to show me my blind spots. I will cry out to Him to search and try me, and to see if there be any wicked way in me, and to lead me in the way everlasting. That is what it means to be serious about coming to the truth and about walking in the light.

(vv. 22-24) After spending some time in the capital of Judea, Jesus and His disciples now headed out into the rural areas of the same province, and under Jesus' supervision, his disciples began to baptise (see 4:2). At the same time, John the Baptist was baptising in a different place called Aenon, near to Salim. John's time in the public limelight was now drawing to a close, He would soon be imprisoned by Herod, and then beheaded.

(v. 25) It seems that there were some Jews who were been arguing with John's disciples about the necessity of John's baptism, seeing that the Jews had their own ceremonial purifications. Their argument may have been something like this: 'We Jews already have our own ceremonial purifications. Why do we need to add John's baptism to this? And besides, Jesus also has now begun to baptise, so who would we choose if we did want to accept the ordinance? How can you be sure that John's baptism is the best one, seeing that most are now going to Jesus and His disciples to be baptized?'

(v. 26) Those who identified as John's disciples came away from the dispute much disturbed, and were anxious to see John vindicated in the matter, and so they complained to John about the current state of affairs. They evidently had not grasped the true significance of John's ministry, and had revered the man more than his message. This is a common problem today. People will focus more on the preacher than they will upon the truth which he speaks. Ezekiel experienced this: (Ezekiel 33:32) 'And, lo, thou *art* unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.' The people had enjoyed John's ministry. Maybe they liked the image of an austere prophet. Maybe they liked his long beard. Maybe his unusual clothes caught their attention. Maybe the nostalgia of the wilderness filled their imaginations with awe. Maybe the intrigue of something new and interesting was what they were after. We don't know what it was. But whatever it was, the message had not truly reached their heart, for they were not yet followers of the Messiah.

These professed followers of John were yet carnally minded. They were like those in the church at Corinth who wanted to be exclusive followers of either Paul, Apollos, or Cephas. They did not realise that John was simply there to point them to Christ.

(v. 27) John showed that any true ministry is from God. The success in John's ministry was to be attributed to God's power. Likewise, the success of Jesus' ministry was to be attributed to Heaven

also. Assuming that a preacher's life and doctrine is in line with the truth, then there is no use becoming jealous or insecure simply because someone else seems to have a greater following.

(v. 28) It is evident that they had not taken John's previous statements in chapter 1 seriously. What were they truly looking for, if they were not attracted to the person of Christ? Why had they not become avid disciples of Christ?

(vv. 29-33) The bridegroom and his friend: 'The allusion is to a custom among the Jews, who, at their marriages, used to have persons both on the side of the bride, and of the bridegroom, as companions that attended each, and were called their friends...' (John Gill). John identified as the friend of Jesus, rejoicing to stand and listen to Him speak. It was John's joy to see Christ come and take His people as a bride for Himself. John was only able to speak about Heavenly things only by way of earthly and low comparisons, and limited knowledge, but Christ was from Heaven, above all, and able to reveal Heavenly things to men (see verses 12 and 13). It was a stern rebuke that John gave in verse 32, designed to make them receptive to Jesus' testimony. The person who receives Jesus' testimony 'hath set to his seal that God is true'. 'The meaning here is, has solemnly attested and confirmed the statement "God is true"' (Vincent's Word Studies).

(vv. 34-26) Jesus words are the very words of God. He had the Spirit's filling without measure. He is the only begotten of the Father, and is the inheritor of all things. All judgment is committed to Him (John 5:22). All power is given unto Him. It is with Jesus Christ that men must reckon if they want to come to the Father. They must own Him as Lord and Saviour if they will have eternal life. God's wrath rests upon all who reject the Son.

Chapter 3 Questions

1. *Nicodemus was a _____, and being a _____, he was no doubt a _____ man. This same Nicodemus was verbally _____ for defending Christ in the council, and also brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes to _____ the body of Christ.
2. *Nicodemus had a _____, in that he was _____ Christ without truly understanding or _____ who He was.
3. If there is not an _____ of the true _____ of the Gospel, then there can be no true _____.
4. Jesus showed Nicodemus that spiritual rebirth is:
 - a. A product of the _____
 - b. A _____ of _____ on the name of the only begotten Son of God.
 - c. _____ from sin
5. Being _____ by the Holy Spirit has a spiritual _____, and is not _____.
6. The _____ of spiritual rebirth will be _____ to the person and others around him, but just like the wind, the springs of the Holy Spirit's _____ in a man are _____ and mysterious.
7. Until believers accept that God's Word is the _____ and _____ answer, they will always be looking for a loophole, an _____, and an alternative.
8. God wants to lead us higher and higher in our _____ with Him, and in our knowledge of _____, but it cannot happen if we don't _____ what He's trying to show us right now.
9. *The brazen serpent _____ demonstrates the truth of _____ and _____.

10. Despite the _____ that unsaved people have, they _____ darkness, because they _____ to hold on to their sinful ways.
11. If _____ God is the most _____ thing in my life, then I will do what it takes to _____ how to do that.
12. It seems that there were some _____ who were been arguing with _____ disciples about the necessity of John's _____, seeing that the Jews had their own _____ purifications.
13. *They evidently had not grasped the true _____ of John's ministry, and had revered the _____ more than his _____. This is a common _____ today.
14. These professed followers of John showed that his _____ had not truly reached their _____, for they were not yet _____ of the Messiah.
15. 'The allusion is to a _____ among the Jews, who, at their marriages, used to have persons both on the side of the bride, and of the bridegroom, as _____ that attended each, and were called their _____...' (John Gill).
16. '...Hath set to his seal that God is true': 'The meaning here is, *has solemnly* _____ and _____ the statement " _____ "' (Vincent's Word Studies).

Chapter 4: Jesus Ministers in Samaria and Galilee

Jesus Mission to Samaria (vv. 1-42)

(vv. 1-3) Jesus was careful about His ministry. It was not the right time for Him to be put to death by the Jewish leaders, and He knew the Father had more for Him to do. His fame had increased with the rumour that he made and baptised more disciples than John. However, it was not Jesus, but His disciples who were baptising. At any rate, it was expedient for Jesus to depart into Galilee.

(v. 4) Unlike many orthodox Jews, Jesus chose to pass through Samaria on His way to Galilee. Jews were in the habit of taking an alternate route through Perea, east of the Jordan River, in order to avoid any kind of contact with the Samaritans. The Samaritans were a mixed race of Jews and foreigners, and did not believe that the Messiah would be of the line of David, for they rejected all the Old Testament, except for the Pentateuch (the first 5 books, written by Moses). They believed the Messiah would be like Moses, in accordance with Deuteronomy 18:15-18. They felt that Mount Gerizim was the place men ought to worship, and not Jerusalem.

(vv. 5-9) At about 6 p.m. Jesus sat down upon a well outside the city of Sychar, tired from walking. The disciples went into the city to buy food. A Samaritan woman came to the well, and Jesus asked her for a drink. To understand her blunt reply, we do well to remember the national antagonism between Jews and Samaritans. For example, 'A Rabbinic law of A.D. 66 stated that Samaritan women were considered as continually menstruating and thus unclean' (Edwin A. Blum, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, edited by Walvoord and Zuck).

(v. 10) The woman did not know the gift of God. In other words, she did not understand God's desire for her to have eternal life. Here was an individual who had been seeking fulfilment, but had not found it. She had not yet recognised the Fountain of living waters, and had been using her own hewn-out, broken cisterns to satiate her thirsty soul. The Son of God placed Himself in her path, and began to expose the blindness and barrenness of her heart. This is what God does. He confronts the fainting soul with its own need, and persists in doing so, unrecognised, and unappreciated. The woman would willingly have ignored Him, but He would not ignore her.

God wills to give His gift. His gift is eternal life. He does not simply wait for people to seek Him out. He confronts them with their desperate need. He knows their parched condition. He knows that they would fain drink from muddied waters. He sees their weary endeavours to quench their thirsty souls. And so He places Himself in front of the desolate individual, that he or she might recognise Him as the Living Rock.

Jesus has power to give eternal life to people (John 10:28; 17:2), which is the water spoken of here. Notice that the water is living. The Hebrew idea for 'springing' is the same word for 'living', and is used in that sense in Genesis 26:19. Other key passages that speak about the imagery of water as life, and God as the Fountain include: Psalm 36:8; Jeremiah 2:13; 7:13; John 6:35; 7:37-38; Rev 7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17.

(vv. 11-12) Jacob's well has been identified by archaeologists as one of the deepest in Palestine, and so it is truly deep. But Jesus didn't need a rope or a pitcher to give eternal life to this woman, for He is almighty! Truly, He is powerful enough to do this, although the woman didn't realise it at the time.

(vv. 13-14) 'Drinketh' in verse 13 refers to a repeated action, whereas another form of the same Greek word in verse 14 refers to a single action. The thirst-quenching properties of the well's physical water would only be short lived, and the drinking would have to be repeated. The woman would become thirsty again, and would need to drink again. However, the water that Jesus would give would satisfy eternally, for it would be an eternal supply within the individual, causing him to drink continuously. Sadly, Christians who profess to have this life-giving water, cease to drink of it as they should. In other words, they neither understand nor enjoy the eternal life which they possess. Jesus spoke of it as something that saturates and satiates the whole soul and the whole life. How can we conceive of it as anything less? Note the following words of James Hudson Taylor, missionary to China (*Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, p. 182, Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor):

'Do not let us change the Saviour's words [he often said in later years]. It is not 'Whosoever has drunk,' but "Whosoever drinketh." It is not of one isolated draught He speaks, or even many, but of the continuous habit of the soul. In John 6:35, also, the full meaning is, "He who is habitually coming to me shall by no means hunger, and he who is believing on me shall by no means thirst." The habit of coming in faith to Him is incompatible with unmet hunger and thirst...'

(vv. 15-18) When the woman expressed that she wanted this water, Jesus then began to deal with her sin of fornication, and exposed her marital history and present status. God is holy, and we cannot approach to Him without repenting of those things that grieve Him. However, He puts His finger on those very things that are standing between us and Him, so that we can come to Him, either for salvation (if lost), or for fellowship (if saved, but harbouring some sin in our lives). It is a mercy if God puts His finger on something in your life. It shows that He loves you, and wants to bring you into relationship with Himself.

(vv. 19-23) The woman raised the question of which was the right place to worship God – Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem. Jesus showed her that earthly places of worship were not the point. The temple in Jerusalem was soon to be destroyed by the Romans. The veil into the Holy Place was to be supernaturally torn when Jesus hung on the cross, atoning for mankind's sin. What ultimately matters to God is the new and living way in Christ (Heb 10:20). She did not yet understand that Jesus would die for sin, but Jesus was bringing her to the point of realisation that He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). The point was not, 'Where should people worship?' The bigger concern was that people should worship in spirit and in truth. What does that mean? It means that God is interested in worship which comes from a man's spirit, not only in what he does on the outside by way of formal 'worship'. God is looking for truthful hearts, not hypocrites, to fellowship with Him. Other references which point to this same truth are: Psalm 51:16-17; 69:30-31; Micah 6:6-8. Jesus was often rebuking the religious leaders of his day for being highly polished on the outside, while they harboured sin on the inside.

(v. 24) God is a Spirit, and so He cannot be worshipped as if material things are all that matter to Him. Being a Spirit, God is primarily interested in what is going on in man's spirit when he worships. See comments on the phrase 'in spirit and in truth' for the previous verse.

(v. 25) Here we see a wonderful demonstration of God's foreknowledge and predestination. This woman had been searching for something to quench her inner thirst for a long time probably, but it was God who found her, for she had very little understanding or knowledge of Him. As she trudged out to the well, she did not know that God was leading her weary feet to the very One Who would give her the water of life. She went to draw water from Jacob's well, but returned with the living water from Jacob's God. Her statement in verse 25 was foreknown from eternity past, beautifully intersecting the appointed moment of realisation.

(v. 26) Jesus spoke, and God had so prepared her heart that she was ready to receive the truth.

(v. 27) The disciples were amazed that He was speaking to the woman, primarily because she was a Samaritan, and a woman at that. The Jewish rabbis felt that Samaritan women were perpetually unclean. The disciples wondered what the woman could possibly want, talking to Jesus. They also wondered why He was talking with her. The whole event did not make any sense to their carnal and short-sighted mindset. However, they must have felt that something was going on which was beyond their depth. And indeed, it was at that time.

(vv. 28-33) What a sight, to see the woman stumbling away in a daze, and forgetting to take her water pot. Here was a clear testimony to Christ's power in the lives of individuals. Not only so, but her testimony was received with interest by the men in the city. What the disciples saw must have been quite perplexing at the time, but if they had any desire to get to the bottom of what was happening, they stifled it with what seemed to be a more pressing concern: 'Master, eat.' But Jesus was not at all inclined to humour them in their carnal mindset. He was thoroughly thrilled and excited about what was happening in the life of the woman. Truly, the disciples had not yet learned the satisfaction of doing the Father's will, nor did they share Jesus' consuming passion to be about His Father's business. It was as meat to Him to see the salvation of eternal souls. The disciples, however, saw food to be of greater interest at that time. The extravagant, 'all-out', sacrificial service of zealous Christians will be incomprehensible to the carnally minded Christian. He or she will think, 'How can anybody be so consumed with such things?'

(v. 34) Jesus' satisfaction was two-fold: 1. To do the will of the Father Who had sent Him. 2. To work until it was completed. This reflects upon an Old Testament prophecy of Jesus: 'He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth...' (Isa 42:4). Throughout His whole life, Christ focused like a lazer beam on exactly what the Father would have Him to do.

(v. 35) 'There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest' may have been a common saying, which indicated that there was a period of time that must transpire before reaping. Jesus wanted for the disciples not to be complacent or apathetic in this matter. He pointed out that there were people whose hearts God had touched, who were ready to turn to the truth. Likewise, we must lift our eyes and look on the fields, knowing that God has already prepared a work for us to do. There is a harvest to be gathered, and we must be busy gathering it until the Lord returns. 2 Peter 3:9: 'The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.'

(v. 36) We see from this Scripture that there will be a reward for the soul winner. The book of Daniel also says: Daniel 12:3: 'And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.' The work of the soul-winner is an eternal work. It is something that will never be burned up.

(v. 37) Sometimes we have to sow, and sometimes we are enabled to reap. Other times, we are simply ploughing the ground in preparation for someone else to sow the seed later on. Whether we sow or reap, we are part of Christ's harvest program, and in the end we will all rejoice together to see the wonderful work that we have been enabled to be part of. Psalms 126:5-6: 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves *with him*.'

(v. 38) The disciples had been participating in the Lord's harvest (see 4:2), but it seems that for all their work, they still did not have a love for souls, or an understanding of the great privilege it was to be engaged in that work. This was not to come until after their self-righteous pride had been humbled in forsaking the Lord in the garden, and then after they had been lifted up by His restoring grace to forgiveness, acceptance, and useful service. Jesus is now explaining to them what great sacrifices others have made to make the ministry of the disciples possible, and how they were greatly privileged to be just a small part of the Lord's great harvest work.

(vv. 39-40) The woman's testimony was greatly used of God to turn many to Christ. The hearts of the Samaritans had been prepared – probably a great surprise to the disciples. Jesus and His men were able to stay and minister for two days. This is a great testimony to Jesus' power to bring peace into men's hearts. Ephesians 2:17 'And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.' Here was the Prince of peace at work, reconciling men to Himself and to the Father.

(vv. 41-42) As Jesus stayed and taught, many others believed, who had previously been sceptical of the woman's claims. What a thrilling confession to come from the lips of the Samaritans: '...we have heard *him* ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.'

(vv. 43-45) Jesus returned into Galilee, but not into His home town of Nazareth. Matthew records that the people of Nazareth were offended in him, because they were so familiar with him, and could not imagine that one who had grown up with them should now instruct them (Matt 13:53-58). But the problem ultimately didn't boil down to familiarity, but rather to the hearts of men. Familiarity was merely the catalyst for their rejection of Him – not the reason. And even though others in Galilee seemed to receive Him (having seen him at the feast – John 2:23-25), our Lord's later assessment of those people was one of lamentation over their hard-hearted unbelief (Matt 11:20-24). People may appreciate a preacher because he is from a far place, and therefore interesting and novel. But if people love the pearls of truth, they will value them even if they be found in a toad's head. The Lord and the prophets demonstrated love and faithfulness, in continuing to preach to those who would not receive them. Moses experienced a cold reception when he came to deliver his people from Egypt. It was ultimately God who opened their eyes, and vindicated His prophet.

(vv. 46-47) Here is one of the many instances in which Jesus looks past the crowd to see the heart of the individual. Much of the synoptic Gospel material records interactions that Jesus had with individuals. Here we see that sickness and suffering come to all, including the rich. Neither position nor acquisition can exempt a person from the honest and hard questions of life. This man had been brought to a place of need, for he saw that Jesus alone could provide the solution. He did not yet realise that Jesus was the solution to His lost and miserable condition, and was ready to release him from the bonds of self-reliance, and into His own perfect rest.

(vv. 48-50) It is recorded in Exodus 17:7 that the children of Israel complained in the wilderness and ‘...tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?’ Believer, have you wearied the LORD, by insisting that His presence with you should necessitate some particular change in circumstances, or some special manifestation of noticeable power? As with the nobleman in the Gospel of John, belief in the person, character, love, wisdom, and ability of God is the issue here. Is God powerful to bless? Truly, but we must not seek for signs and wonders before we will rest in Him.

God allows us to come into various straits and perplexities in order to knock us off our high horse of self-reliance. Then we seek His help, because we are convinced that there is no other solution. But the answer may not be in the particular method we expect, and whereas our desire may be a certain solution, His objective will be to reveal His faithfulness. If our Lord is good and powerful, then why must we twist His arm, prayerfully urging prayers of panic and complaint? The nobleman felt that time was running out, and that Jesus talk about ‘believing’ was irrelevant to the situation at hand. His whip-lash response only confirmed the truth of Jesus’ words. Little did he understand that God’s whole intent in bringing him into this crisis was to strip away his scales of blindness, and to lead him into the light of faith.

As this nobleman, we too often seek rest in the self-made certainty of autonomy, but this is always elusive, because we are created to be dependent. The God of peace will grant rest to the man whose mind is stayed on Him, because he trusts in Him. If Jesus would come at that moment, the nobleman thought everything might be alright. The journey was approximately 25 kilometres, and the man was talking to Jesus at about 7 pm in the evening.

One might suppose that the nobleman was ready to begin the long journey back to Capernaum with Jesus right at that moment. This was not the way Jesus intended. He would prepare the man’s heart in readiness for the morrow. He would give him a word to believe, until his faith was confirmed by sight. The man chose to believe the trustworthiness of Jesus’ claim, and rested in that word that night. In this way, faith began to dawn, howbeit saving faith would not shoot forth until the next day. We must believe the word that God gives us today, if we would see greater things tomorrow.

(v. 51) Here we see God’s mercy. He will not make the trusting soul wait longer than necessary. He is gentle to the helpless individual that casts all on him with feeble confidence. He sent the servants to meet the nobleman. Was his faith beginning to falter? Was he struggling to face the unknown? How tender God is, even to the wavering.

(v. 52) Resting upon Christ's word had aroused a deep desire to know the genuineness of Christ's person and claims. It was not enough to know that his son was well. He must know if this man Jesus was true. Would we have our problems fixed, and yet know nothing more of the God who delivered us? 'Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men!' (Psalm 107:8). Saving faith was borne; faith in the Son of God. The intent of the miracle had been accomplished.

Chapter 4 Questions

1. *The Samaritans were a _____ race of Jews and foreigners, and did not believe that the Messiah would be of the line of _____, for they rejected all the Old Testament, except for the _____. They believed the Messiah would be like _____. They also felt that Mount _____ was the place men ought to worship, and not Jerusalem.
2. God _____ the barrenness and _____ of our own hearts. He _____ the fainting soul with its own _____, and persists in doing so, _____, and _____.
3. *Sadly, Christians who profess to have the water of eternal life, _____ to drink of it as they should. They neither _____ nor _____ the eternal life which they possess.
4. Concerning Jesus' statement in John 4:14, James Hudson Taylor wrote: 'It is not of one _____ draught He speaks, or even _____, but of the continuous _____ of the soul.'
5. It is a _____ if God puts His _____ on something in your life. It shows that He loves you, and wants to bring you into _____ with Himself.
6. God is interested in worship which comes from a man's _____, not only in what he does on the outside by way of formal '_____'. God is looking for truthful hearts, not _____, to fellowship with Him.
7. The Samaritan woman went to draw water from Jacob's _____, but returned with the _____ water from Jacob's _____.
8. Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman did not make any _____ to the disciples' _____ and _____ mindset.

9. *The disciples had not yet learned the _____ of doing the Father's will, nor did they share Jesus' consuming _____ to be about His Father's business. The extravagant, '_____', sacrificial service of _____ Christians will be _____ to the carnally minded Christian.
10. Throughout His whole life, Christ _____ like a _____ on exactly what the Father would have Him to do.
11. The work of the soul-winner is an _____ work. It is something that will never be _____ up.
12. Even though the disciples had been _____ with Christ, they still did not have a _____ for souls, or an understanding of the great _____ it was to be engaged in that work.
13. As Jesus stayed in Samaria and taught, many others _____, who had previously been _____ of the woman's claims.
14. When the people of Nazareth rejected Jesus, the problem wasn't ultimately _____, but rather the _____ of men. Familiarity was merely the _____ for their rejection of Him.
15. Neither _____ nor _____ can exempt a person from the honest and hard questions of life.
16. We must not seek for signs and wonders before we will _____ in Him.
17. *The journey from Cana to Capernaum was approximately _____ kilometres, and the man was talking to Jesus at about _____ in the evening.
18. We must believe the word that God gives us _____, if we would see greater things _____.

19. Resting upon Christ's word had aroused a deep _____ in the nobleman to know the _____ of Christ's person and claims.

Chapter 5: The Impotent Man Healed, and Jesus Contends with the Jews about His Divine Origin

(vv. 1-4) The miracle: Bethesda means 'house of kindness'. As we examine this account, we must not begin to believe that physical 'healing is in the atonement' or that it is God's will for everyone to be healed, as many Pentecostals teach. This miracle was performed to demonstrate who Jesus was, and this is evident from the teaching of Jesus that follows.

We believe the angel that stirred the waters to be an evil angel, for God never requires us to be stronger or better than others in order to be blessed, and in this case, the situation evidently required one to be faster and more agile in getting to the waters for healing. Like these multitudes, the whole world lies in a state of expectancy. They wait for the thing that will transform them from a state of despair, anxiety, and frustration, into an elusive state of peace, joy, and rest. The hope of unjust men perishes. The situation reminds us of the many who come to Pentecostal meetings to be healed, but are either found to be 'lacking in faith' or are mistakenly or deceptively pronounced 'healed' and are later found to be in declining health or even worse, dead.

(vv. 5-6) Personal sin may have had something to do with the man's condition (see v. 14), but this doesn't mean that we are to assume this to be the cause of other physical infirmities or sickness, even in most of the instances we come across. So, although we speak of the man's physical condition, I shall also use the text to examine Christ's dealings with mankind's spiritual condition. In doing this, I do not wish to confuse physical conditions with spiritual conditions.

The man had been in a crippled condition for thirty eight years, probably spanning the prime of his life. Applying this to the spiritual realm, we could say that Jesus comes to spiritual conditions that seem chronic, and delivers people. The duration of a spiritually stunted condition in no way necessitates the continuance of that condition in a believer. Stubbornness will serve to prolong the condition, yes. But the question the Lord puts to us is 'Wilt thou...?' Are we willing to take God's hand by faith, and let Him lead us up and out of our despair and sin, our anxiety and self-reliance, our pride and fearfulness?

(v. 7) Such is our natural tendency to live independently of God, that we must needs be brought to see that there is no other help for us, but in God Himself. After all the strivings of self-effort have availed nothing, after the struggles and strains of natural strength and ability have broken down, and God's people have worn themselves out under the death-work of the cross, and when a man eventually ceases from his pride and carnal assertiveness, and lies in the dust, despairing of himself, the Lord Himself sees that the way is clear for Him to do His work.

(v. 8) Along with the authoritative commands of God, He gives His grace to obey.

(vv. 10-12) The Jews' enquiry: They demonstrated an utter disregard for the operation of God's hands (Psalm 28:5). They were not overjoyed to see the man healed, but were rather jealous for the attention that the miracle had drawn to Jesus (Hos 6:6).

(vv. 13-14) Jesus second exchange with the man: 'Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.' It may be that the man's condition had been incurred by personal sin, and that Jesus was concerned that the man be careful now in his walk. Although we need not assume it to be so in most cases, it is

a well-attested fact of Scripture that infirmity and sickness can be the result of personal sin. The following Scriptures point to this: Psalm 32:3-4; Psalm 107:17-18; Jas 5:14-16; 1 Cor 11:29-30. If we have been saved, then we must not forget God's deliverances in our lives – e.g. deliverance from our sin, the eternal punishment for sin, and the futile lifestyle of sin. We must not squander our redeemed lives on sinful and selfish living (1 Peter 4:1-3).

(vv. 15-16) From here to the end of the chapter, we see Jesus' confrontation with the Jews. He teaches them who He is: His relationship and equality with the Father, His power and authority received from the Father, and His deity. Finally, He brings an indictment against them for their unbelief. This hard-hearted unbelief is here demonstrated at the outset by their desire to kill Him.

(vv. 17-19) Jesus' relationship and equality with the Father: In response to the accusation of healing on the Sabbath day, Jesus said, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' In other words, if His Father had a right to work, then so did He. This made the Jews mad, because they understood Him to be claiming equality with God, which of course He was. Jesus simply pointed them back to the Father, because it was under the Father's direction and will that He had performed this miracle. Rather than avoiding the point at hand, Jesus pressed it. He insisted that the Son performed the works of the Father upon earth, and would do even greater works than the one they had just learned about. He pointed to the close relationship between the Father and the Son which necessitated this intimate working.

(vv. 21-30) Jesus' power and authority received from the Father: One example of 'greater works' was Jesus ability to raise the dead, which we see elsewhere in the Gospel accounts. Not only so, but He quickens or regenerates those who believe on Him (John 1:12; 10:28; 11:25; Ephesians 2:1). Jesus began to unfold to them the administrative power which the Father had committed into His hand. Joseph (an OT type of Christ) had been victimised by his brothers, but at the last they stood before none other than he to be judged and brought to account for their wrong-doings. So it is with Christ. Those who reject Him as Saviour will face Him as Judge. This is what Jesus was showing the Jews at this point. Men's acceptance or rejection of the Son of God is proof of their acceptance or rejection of the Father.

With powerful authority, Jesus stuck to His line of argument, and set the truth unmistakably before their eyes. It was with Him that they had to deal, and it was their response to Him that determined their destiny: everlasting life, or eternal condemnation (judgment).

In one sense, these Jews might be considered the 'dead' which were hearing the voice of the Son of God. However, they were unwilling to truly 'hear', and so would not live. However, we know there is coming a time when this Scripture will begin to be fulfilled in the rapture of the church-age saints (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16). We will hear the voice of the Son of God, as he descends from Heaven to the clouds to meet us in the air.

So we see that Jesus has power both to confer life, and authority to execute judgment. As the Son of man, he is qualified to exercise judgment, just as His manhood also qualifies Him to be the Saviour of mankind.

Once again, in verses 28-30, Jesus spoke in literal terms of the future resurrection. The 'resurrection of life' and the 'resurrection of damnation' reminds us of the prophecy in Daniel 12:2: 'And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.' The context in which Daniel wrote this prophecy was a Jewish one, and he didn't foresee the rapture of the church age saints, but rather prophesied of the resurrections of OT saints and the unregenerate of all time, that are to take place at a later time in the future. Likewise, Jesus was still speaking to an OT audience, seeing he had not yet gone to the cross (which inaugurated the New Covenant (or New Testament) times that we live in today.

(vv. 31-37) Jesus' deity witnessed to: If Jesus had no other witness to His deity than Himself, His witness would be false. God has provided that there should be other witnesses to the deity of Christ (see also 1 John 5:6-11). One of these was John the Baptist, prophesied in Isaiah 40:3. All the Jews knew about John, and Jesus mentioned him, not only because the Jews all knew about him, but also because they had sent to enquire of John. Jesus was simply reminding them of the testimony which they had rejected. At one time they had actually enjoyed John's preaching, and the truth which he proclaimed. What a wonderful statement on the life of John! But John's fellow countrymen had not taken his message seriously, and were in grave danger of losing what light they had seen (see Hebrews 6:4-8). Notice that while Jesus contended strongly with these Jews, his stated desire for them was 'that ye might be saved'.

But there was a greater witness than John. That witness was in the very works that Jesus performed on the earth. They were proof of His Divine origin. The Father also has given ample proof to all men of the Divine Sonship of Jesus (in the Scriptures, in the conscience, by sending the Holy Spirit to illuminate, by bearing witness at His baptism, and by working miracles through Him).

(vv. 37-47) Jesus' indictment of the Jews: Jesus had been with them, and yet the Jews had not recognised in His voice and in His person the image of the Father (see also John 14:9). The fact that they rejected the One sent by the Father showed that God's words were not treasured in their hearts. If we truly treasure God's words, we will also treasure the Word – the Logos, the revelation of God to mankind. If you don't enjoy closeness with Jesus Christ, ask yourself whether you enjoy closeness with the Scriptures. For, as He said in verse 39, '...They are they which testify of me.'

Part of the indictment was that these men were not willing to come to Jesus and receive eternal life. 'Wilt thou...?' was the question put to the impotent man. 'Whosoever will' is the open invitation of the Gospel. God will not force a man to believe against His will. He has a choice.

Jesus began to talk about the honour that men seek and receive. The Son of God had no ambition. By speaking of His deity, He was not seeking honour for Himself. Neither was he ever gratified by the cheap honour of miracle-gazing crowds. Indeed, the only kind of honour that was worthy of Him was not forthcoming. His contending with the Jews in the present context was rather proof that they had no love or respect for the One Who had sent Him. These men did not love the truth, and they did not love God. If they did, they would have honoured Him whom the Father had sent. This was the point Jesus wanted to make. They were of the world, and were willing to listen to any who spoke from the seat of the pride of life. But they were not willing to hear someone sent by the Father.

The history of their forefathers in the wilderness also reveals a generation of hard hearts and dull ears. Moses spoke of Jesus. See the following references: Exodus 20:18-21; Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Hebrews 3:10.

Chapter 5 Questions

1. Bethesda means '_____'.
2. Like these _____, the whole world lies in a state of _____.
3. *The _____ of a spiritually stunted _____ in no way necessitates the _____ of that condition in a believer.
4. Such is our natural _____ to live _____ of God, that we must needs be brought to see that there is no other _____ for us, but in God Himself.
5. Along with the authoritative _____ of God, He gives His _____ to _____.
6. *It is a well-attested _____ of Scripture that infirmity and _____ can be the result of personal _____.
7. Jesus performed the _____ of the _____ upon earth.
8. It was with Jesus that the Jews had to _____, and it was their _____ to Him that determined their _____.
9. Fill in the blanks in Daniel 12:2: 'And many of them that _____ in the _____ of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting _____, and some to _____ *and* everlasting _____.'
10. John's fellow countrymen had not taken his message seriously, and were in _____ danger of _____ what _____ they had seen.
11. *If we truly treasure God's _____, we will also treasure the Word – the _____, the revelation of God to mankind.

12. Jesus' _____ with the Jews was _____ that they had no _____ or respect for the One Who had sent Him.

Chapter 6: Jesus feeds the 5,000, and teaches that He is the Bread of Life

(vv. 1-14) –

(v. 15) Jesus would take no short cuts to fame and power. Nor would He become a bread-king for lustful multitudes. The believer ought not to stoop to pleasing people's lusts in order to win them to Christ. He must insist on a love for the truth for the truth's sake. If any would be a fisher of men, he must see whether people love the words of life or no. God looks for a relationship with those He created, and is in true earnest until He finds it.

Loneliness was what the Son of man experienced, for He sought those who would truly seek after God, and found none. Believer, does the Son of God experience loneliness because of your neglect of Him? I wonder if He does. Surely it troubles Him. Surely it bothers Him. Do you seek Him for little more than what He can do to meet your desires and whims? If so, then His existence in your soul must be one of sufferance, although He loves you dearly. Even so, Jesus is not alone, for He turns to fellowship with His Father in the mountain.

(vv. 16-17) Surely it would have been for the disciples' strength to be up on that mountain with Jesus also. Had they not come apart with the intention of resting a while? Why, as Matthew records, did Jesus constrain the disciples to get into a boat and to depart to the other side? All we can know is what was achieved thereby. Jesus was enabled to pray. The hearts of the multitudes were sifted. But just as needful was the test that the disciples were to undergo on the sea.

(v. 18) As we go about to do the will of God, even that which He has clearly revealed to us, we sometimes find ourselves enveloped very quickly in winds and waves of trouble. It is His appointment for us, however, and He desires to show us that He is the ruler of those very winds and waves. One of the Gospel writers tells us that Jesus saw them toiling in rowing, and so the Lord closely guards each one of His servants as they pass through the tempests of life. It is necessary, however, for the Lord to try the righteous, in order to sanctify and extract them from the stubborn principle of unbelief. It was necessary that they enter into the darkened night of testing, and even that the face of the Son of God should be withdrawn from their immediate gaze for a time. Be sure, though, that when you cannot see Him, His eye has not shifted from you.

(v. 19) After rowing for about six kilometres, they saw Jesus walking to them on the water. According to Matthew and Mark, He came in the fourth watch of the night. 'In the time of our Saviour they divided the night into four watches, the fourth having been introduced by the Romans. These watches consisted of three hours each. The first commenced at six and continued until nine; the second from nine to twelve; the third from twelve to three; and the fourth from three to six. The first was called evening; the second midnight; the third cock-crowing; the fourth morning.' (Barnes)

Mark 6:48 records that He 'would have passed by them.' 'By the course he steered, by the swiftness of his motion, and his seeming negligence of them, it looked as though he intended to have gone by them, and said nothing to them, though this was far from his real design.' (John Gill) God tests the hearts of men, and especially of His own, to see if they will readily believe His goodness, or if they will willingly disbelieve it. The Syrophenician woman was a believing example to follow in this regard (see Mark 7:25-30).

We might think that Jesus walked over the dark waves with a radiance of light emanating from His person. If we are to assume that the sun had not properly risen yet, we must remember that it is improbable that Jesus was shining. Just His bodily appearance upon the waves must have been what surprised the disciples, for it was one thing to see Jesus, but to see Him walking upon the waves was quite another. As they watched Him walking with determination, but seeming indifference to them, it must have seemed an ominous impression. However, they had hardened their hearts concerning the feeding of the multitude (we are told in Mark 6:52), and so were not at an advantage to readily understand and accept His care for them, or His power over the elements at this stage. They were amazed beyond measure.

Wherein have we seen God's powerful hand in our lives, through creation, in salvation, through provision, through deliverance, and through answered prayer? Does our inordinate amazement at God's provision betray the poor condition of our faith in God? Surely it is right to praise God for His answers to prayer, and His deliverances in trouble, but to be amazed beyond measure – this indicates a hardening of the heart toward previous mercies of God. It is so important to reflect upon God's works of the past, if we are to rightly comprehend Him in the present.

(v. 20) The one who walked with inexplicable might upon the waves was none other than their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Christ Who dwells in you is more powerful than the turbulence of your present circumstance. He can do anything about it that He chooses, but maybe you underestimate His love and power, and maybe you have yet hardened your heart. You must return to the faith of a little child, if you would enjoy His peace. Peter demonstrated such faith at this very event (see Matt 14:28-31), even though he faltered.

(v. 21) Accept Christ's leadership and place in your circumstance. Accept it willingly. You will soon find yourself at the destination of *His* choosing.

(Notes incomplete here)

Chapter 7:

(vv. 3-4) Jesus' brethren demonstrated gross blindness and ignorance about a number of things: 1. They didn't understand the great danger that Jesus was exposing Himself to, and how much he was hated by the Jews, particularly in Judea. 2. They thought carnally about fame and popularity. They thought that Jesus simply desired prominence and fame, and that being the case, they were ready to give Him advice about how to get it. They did not understand that He

was in earnest about bringing glory to His Father alone. 3. They didn't believe that their elder brother was the Son of God, and the messiah of Israel.

(v. 5) What great forbearance on Jesus part, to grow up with siblings who did not even believe that He was the Messiah, the Son of God! What patience, what heaviness of spirit He must have experienced! Surely this singular sorrow must have tainted all of the happy family gatherings, and all of His conversations with them. Truly, He was the older brother, being Mary's firstborn, and as such, He would have held a place of high regard in their hearts. But they did not believe in His essential nature and origin, and so they could never truly enter into that oneness of fellowship which He, no doubt, would have so deeply yearned for. It seems that Joseph must have died early on in Jesus' life, and that being the case, Jesus would have assumed the natural role of family leader. Although natural, at the same time it must have been somewhat awkward for the siblings, given their own spiritual blindness. However, it was as Providence had ordained, and Mary, their dear mother had always treasured the knowledge of her Son's divine origin with wonder. Temper this with her grief concerning Joseph's early death, as well as the sting of seeing that her other children did not acknowledge Jesus' deity or messiah-ship, and we can understand something of the wrenching pain in her heart as she looked up at her firstborn, stretched upon the cruel cross.

(vv. 6-9) Jesus' answer indicated that the divine plan was foreordained, and that to go to the feast at this moment would not be in accordance with that plan. Jesus was in perfect fellowship with the Father, and in perfect obedience to His will. He wanted to show His brethren that they were absolutely insensible to the will of God, revealing that He was a man under authority, whereas they spoke as if they or He could come and go at whim.

He implied that there was great danger to Himself, should He go immediately to the feast. But He wanted them to understand the great nature of this antagonism, of which (it would seem) they had very little idea. The world itself does not understand that it is controlled by an extremely powerful current directed against Christ and His servants. While Jesus spoke gently to his brethren, He wanted them to understand the spirit of the world, the attitude which they themselves imbibed, and whereto it was driving. The reason they had not experienced the force of the world's hatred, was because they were not willing to oppose the sins of the world. Are we willing to testify of this world, that its works are evil? This Jesus' brethren were not willing to do, and so they failed to comprehend the great hatred that the world harboured toward God and righteousness. At best, they could only assume that Jesus was slightly radical in His religious zeal. And so will be the attitude toward all of Christ's devoted servants, who decry the evils of their age.

(v. 9) Jesus had sown the seeds of truth in the hearts of his brethren today. It would not be until another day, that they would believe on him. Did Mary live to see her two sceptical sons, James and Jude, rise to faith in their elder brother, and to excel in ministry endeavour? It is quite likely that she did. Whether or not she lived long enough to read their inspired epistles, we do not know. At that time, we know that they were both willing to call themselves 'servants of Jesus Christ', rather than to boast of being His half-brothers. Dear Christian, learn of the meek and mild Jesus to sow the fruit righteousness in peace, and to wait upon the best timing of Providence for the return of your labours. Those who mock you today may yet be humbled

another day, and may bring to remembrance your patience, love, and sorrow, on their behalf, when they turn to God from their sins.

(vv. 10-14) Jesus was the Master of subtlety and strategy. He was a discerner both of time and judgment. But then notice His boldness is stepping forward, into a place of publicity! If we are walking with our Lord, we will share these characteristics, all the while participating in that holy calm that pervaded everything that He did.

But notice also that He is the Great Divider of men. To some He is a stumbling stone, a rock of offence, but to others He is precious, a tried and true cornerstone. He is not only precious, but He is everything to them. Without Him, mature believers have come to see that they have absolutely nothing. In Him, they have everything. What polar opposites are effected in society, simply because of one's acceptance or refusal of Christ!

(vv. 15-18) Such boldness as Jesus exemplified comes only from above. In a Christian, it is the assurance that what he has learned comes from the Word of God, and has been taught to Him by the Spirit of Christ. As with the learner, so it is with the teacher. If a man has been willing to do the will of God, he shall have a certainty about what he teaches, and will speak with authority and conviction. People will not be able to truly resist the wisdom of what we teach, but they will no doubt try to rationalise away what they want to disregard. This they did with Jesus here. He did not seem to meet their standards of qualification for a rabbi, but they could not deny the wisdom and authority with which He spoke.

Moreover, the people could not understand the selfless spirit behind all of Jesus' actions, although it directed the whole course and effectual nature of His ministry. Such selflessness gives a man boldness, force, and courage. The ulterior motives of power, fame, or popularity do not enshroud such a man. Rather, He is given over entirely to the honour of the Father, and the good of his hearers. Therefore his discourse will be frank and straightforward, and his speech pure and without guile.

Here we see the beauty of the Lord Jesus, in that He sought only the honour and glory of His Father. As a boy, we see His desire to be about His Father's business. As a man, we see His zeal for His Father's temple. And here, as the authoritative Teacher, we see His earnest desire to set forth in uncompromising terms the nature of sin, God's laws, judgment to come, and the ways of righteousness. Truly, it all cost Him greatly. Instead of respecting Him for speaking the truth, men rather hated Him, because He testified against their sins. But it was all to bring honour to His Father, and to finish the work He had been sent to do. He came not to be loved, but rather to point all men to the Father. All men and women who follow in these same steps will be branded as either prideful or stupid, but those who really care about the truth will perceive the voice of Jesus speaking through them.

(vv. 19-20) The people had accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath, and yet they themselves hated Jesus without a cause, thus breaking the sixth commandment. Jesus' purity and straightforwardness of speech exposed the people's sin, and we ought to do the same, though people deny what we say.

(vv. 21-24) Jesus wanted the people to think more carefully before making their judgments. Implicit behind all of this is that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Jesus had come to save men's lives, and not to destroy them. He would have mercy, and not sacrifice.

Jesus' goodness is seen here, in distinction to man's sinful bent towards the letter of the law. Whereas mankind will be quick to adopt rules and laws if they seem to advance his own religious image, he soon finds himself bankrupt when it comes to showing true goodness and mercy. His own perceived 'badge of honour' becomes a rule wherewith he measures all and sundry. But the Son of God did not come parading any such badge of honour. His great humility caused Him to stoop to the rescuing of all kinds of men, not considering His own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved. And in His humility and kindness, He towered over His accusers.

(vv. 25-31) Our Lord knew whereof He spoke, and He knew and was in perfect fellowship with the One Who had sent Him. Once again, we see that this was the undergirding to that wonderful boldness! If you would seek to testify to those around you of God, then you must know Him. You must speak as one who is acquainted with God. You must turn to them as one who has come fresh from His presence. Otherwise your words and ways will fall to the ground like so much spilt water, and men will know that God's unction is somehow missing in your testimony. One who has truly been in communion with the Lord will have a holy peace, a steadfast gravity, and a serene humility, for these are the things that characterise the Saviour. He that has not these things has yet to abide in Him, and to learn of Him. If we would call others to the right, we ourselves must be walking in light of the Lord's own countenance.

(vv. 32-36) While the Pharisees and chief priests sought to extinguish the Light of the world, Jesus in mercy shone brightly. He was in true earnest that they should take note, and give heed to Him. He warned them that the time of opportunity was closing. This is not the talk of one who is panic-struck with terror, and seeks to agitate the crowd into quick decisions. It is the grave and sincere warning of One Who knows the calamity that will come on those who take His warnings lightly. It is with deep, kind, and fatherly concern, and yet at the same time, it is tainted with sorrow, for He knows the end of all men.

Behold the Man of sorrows, as He stands, not in Heaven's high courts, but now with His feet upon the sin-drenched soil of this world. Wickedness swirls around Him, and one might think it would be more effective to thrash the ocean breakers into submission with a whip, than to contend with such sinners! And yet He is not discouraged! He stands His ground, and turns from one sin-hardened heart to the next, sifting them with wisdom and patience, yearning over them with love, and pressing undaunted through all that the Father would have Him to accomplish. His words now stand emblazoned on the minds of generations! O that we might understand the significance of our time, our place, and our moment – every one of us! Though wrestling through the seeming mundane, our stories will stand forever in the mind of the Saviour.

(vv. 37-39) Jesus did not miss the opportunity to show the people what the types meant. The water referred to the abundance of life through the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament times, it had flowed from the rock. In those times, Christ, pre-incarnate, had followed their forefathers through the wilderness, supplying them with life-giving water. These were the types and figures of our Lord. He did not shrink from declaring His all-sufficiency to meet the human need. He is

the very spring and source of the abundant life. From Him flow all the riches of righteousness, peace, and joy. He is the fountain of living waters.

So it is, that in the physical realm, Christ has provided us many things that point us back to His all-sufficiency. Bread and water have already been used by Christ in the book to describe what He is to mankind.



TAMWORTH BIBLE
BAPTIST CHURCH

Copyright 2019 by James West

This publication is published for free distribution in digital format. See the Publications section at tbbc.org.au. We do not allow distribution of this publication from other websites.