



Sermons from selected passages in the Gospel of John...

A series by David Legge

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Portions From John - Chapter 1

"Sin, Suffering And The Saviour"

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Well, good morning to you all, it's wonderful to be back with you in Scrabo again, and thank you for that introduction. We're turning to John chapter 9 this morning - I was given the passage John 9 verses 1-12, but I want to read the whole chapter please. I know it seems quite long, 41 verses, but it's not really long because it's all encompassed within this story of the first 12 verses. The title is: 'Sin, Suffering And The Saviour', John 9 verse 1.

"Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'. Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world'. When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. Therefore the neighbours and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, 'Is not this he who sat and begged?'. Some said, 'This is he'. Others said, 'He is like him'. He said, 'I am he'. Therefore they said to him, 'How were your eyes opened?'" Let me just pause there for a moment, because I did mean to say to you before I began reading: I want you to note, please, the questions that are being asked in this portion of Scripture. We've already had many, so try and note them as we go through from here on in.

Verse 11: "He answered and said, 'A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash'. So I went and washed, and I received sight'. Then they said to him, 'Where is He?' He said, 'I do not know'. They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see'. Therefore some of the Pharisees said, 'This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath'. Others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?' And there was a division among them. They said to the blind man again, 'What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?' He said, 'He is a prophet'. But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?'. His parents answered them and said, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for

himself'. His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He", that is, Jesus, "was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him'. So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, 'Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner'. He answered and said, 'Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see'. Then they said to him again, 'What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?'. He answered them, 'I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?'. Then they reviled him and said, 'You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from'. The man answered and said to them, 'Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing'. They answered and said to him, 'You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?'. And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?'. He answered and said, 'Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?'. And Jesus said to him, 'You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you'. Then he said, 'Lord, I believe!'. And he worshiped Him. And Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind'. Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, 'Are we blind also?'. Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see'. Therefore your sin remains'''.

Let us pray for a moment - and I would ask you, please, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus, that you pray with me that the Lord would speak and open the eyes of some people in this place this morning, who have come in blind to the reality of the Lord Jesus and their need of Him. Father, we thank You for Your word, we thank You for Your Son. We thank You that He is the Light of the World, and Lord, we pray that people who are walking in darkness, even in this place just now, may have the light of life through the revelation of the gospel in Jesus Christ. Lord, we pray, we need the outpouring of Your Holy Spirit - we can do nothing without Him, and so we ask now in Jesus' name that He may come, convince of sin, and righteousness, and judgement to come, and witness Christ to the minds and hearts of those who have not yet believed. Lord, meet with us in a very special way, and even speak to Your own children, in Jesus' name we ask it, Amen.

One of the first questions that we ask as children is a question that we are trained to ask right throughout our education. Actually, it is a question that we find ourselves naturally and habitually asking throughout adulthood, right to the day of our deaths. This question is a simple one word question that sums up the greatest of human dilemmas, the most insoluble of philosophical problems, and the most intractable of theological quandaries. It is the age-old question: why? Now, as intelligent beings - and I know I'm taking a lot for granted here this morning in Scrabo Hall! - we are

obsessed with causes, we have to know the reason why. Whether in the realm of science, technology, politics or religion, we want to know why and how things happen.

However, I would say and guess that the most common place that this question 'Why?' is heard is in the midst of suffering: 'Why me? Why this?'. I'm sure most of us, if not all of us, here this morning have faced pain, and have either sobbed or screamed: 'Why, Lord?'. We want to know and understand the causes of our suffering, or the causes of the suffering of those we love. Now John 9 gives us a whole new perspective on this issue of suffering. I believe, particularly this morning in this place, through this passage of Scripture, that the Holy Spirit wants to change our focus away from the causes of suffering to the cure for suffering. Look at verse 2: 'His disciples asked Jesus, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this blind man or his parents, that he was born blind?'. The disciples were obsessed with the causes of this man's blindness.

It appears that the Jews understood that there would have to be sin in a man's life, or in his parent's life, to be born blind. It appears to be a well-established idea in this culture that, perhaps even before you were born, you could be punished for a sin that God knew you were going to commit. I know it's weird thinking, but that's obviously the conception that they had. But the bottom line is this, to put it very simply for you: in their minds, suffering always had to be as a result of sin. So if you have suffering in your life, they were saying: 'You have sinned'. It was a form of 'karma', if you like. You were getting payback for something you had done, or something that your parents had done before you.

Now, is that true? Well, let me say that, of course, personal sin does have consequences - there's no doubt about that - and parental sin can cause the effect of suffering in children. Now we don't have to think too long about that, for instance the consequences of our example as parents and grandparents to our children has massive effects. I heard someone say recently: what we do in measure as parents, our children will do to excess. Therefore we must be very careful of the example that we give to young people, for what we do in measure, and allow in measure, they will do to excess - our example is of supreme importance. Also think of the suffering that can be caused directly to children by the behaviour of adults and parents, we don't have time to explore this but we only have to think of broken marriages, estranged and absent parents, and the effect that that has on the rearing and the formation of the personalities and the lives of young people. Not to mention how we can affect children as parents and grandparents by generational sins - and I do believe in this. There can be spiritual effects upon children of up and coming generations, of things that parents and grandparents have done in the past - particularly if they are dabbling in realms of darkness, there can be spiritual curses that come upon our children and our grandchildren - Moses said, to the third and fourth generation.

So what this passage is not saying is that there are no consequences for our sins toward children, the wages of sin still is death, and the way of the transgressor is hard. Our own sins have an awful venomous bite in them - there's not just a judgement for sin on judgement day, there is a judgement in sin. Yes, there is the buzz and the pleasure that is momentary, but then there is the bite and the poison.

The lesson of this passage of Scripture, as the disciples ask: 'Who sinned, this man or his parents?', is that we cannot know the reason for suffering - none of us can know. We can know that sin brings suffering, but none of us can speak accurately, or can speak with surety over someone's suffering being a consequence of their personal sin. We can't always know why people suffer, and unless God reveals it to us personally about ourselves, we must beware of making judgements over the suffering of others - because there is often great mystery in this issue of suffering.

So Jesus brings an all new perspective, and Jesus redirects His disciples, and us as well, away from the cause of this man's blindness to see the positive cure. Look at verse 3: 'Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world''. He redirects them away from the cause of the blindness to the cure: 'I'm the answer!'.

Later the Pharisees, we read this, questioned the man who was healed - this passage is full of questions. This time they weren't obsessed with the blindness, because they took that for granted, that he must be a bad man or his parents must be bad parents, but they were obsessed with the cause of the healing. Now they really wanted to know how he was healed so that they could accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath. In verse 24 through to verse 27 we see this. But when they question this man about how he was healed, in verse 25 the man retorts - this is his reply - 'Whether He', that is, Jesus, 'is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see'. In other words, to put it in my phraseology, what the man is saying is: 'I don't know much about the cause of how this Man healed my blindness, but all I know is: I have experienced the cure!'.

In verse 27 he gets rather frustrated with these religious men, as often we can with religious folk. He answered them: 'I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?'. He's becoming a bit sarcastic, because they're missing the cure! They are so taken up, infatuated by the causes of this man's blindness, that they are missing the point: Jesus is the cure, He had healed this man, yet they would not analyse Him.

Now I want to ask you this morning a question I believe the Holy Spirit has put on my heart to ask you: are you here today, and you are a person who has to know everything before you will become a Christian? I believe I'm speaking to someone here. Maybe you have been at gatherings like this frequently, maybe you come regularly to Scrabo Hall on a Sunday morning, and you're quite intrigued and interested by what you hear, and this good news of the Gospel has a measure of attraction to you - but you don't know enough. But your problem is not that you don't know enough, your problem is that you don't know everything, and until you know everything you will not become a Christian. Well, I want to say to you, from God I believe: you will never become a Christian, because you will never know everything. If that's what you're waiting for, it ain't going to come, because only God knows everything!

Suffering, in a strange way, helps us here, because suffering - when it comes into our life, or the lives of those whom we love - it's a drastic way of waking us up to the awareness that we can't know everything, and that we cannot control everything, and that we cannot determine the outcome of everything. You see, what suffering does is, it puts us in touch with our own mortality, and it ought to cause us to seek the Almighty. It was C.S. Lewis who said in his book, 'The Problem of Pain', some of you know this quote well: 'God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world'.

You see, ultimately, what suffering ought to do is cause us to look outside ourselves for help, to look to God. You see, this is why suffering, at times, is allowed into our lives. The Lord didn't give a specific reason or sin why this man was born blind, on his account or his parents, but this is what He does say in verse 3: 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him'. He's saying: 'This man's suffering is a great opportunity for God to reveal Himself'. You have the same in John 11, where Mary and Martha lost their brother, Lazarus. He died, and in fact Jesus delayed in coming to heal Lazarus. He wouldn't go to heal him, He held back so that he would die. They wanted an explanation, and they said to Him: 'If You had been here, our brother would not have died'. Jesus said: 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified through it'. You see, man's extremity can be God's opportunity. If you're here this morning, and you're suffering, I sympathise with you - and don't misunderstand me, I'm not belittling or undermining anything that you're going through here today in your life - but what I am saying to you is: has it caused you to look up? Has it caused you to seek God? Has it caused you to understand that this is an opportunity for God to reveal Himself to you and glorify Himself?

You see, our experiences of suffering - whilst we cannot always know the reason - they ought to drive us to God, but do you know what sadly often is the case? Suffering drives people from God rather than to Him. So how we react to suffering is all-important. Maybe you're even a believer here today, and suffering in your life has caused you to sort of curl up like a hedgehog and put the prickles out even with God. You're retracting away from His presence, His communion; you really are resenting that He has allowed this into your life. Isn't it ironic that the same circumstances that can bring a man or a woman to faith in Christ, can actually drive another man or woman to atheism or to despair? Man's extremity, which is God's opportunity, can also be the devil's opportunity to drive people away from Christ - depending on where a person turns for help.

Let me ask you: where are you turning for help? In your suffering, in your test, in your pain, where have you been turning for help? Sir Henry Lauder, his only son was killed in the First World War, and he said to a friend: 'When a man comes to a thing like this there are just three ways out of it. There is drink, despair, and God - and by His grace, the last is for me', God. Man is born to trouble, Job says, as the sparks upward. It's going to come, and if it hasn't hit you yet, it's coming your way believe you me! The great issue is how we react, and where we turn. Do we turn to drink? Are

you turning to drink? Are you turning to despair? Are you going to take the coward's way out, take your own life? Is there someone here today like that, or you've contemplated it? You might even have the plan all worked out! Or will you turn to God? The old Negro spiritual says: 'Where will I go? Where should I go seeking refuge for my soul?'

Maybe you're saying from your mind and heart, if you're that person that has to know everything: 'But that requires me to take a leap in the dark. I need to know more' - causes again, isn't it? The cure is before you this morning, but you're being taken up with the causes. It is not a leap in the dark, on the contrary: to trust in Christ is a leap in the light, look at verse 5: 'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world'. So whatever your darkness is, if you come to Christ He will dispel that darkness, for He is the light. Now, yes, there is a leap in coming to Christ, for that's what faith is - and this man had to exercise faith, which is simple obedience on nothing but trust. You look at verses 10 and 11, the Lord said to him to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. So this man had to exercise faith. Jesus spat on the ground, made clay, put it on his eyes, and told him to go and do something. Jesus tells you to repent of your sins, that means to change your attitude about sin, realising it's destroying you, it's going to damn your soul for all eternity; and being willing, by His power, to forsake it, and trust Christ alone for salvation. There is a leap to take, but it's not a leap in the dark, it's a leap into the light!

Whilst you may never know the causes to all your problems and all your sufferings, you can have a revelation of the cure - and surely that's more important? Is that not more important? I mean, when I have a headache, I don't need to know why I've got the headache as long as the paracetamol takes it away! Is that not the case? Yet so many are thrust into atheism or agnosticism because they don't know the causes to everything, and despair. If you allow your suffering to drive you away from God, that's where you will end: a cul-de-sac of despair and hopelessness! That's all that atheism can offer! Listen to the contemporary artist Francis Bacon, he believed that men and women are futile wretches. He said: 'Man now realises that he is an accident, that he is a completely futile being, that he has to play out the game without reason'. The French thinker, Jean-Paul Sartre, believed that 'because God does not exist', as far as he was concerned, 'life has no ultimate meaning and is absurd'. He concluded: 'Man is a useless passion'. The famous playwright, Samuel Beckett, conveyed this attitude to life in his play 'Breath'. It was one I would have loved to have been at: it lasts 30 seconds, there were no actors, no conversation, the whole script was just the sigh of human life from a baby's cry to a man's last breath before he dies - that was life, just a breath to him, a sigh, a moan. Ernest Hemingway believed, I quote: 'Life is a rough track from nowhere to nowhere', and on 2 July 1961 he put a shotgun to his head and took his own life.

Do you know what the biggest killer of young men in Ireland today is? Suicide, because of utter hopelessness and despair - and that is the fruit of atheism and unbelief, of agnosticism. You're maybe here today, and you have to know everything - I say to you: Christianity is not blind faith, it is intelligent faith, it is open eyed faith. Jesus said in John 8: 'You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free'. Paul

said: 'I know whom I have believed' - he didn't say, 'I know everything', but he said, 'I know in whom I have believed'.

We may not know all the causes for suffering, but we can know all we need to know about the cure: the cure is Christ. I challenge you this morning, if you have never done it before, take this book and study the life and ministry, the words and claims of Jesus Christ - and I guarantee you that you will not be disappointed. Why don't you get obsessed about the cure, rather than the cause? Often we waste so much of our time and energies searching for answers and causes, when the cure is what we really need! The cure is clear as crystal: 'I am the light in the world'. All your curiosity, no matter how insatiable it has been up until this moment, can be satisfied in a split-second if you were to take that leap into the light and trust Jesus Christ as your Saviour.

Verse 6, see how this man was healed: 'Jesus spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva'. You see the eyes were being opened in the heart to who this Man was, that's what John wants us to see. This is an act of a Creator, the One who took clay from the ground and breathed in it and made the first man. This One who is walking among men as a Man, is the Creator of the universe, and He's taking clay again and He's covering a man's eyes that are blind from birth, and He's giving him sight. This Jesus is Saviour, and He is Creator, He is God - He's got the power, my friend, to turn your life all around!

Between Genesis and John no priest, no prophet, had ever given sight - no apostle even, up to this point, had ever given sight to blind eyes. Jesus did this healing as a mark that He was Messiah, He was God's Anointed One, He was the Saviour, He was the answer! This, in fact, is the most common miracle that Jesus ever did: 'The eyes of the blind shall be opened', to show that Jesus is unique! My friend, are your eyes opened today to who Jesus is? Oh, you're so caught up with the causes, and why this, why that, why the other, how, wherefore - but you've got to see that this is the indisputable fact of history and eternity: Jesus is the Son of God. He has all power, He has died for your sins, He has risen again, He is alive and present by His Holy Spirit, and He is the answer to all your quandary and questions. He is the revelation you need.

Whilst we cannot know everything about the causes of personal suffering, we can know something of the cure. Do you know something? We know something of how the cure was caused: the cure was caused through suffering! Isn't that a remarkably divine paradox? He suffered for sin, He suffered for the pain of humanity to purchase our cure. God made Him flesh, to suffer hunger, to suffer pain, to suffer thirst, and then to suffer crucifixion. God was in Christ on the cross reconciling the world to Himself, Isaiah said: 'Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the punishment for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed'.

God is not at a distance watching us, but this God who you are asking 'Why? Why?

Why?', this God became flesh and felt our pain, and took our sin, and entered into our fallen world - and there was never a man suffered like Him. Do you ever think of the suffering of Christ? I don't have time to go into it, but He suffered rejection from day one. There was no room for Him in the Inn as a baby. He suffered the abuse of Herod, he tried to kill Him. He was bereaved of Joseph as His father, and effectively, at a very young age, was brought up in a single-parent family. He was slandered, aspersions cast upon His birth. He was mocked as an illegitimate. He lost His childhood, because He most likely had to assume the responsibility of being the head of the home, and going into the carpentry business as a young lad. He had to help in bringing up His brothers and His sisters who, later in His ministry, forsook Him and said He was mad. He never had His own family, He never had a wife, He never had a house to call His own. His disciples forsook Him at the cross. His friends betrayed Him. Soldiers ridiculed Him and physically abused Him. He was crucified, and even God forsook Him - and He cried out: 'My God, my God, why?'. He asked 'Why?', not because He didn't know - He knew it was to redeem us all from this mess.

Though the cause of your suffering today may not be clear, and may never be - I want you to know that the cure is the Suffering Saviour, a Saviour who knows and understands, and a Saviour who will meet you right where you are now. John Blanchard said that soon after the events of September 2001 he was asked the question: 'Where was God when religious fanatics killed more than 2,800 people?', and he replied 'Exactly where He was when religious fanatics killed His Son, Jesus Christ - in complete control of everything that happened'.

You might feel that your life and your suffering is careering out of control. I want to say to you today: it's not. You might not understand the causes, but I have presented to you the cure: Jesus is the answer. Let us pray.

Now let's all bow our heads and quieten our hearts, and please, believers, be praying for those in our midst who may not be Christians - and it's you I want to talk to. Has God spoken to your heart this morning? You say: 'David, really, I've had a revelation, that I've been looking in every nook and cranny and under every rock for answers, and I know now that I'm not going to get them all - but I know now that Jesus is the cure, He is the answer, He is the light, He is the One who suffered for my suffering and my sin. What do I do?'. Well, you just come to Him, you just come to Him. He has opened your eyes today like He did for this man, and He has revealed Himself as the Son of God. All you have to do is repent of your sin, and believe in Him. You can use these words to do it, from your heart, quietly, between you and the Lord: 'Lord, I'm a sinner', say it to Him now, 'Lord, I'm a sinner, and I repent of my sin and my wickedness, and my selfishness and my pride. I thank You for the Saviour who died for me, and I take Him as my Saviour. Save me now, in Jesus' name'.

If you've done that today, why not tell me at the door, or tell someone in the meeting you know. We want to encourage you, pray for you, give you some help. If you want to talk about the matter, why not talk to a friend or myself. I'll be available for you - but please, if God has revealed Himself to you in Jesus, don't leave today without the cure.

Father, we just pray that You will part us now with Your blessing - and that all of us, even Your people who, at times, if we're all honest, Lord, we ask questions - help us to see that if we take refuge in Christ, the cure, all our questions may not be answered specifically, but Lord, we'll have the answer to everything, and our soul will be satisfied in Him - even to not know our deepest questions, as long as we know in whom we have believed, and the truth has set us free. Set people free here today, Lord, through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Portions From John - Chapter 2

"Reasons For Unbelief In Christ"

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We're turning to John chapter 9, please, and we looked last time at verses 1 to 12, 'Sin, Suffering and the Saviour' - and we're looking at the rest of the chapter this week under the heading: 'Reasons for Unbelief in Christ'. We'll read the whole chapter, please, just to get the whole story. Verse 1 of John 9 then, and as I said to you the last time, I want you to note as we read through here the questions that are being asked. There are many questions asked in this passage of Scripture, and they give us an idea of what was going on.

Verse 1: *"Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'. Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world'. When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. Therefore the neighbours and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, 'Is not this he who sat and begged?'. Some said, 'This is he'. Others said, 'He is like him'. He said, 'I am he'. Therefore they said to him, 'How were your eyes opened?'. He answered and said, 'A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash'. So I went and washed, and I received sight'. Then they said to him, 'Where is He?' He said, 'I do not know'. They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see'. Therefore some of the Pharisees said, 'This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath'. Others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?', and there was a division among them. They said to the blind man again, 'What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?' He said, 'He is a prophet'. But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?'. His parents answered them and said, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself'. His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him'. So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, 'Give*

God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner'. He answered and said, 'Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see'. Then they said to him again, 'What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?'. He answered them, 'I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?'. Then they reviled him and said, 'You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from'. The man answered and said to them, 'Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing'. They answered and said to him, 'You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?'. And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?'. He answered and said, 'Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?'. And Jesus said to him, 'You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you'. Then he said, 'Lord, I believe!'. And he worshiped Him. And Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind'. Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, 'Are we blind also?'. Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see'. Therefore your sin remains''.

If you have been going through John's Gospel, as I know you have, you will by now have noted that there are several signs or miracles in John's Gospel that John builds his book around, and this is one of them. If you go to the end of John, chapter 20, I'm sure many preachers have already pointed this out to you, if you go to chapter 20 you have in verses 30 and 31 what has been known as the purpose statement of John, his reason for writing the book, and he's very clear about it. This is an evangelistic book, verses 30 and 31 of chapter 20: 'Truly Jesus did many other signs', or miracles, 'in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ', the Messiah, 'the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name'. There we have at least two purposes of John in writing his gospel: he wants to prove that Jesus is the Son of God, and the Messiah of God, and he uses these signs, these miracles, to do that. In proving that He is the Son of God, he wants to prompt people to faith, belief in Christ, in order that they might be saved.

Now John, as he writes his gospel, he presents his evidence of the deity of Christ and the Messiahship of Jesus in a threefold manner. I want you to see this quickly in introduction: first of all, he presents these signs, these miracles that Jesus performed; then secondly, he gives us the words that Jesus spoke, His teaching; then thirdly, he gives us the testimony of witnesses who knew the Lord Jesus Christ, who saw His miracles, who heard His words and believed Him. Now Matthew, Mark, and Luke - what we call the synoptic gospels - really the theme of them is 'Come and hear', but in John, though we hear what Jesus says, and in John chapter 7 we hear a soldier say 'Never a man spoke like this Man', John's gospel is more about 'Come and see'. Not

just 'Come and hear', but 'Come and see' what Jesus has done - and we have 58 references to hearing in John's gospel, but 67 references to seeing. So His words are in John, of course, and we hear them, but His works are seen to prove that Jesus indeed is the Son of God. In John's Gospel especially we see Jesus moving and acting in power.

So we have these miracles or signs, there are seven of them, perhaps eight, and John builds his gospel around them. The first you would have looked at in chapter 2, Jesus turns the water into wine. The second was the healing of the noble man's son in chapter 4. The third was the healing of the crippled man at the pool of Bethesda in chapter 5. The fourth was the feeding of the 5000 in chapter 6. The fifth was Jesus walking on water and calming the storm in chapter 6. The sixth was the healing of the man born blind from birth that we're reading about this morning. The seventh was chapter 11, the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Now there was an eighth which was after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, which of course proved categorically that He was the Son of God, where He met the disciples privately on the beach and, of course, there was a miraculous catch of fish in chapter 21 of John.

So we're getting these signs so that we might see, and we're looking now at the sixth sign in chapter 9, and isn't it interesting that this is one all about seeing and believing that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah? There is something else that you may have missed if you've focused in too much on these signs at the expense of seven witnesses. I said that John gives us the miracles Jesus performed, the words that He spoke, and the testimony of witnesses that knew Jesus. We have seven witnesses in John's Gospel who declare that He is the Son of God. Let me bring you down them quickly, and of course the Lord Jesus Himself declared Himself to be the Son of God - John 5:25: 'Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live'. Again in John 10 verse 36, He said: 'Do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?'.

So He testified of it Himself, but then there are seven other witnesses. John the Baptist is the first, chapter 1 verse 34: 'I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God'. The second is Nathanael in chapter 1 verse 49: 'Nathanael answered and said to Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'. The third is Peter in chapter 6 verse 69: 'Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'. The fourth is the man born blind in this passage of Scripture, and in verse 35, if you look down at it you will see Jesus asks him, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?', and he says basically 'Show Him to me - who is He? - that I might believe in Him'; and Jesus says, 'You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you'. The fifth witness was Martha in John chapter 11 that you have still to study yet, and we read in verse 27: 'She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world''. The sixth is Thomas, 'Doubting Thomas' as we know him, John 20:28: 'Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'. The seventh witness is John the apostle himself, who is writing this gospel, chapter 20 verse 31 that we have already read: 'These signs are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that

believing you may have life in His name'.

All of this, the miracles He performed, the words that He spoke, and the witnesses who knew Him and encountered Him, all of this is evidence that demands a verdict - and that is why John gives it to us. He wants us too to believe and be prompted to trust in Christ as the Saviour, the Son of God, and the Messiah. I touched two weeks ago on the point that many people think that Christianity is blind faith, but it is not. It is not a leap into the dark, it is a leap into the light, it is open-eyed faith. Paul Little, in his little book 'Know Why You Believe', says: 'Faith in Christianity is based on evidence. It is a reasonable faith. Faith, in the Christian sense, goes beyond reason but not against it' - very important. Christianity is reasonable, it goes beyond reason because it's a thing of faith - without faith it is impossible to please God - but it does not go against reason. I challenge you this morning, if you're not a believer in Christ, you're not converted, you're not born-again: what is your verdict on the evidence that John has presented in this book?

Maybe you're not familiar with John's Gospel the way the rest of the Christians might be here, but maybe you have been travelling this journey Sunday morning after Sunday morning, as they have been progressing through John, and all this evidence is coming your way. What is your verdict? You have to make one! All of us make one. It seems every time I'm here I'm quoting C.S. Lewis - I don't quote him in every sermon that I preach! It must be just because you're very intelligent people here in Scrabo! - but this is a tremendous quote from him that spells out why every human being must come to terms with Christ. He says: 'In a civilisation like ours, I feel that everyone has to come to terms with the claims of Christ upon his life, or else he is guilty of inattention or avoiding the question'. Here we have in John's Gospel evidence that demands a verdict, and if you have never faced up to it, if you've never delved into it and analysed it, you're either guilty of inattention or avoiding the question - but you must make a verdict.

Now, of course, not all accept the evidence as John puts it to us, but some dispute it. Actually after the sixth sign, this sixth miracle, we see in verse 16 that Jesus divided opinion as He always does: 'Therefore some of the Pharisees said, 'This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath'. Others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?', and there was a division among them'. Jesus always is the divider of opinion between those who believe and those who disbelieve. But we're here this morning to consider: what are the reasons for unbelief in Christ in the face of such overwhelming evidence? Why, when people are presented with such evidence that demands a positive verdict, why is it that certain people do not believe?

Now there are many reasons for unbelief in general, which we're not going to go into today, I only want to deal with the specific reasons for unbelief in John chapter 9. It might surprise you that religion was what motivated their unbelief in Christ in this chapter, religion! Because the Lord Jesus did not conform to the Jews' religious mode, or the model of Messiah that they had accepted and contrived, though they faced obvious evidence that He was the one who was promised and He was the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, they rejected Him because of their religion. They wanted a

Christ that suited them, they wanted a Christ of their own making. Now, we in Ireland know that religion can be extremely prejudicial, putting it mildly - but have you ever considered that religion is one of the greatest obstacles to people coming to Christ? Even 'Christian' religion - I think it was Bishop Ryle who said: 'Immorality has slain its thousands, but morality its tens of thousands'. Religion has slain and damned its millions. Now I don't know what your religion is here today, and I'm not particularly interested in the sense of critiquing your religion specifically, but what I am interested in is the possibility that there may be someone here, even someone who has grown up within religious tradition in this church, who is not born-again. It has actually been religion that has come between you and Christ.

Look at the religion that caused unbelief in Christ here in John 9. I want to give you four headings to do with religion that were real obstacles to them coming to Jesus. The first is religious tradition, religious tradition was a reason for their unbelief. If you look at verse 16, we've read it a couple of times now, the reason why they were rejecting Christ in this miracle was the fact that He, as far as they were concerned, transgressed the law of the Sabbath: 'Therefore some of the Pharisees said, 'This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath''. Now the Sabbath was from God, you only need to read the first five books of the Bible to realise that God gave the Sabbath like a sign or a badge to the Jews that they were His special people. But God gave the Sabbath to the Jews not to harm them, not to hinder them, but to help them to God. In fact the Lord Jesus, in Mark chapter 2, says this: 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath'. The Sabbath was given to man to help him, but man was not made to be a slave of this religious day. Yet what the Pharisees and the Scribes did was, they added that many harmful dos and don'ts to the Sabbath law of the Bible that they effectively made the Sabbath Day a miserable experience. It became a crushing burden: 'Oh, Saturday again!' - a symbol of suffocating religious bondage that effectively robbed the nation of the Jews of the joy that they once had in God. That is typical of what religion does: the Sabbath became a funeral to the Jews, and religion will do that to you. It is a killjoy. It will rob you of any joy or semblance thereof.

It had come to the stage in Judah that you couldn't help a fellow human being on the Sabbath, lest you transgress. Jesus performing this miracle of giving blind eyesight was tantamount, in their eyes, to breaking the law. But here was the problem, and here is the problem of religious tradition: when laws become more important than lives, we've got our religion wrong somewhere! Could I just challenge some of you believers here this morning: are your laws more important than lives? Someone has said: 'If ever the performance of a man's religion stops him helping someone who is in need, his religion is false. People matter far more than systems and ordinances. One of the best ways to worship God is to help men'. Now it's not that we reject spiritual ordinances, or practices, or laws that God has given to us - but it is that we get perspective on holy things that we do, holy things that we own and celebrate, and this is what the Lord had to bring home to these Pharisees and Scribes in Matthew 23:23: 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone'. So it's

not that you chuck out God's laws, but you gain perspective, and you realise that lives are more important than laws. We ought to use sacred things, not abuse them, but use them to help men and women who are lost and dying in their sin - that, in fact, is the only way to offer ordinances to God. One biblical writer says: 'The Sabbath was never so sacred as when it was used to help those who needed help. The final arbiter in the use of all things is love, and not law'.

The religious tradition of the Jews here was an obstacle, a reason for their unbelief in Jesus - because Jesus had performed a miracle on the Sabbath, and the laws that they had added to God's law, their tradition, said you shouldn't do that, that hindered them in coming to Christ. If you're in a system that hinders you coming to Christ because of certain laws, or rites, or rituals, or regulations, there is something wrong with your religion! This is a paraphrase of Matthew chapter 11 verses 28 to 30, which says: 'Come unto Me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'. Listen how it is paraphrased here: 'Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me', Jesus says, 'Get away with Me and you will recover your life. I will show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me - watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you will learn to live freely and lightly'. He was inviting religious Jews, with all of the burdens of the Sabbath and everything else on top of them, to come away to Him and get freedom. I invite you this morning: come away from your religion - some of you believers need to come away from your religion, your man-made tradition and religion, and come to Christ!

Religious tradition was an obstacle. Something else religious: religious interpretation. This is an interesting one, verses 28 and 29: 'You are His disciple', they said to the blind man, who once was blind, 'We know that God spoke to Moses' - God spoke to Moses. That was like saying: 'We've got the Bible, we know what the Bible says, God spoke to Moses'. What they were doing was: they were invoking their religious interpretation - we might say their teaching or doctrine, but I want to use the word 'interpretation' because that really brings home, at times, the fact that a lot of our doctrine - not fundamental doctrine now - but a lot of our doctrine is down to interpretation. Whilst the Bible is infallible - Amen to that, the Word of God, the Scriptures are infallible - our interpretation is not. Now maybe I should give half an hour for that one to sink in - but it has taken me a long time to realise that. I'm not talking about fundamental truths in the Gospel - that was not their problem, they believed in one God. In fact, if you look - and I haven't time to go into this - but the Lord Jesus always sided with the Pharisees on fundamental truth matters, Paul the apostle did the same. He said: 'They sit in Moses' seat, do what they teach but don't do what they do', that's what the Lord said. So He wasn't disagreeing with them, but what He disagreed with was the additional traditions and extra laws that they had added in their interpretation of what God had actually said. When our tenacious adherence to some interpretation, even of Scripture, causes us to contradict the obvious truth revealed in Scripture, there is something wrong with our interpretation. Do I need to repeat that? If some minor interpretation of the Scriptures that we have contradicts an obvious revealed truth of the word of God, there is something wrong with our interpretation initially - especially when it affects the Gospel, and when it

affects how we spread the Gospel, and reach out to those without Christ. The Pharisees' problem was that they elevated their traditional interpretation to the point of Scriptural authority, where it became equal with the word of God - and we do that as evangelicals.

Jesus said in Mark chapter 7 verse 7: 'In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'. For instance, in Matthew 23:24 Jesus said: 'Blind guides', that's what you are, you Pharisees, 'You're blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!'. Do you understand that verse? For years I could have quoted you that verse, and I'd never understand what it meant: 'Strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel' - it's so graphic. Under Jewish dietary kosher laws, the Jew was not allowed to eat a camel if he wanted to - he might have felt like it sometimes, but he wasn't allowed, Leviticus 11, to eat a camel nor a gnat, a little bug, they were both forbidden. Not wanting to let anything unclean go down his throat, the Jew, when drinking wine, the Pharisees in particular, would strain the wine through their teeth, use their teeth like a sieve - I wouldn't have liked to have been their dentist! The purpose was to catch the little insects and the gnats, and what they would do when they had finished their wine was they would pick their teeth and spit out the bugs. What Jesus was saying is this: 'You work so hard to keep the bugs out, those little details that would make you transgress the law; and yet you're swallowing camels!'. Have you ever seen it before? 'You're tithing mint and anise and cummin, but the weightier matters of the law: love and justice and mercy, you're leaving those things undone' - and this was a barrier to these Pharisees, their religious interpretation was preventing them coming to Jesus.

It could be that there is someone here - and believe you me, I have known many of them, and I may have been one of them - who get so caught up with minute details of Scriptural interpretation and religious tradition, whatever shade of the spectrum it might be, it matters little if it's keeping you from Christ and you've neglected the real big major thing, and that is repentance from sin, belief in the gospel, and confessing Jesus Christ as your Lord. All that other stuff doesn't matter 'that' if you've never come to Christ, truly come to Christ!

Their religious tradition, their religious interpretation were reasons for their unbelief - something else: their religious pedigree. Look at verse 29: 'We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from'. You see, the Scribes and the Pharisees followed certain rabbis, teachers, and these teachers would have been of differing theological schools of doctrine and even practice. They were basically sectarian in their religious mindset, and because Jesus wasn't from their - pardon the phrase - stable, or from their school, He wasn't a protege of theirs, they didn't know where He was from - and because they didn't know where He was from, they couldn't accept Him. The attitude was: 'How could Messiah arise and we not know Him? How could Messiah be here, the Son of God, and we did not deliver Him to the people? It's impossible, because we are the people! He could not be the real thing, because we don't know where He came from. He's not a man of letters, He didn't pass through our seminary' - what pride! What pride! The Son of God was in the midst - now listen to this, this is the essence of Pharisaism: they knew their Bibles back to front, but when

God showed up in human flesh they didn't recognise Him! What pride!

You know, there was sectarianism even among the disciples, even John who wrote this gospel. We read that John came on one occasion to Jesus saying: 'Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us'. Jesus said: 'Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterwards speak evil of Me, for he who is not against us is on our side'. I wonder could your problem this morning be that you grew up in a certain denomination, or a certain Christian expression of faith, and you come along here and you're here today, and you're not able to accept Christ because you think that what is being presented is a 'Scrabo Hall' version of the Gospel or Jesus. My dear friend, just because it's not Presbyterian, or Episcopalian, or Methodist, or maybe what I'm saying to you this morning isn't particularly Brethren or whatever you might call yourself, that is not a reason for rejecting it. For if you are confronted with the truth of Jesus Christ, that's all that matters, and you need to make sure that you're not ignoring the overwhelming evidence of who Jesus is, what He has said, and what He has done even in people's lives and the witnesses to it, because of your prejudice through religious tradition, interpretation, or religious pedigree.

Something else, a fourth reason - and I had finished this message, and then this one came to me - not only was there religious tradition and interpretation and pedigree that were reasons why they did not believe, but there was religious camouflage. 'What's that?', you say. Well, it's not a three-piece suit: religion can be covering big, secret sins - even evangelical religion. There's a lot of it about: 'They honour Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me'. Things that you don't want, or you're not ready, to repent of. Religion is a great camouflage, it's convenient. Jesus said in John 15: 'If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin'. Jesus, effectively, by coming and showing Himself to be the real thing, God the Son, the only perfect Man that ever was, showed the Pharisees and the hypocrites up - that their religion was just a camouflage. That's why Jesus said to them: 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whited sepulchres', whitewashed tombs, 'you appear beautiful in the outward, appearance but inside you are full of dead men's bones, and uncleanness'.

Their religion was only a camouflage. Let me put it more bluntly: their religion allowed them to get up to whatever they wanted to under the guise of holiness. There are believers in this place now who are doing exactly that, and you're covering up. The title of this message is 'Reasons for Unbelief' - but do you know what doubt is? Doubt is an intellectual problem, you need your mind satisfied - and we talked about that last week, that that can be a real obstacle, if you're getting caught up with the cause rather than the cure. But though doubt is intellectual, unbelief is moral. What do I mean? It's not a thing of the mind, it's a thing of the heart, a thing of the will. It's not saying: 'I can't believe because I've got an intellectual problem', it's saying 'I won't believe because I have a sin that I'm not prepared to let go of'.

So let me ask you, all of you, all of you: what have you got? Have you got religion or

have you got the real thing? Kierkegaard, the philosopher, told a story in the 19th century - and I finish with this - about a village inhabited by ducks. On Sundays the ducks would waddle out their doors to church, down the street. They waddled into the sanctuary, they squatted in the pews - their favourite pews of course, they had their own ones - and the duck choir then would waddle in, and the duck pastor would waddle up to the pulpit and open the Bible. He would read, and this is what he would say: 'Ducks, God has given you wings. With wings you can fly, with wings you can mount up and soar like eagles. No walls can confine you, no fence can hold you, you have wings! God has given you wings, and you can fly like birds!'. Excitedly the ducks shouted: 'Amen!', and then they all waddled home.

Can I ask you: with all your religion - I'm asking everybody this - with all your religious tradition, with your religious interpretation, with your religious pedigree, are you flying yet or will you waddle home? Perhaps it is religion that is weighing you down? Can I end again with the words of the Lord Jesus from that paraphrase: 'Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you will recover your life. I will show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me - watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you will learn to live freely and lightly'.

Let us all pray. I want to take this moment to address you if God has spoken to you - and I think God should have spoken to all of us really, especially those who have grown up in some kind of religious tradition, even if it is this church. I want to really ask you, some of you young people: are you born-again? Are you born-again? Some evangelical young people are no different than Buddhist or Muslim young people - born into a system, and they just grow up in it. But have you ever truly repented, believed on the Lord Jesus, and been born-again? Do you have the witness of God's Spirit in your heart, witnessing with your spirit that you are a child of God? Oh to God that this morning young people would make sure that they're saved, and get filled with the Holy Spirit to know that they are a child of God!

Maybe you are a person who has taken great pride out of the minutiae of interpretation - you know, that stinks in God's nostrils! I can't say that strong enough: it stinks, even if it's right, if you're taking pride in it it's a stench that reaches high heaven, because you can be making an idol of your tradition and your interpretation - and God will have no gods beside Him. Is your doctrine on the altar? Maybe you've never heard that one before: is your doctrine on the altar? Is your religious pedigree on the altar? Anything that is not on an altar is an idol.

Maybe there is a person who is not a Christian, and you've come from some other background - it doesn't really matter - but you know that you don't have the real thing. Well, where you are, you just say: 'Lord, I repent of my sin. I confess that I am a sinner, and I have been struggling, and I ask You to save me, I ask You to wash me, and cleanse me, and make me Your child. Save me now', and He will do it.

Father, we commit every person here to You. However the word of God has come to

them, we pray that You will really work by Your Holy Spirit in bringing life, as John desired it, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the people would believe and receive life - and that even Your people here today, if they have believed but never really entered into the fullness of abundant life in Christ, or something of tradition or interpretation has robbed them of the joy - Lord, may You restore unto them the joy of their salvation. May the love of God be shed abroad in their heart, may they have the peace of God that passes all understanding, joy unspeakable and full of glory in the Holy Spirit. May this word not be wasted on us this morning, in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2011
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Portions From John - Chapter 3

"The Good Shepherd"

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by David Legge

It's good to be with you again in Scrabo as always, and I'll be here, God willing, the next three weeks as we continue to progress through the gospel of John. I think it was the last time I was with you when you were last in John, so we're turning again to John chapter 10 - we were in John 9, I'm sure none of you can remember that! It was way back in June, and you've been hearing a lot since then, but we will recap a little on the previous message.

John 10 then, and we're looking at 'The Good Shepherd', John 10 verse 1 - and I'm reading from the New King James Version: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers'. Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. Then Jesus said to them again, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father"*. Just down, please, to verse 25: *"Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one"*.

Let us pray, and do pray together with me, that the Lord might come and speak and minister by the Holy Spirit and by His grace to all gathered here today. Do enter into prayer with me now: Father, we thank You for Your holy word. We thank You for the words of the Lord Jesus Himself, we thank You that we have the record of what He said, what He taught, how He lived, and how He died, and how He was buried and rose again for us, and ascended to heaven, and how He is at Your right hand now interceding for us, and He dispenses the power of the Holy Spirit to us for our need. We ask now, Lord, that You will come. We don't want to be preaching the word without power, we don't want the letter to go forth without the Spirit, and so we pray that what will go forth now, Lord, will be in the demonstration and the unction of the Holy Spirit Himself. Come and presence Yourself with us, and meet the needs of all gathered here. We think particularly of those who may not have yet believed in the Lord Jesus. We pray that You will, by the Holy Spirit, reveal Christ to them, and reveal their sin to them, and enable them, by Your grace, Lord, to just take that step of faith and repentance and be saved even today. Lord, we would long for that to happen, we would love someone here today, for the light to dawn on their spirit for the first time, and for them to realise the Good Shepherd that is the Lord Jesus, and that they would enter in and be saved this very morning. We pray for all Your people here, maybe some who are cold in their faith, some who are struggling with burdens, and we pray that, Lord, they too will get a glimpse of this Good Shepherd. We ask these things all in His marvellous name, Amen.

We don't have to contextualise the idea of a shepherd for us in the 21st-century, because we all know what a shepherd is. Even if you don't come from a rural community, and maybe haven't grown up on the farm, you know what a shepherd is, you know what he does. What you may not be aware of is that the term 'shepherd' was also used and understood in this period of time that Jesus was teaching as a leader of any shape or form. So if you were a political leader, you would have been seen as a shepherd. If you were a religious or spiritual leader, you would have been seen as a shepherd. Now the Pharisees were a very strict sect of the Jews who wanted to get everybody back to the Old Testament law of God, and they really put the hammers on people, and screwed them down as far as the laws of God were concerned, and took all the joy - if there was any in their religion - took it all away by the rules and rituals and regulations that they imposed on the people. But they claimed to be the rightful spiritual shepherds of the Jews.

Now chapter 10 we have just read part of is a lesson about what actually happened in chapter 9. I'm sorry if you weren't here when I was last preaching on chapter 9, but let me just recap for you, and hopefully - if you don't know anything about it - you'll get the gist of what chapter 9 is all about. There is a man born blind, he is blind from birth, and the leaders of religion were insinuating that he had to have sinned - how he did that in the womb, I don't know - or his mother or father had to have sinned, that he was born blind. He meets the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus heals him and gives him back his sight, and there is a great cross-questioning goes on in chapter 9, and the Pharisees question him about how he now sees, though he was born blind. The Pharisees had made a rule that if anybody confessed Jesus Christ, that they would be

put out of the synagogue. This man, he didn't know all the theology of who Jesus was, but he knew this much: 'Once I was blind, and now I see, and it was Jesus who gave me back my sight' - and because he confessed Christ and His power, he was excommunicated from the synagogue, he was put out!

Now chapter 10 is all about the Shepherd leading people out and bringing them into His fold. The false shepherds, the Pharisees, threw this man who was once blind out of their fold, but the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, took him into His fold. Chapter 10 essentially teaches us the great difference between false shepherds and the True Shepherd. False shepherds, Jesus says, are like strangers: the sheep don't recognise their voice. They are like thieves: they want to rob the sheep, and kill the sheep. They are like hirelings, or hired hands, or paid workers, foreign labourers: they don't own the sheep, so they don't care for the sheep, so if there is danger coming they will flee from the sheep - because it's more than their life is worth! But Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and in verses 1 to 3 - it's so interesting, look at it again, chapter 10: 'I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper', or the watchman, 'opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out'

What Jesus is saying there is: the shepherd goes through the door of the fold, because he is the shepherd, and a watchman looking out for the shepherd recognises him as the shepherd and lets him in. What Jesus was saying here is: 'I am God's Shepherd, I am the True Shepherd, and I am coming in by the door, I am coming in God's appointed way that proves I am His Shepherd'. Now, what was God's appointed way for the Shepherd to come in? Well, part of that was His lineage, His birth. If you look at the beginning of Matthew's gospel and the beginning of Luke's gospel, you'll see that Jesus is in the Regal line, He's a King, the Son of David. Also there is prophecy that proves Jesus came in by the rightful door to prove that He is the Good Shepherd. He fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. This book, as you've been travelling through John's Gospel, you'll know that it's all formed around signs or miracles. John tells us in his last chapter that these are all to prove that Jesus is the Christ, and that you might believe and be saved. So Jesus came the appointed way, through the door, and proved that He is God's Shepherd. He said: 'Anybody else has to climb over the wall and steal the sheep'.

Now this is what I want you to see this morning, first of all that the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leads His sheep out of harm and into safety. Now one of the great differences between false shepherds and true shepherds is this: false shepherds don't enter the door, but climb the wall - we've seen that already in the first three verses. Jesus reiterates this again in verse 8, look down at it: 'All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them'. Jesus comes through the door, He's the only one qualified to go God's appointed way, the only one God has promised and anointed to be Christ and Saviour - and anybody else that came before Him were thieves and robbers, they climbed over the door, because they denied Christ by not going God's appointed way. They disqualified themselves. That was the Pharisees, was it not? Because the Pharisees, who were claiming to be the rightful

shepherds of God's sheep, they were denying Christ, they were encouraging the people to disown Christ and actually hindering them from following Christ - and effectively, as you follow on in this gospel, and every gospel, you will find that they killed Christ on a human level.

You see, false shepherds want to deceive the sheep. Now can I say to you this morning - I don't know if there's anyone who could class themselves as a searching and seeking soul: you haven't found the truth as far as you're aware, but you're searching and you're seeking, and maybe that's why you're in the meeting this morning. Well, let me cause you to beware of deceivers - because there are millions out there, especially in religion, who are not transparent. You find them in the cults, you find them even in churches, especially churches that emphasise rules and regulations, and they're not being straight with you! Now Jesus, the True Shepherd, always had candour, He was always straight up, He said: 'I am the truth'. He had nothing to hide. Now listen carefully to what I'm saying: false shepherds don't enter through the door, they came over a wall. They don't come God's appointed way, and they don't recognise Jesus Christ as the only way to God. If you're reading about anything, or dabbling in any system or organisation that does not recognise that Jesus is God's appointed and only way to God, it is not of God - they are false shepherds.

Another difference between the false and true shepherd is: false shepherds can't lead the sheep, so they must drive them and steal them - do you notice that? Jesus said: 'My sheep don't recognise the voice of a stranger, a false shepherd' - they only recognise His voice. Like the blind man in chapter 9, who heard Jesus, and he responded to Jesus, but he didn't recognise God's voice in the voice of the self-proclaimed shepherds of the people, the Pharisees. They were like strangers to him in his need. You see, the Pharisees ruled with fear: 'If you don't do what we say God wants you to do, we'll put you out of the synagogue' - and that meant many of the rights of community and society would be robbed of the people. Now listen carefully to what I'm saying: false shepherds can't lead the people, so they drive them - beware of leaders who want to control you, for that is not of God.

We see that in the whole spectrum of religion right throughout human history, whether it's from the Sword of Islam - Jihad - forcing people to convert by the sword, which the 'Christians' did during the Crusades to Muslims. Whether it's that militancy of religion, or whether it's even evangelical, politically correct politics in the church, where we throw our weight around and use position or rank to get our way - listen carefully: true shepherds lead the sheep, they don't need to drive the sheep, and they certainly don't need to steal the sheep. True shepherds never have to use force or coercion to get their way. Thieves steal power, they use the sheep to feed their need for power, and ultimately the goal is to fleece the sheep and slaughter the sheep. Look at verse 10: 'The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy' - that's what the thief wants to do, and the devil is behind it! You say: 'That would never happen in Christian churches' - are Christians not used, and at times abused, by dictatorial leaders? I repeat: the devil is behind that kind of leadership. It is a false shepherd - because he cannot lead the sheep - that drives them.

The third difference between the false and true shepherd - not only does the false shepherd not enter through the door, but climbs over the wall; and he doesn't lead the sheep because he has to drive them and steal them - but when self-interest is not satisfied in leading the sheep, and the well-being of the false shepherd is threatened, that false shepherd will endanger the sheep. You see it in verses 12 and 13: 'But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep'. You see, a hired worker, he only serves for wages, that's what the Amplified Version says: he is only serving for wages, he's only in it for what he can get out of it - good living for a living, we might say. The Pharisees were like that, if you read the gospels the Pharisees were only interested in providing for themselves and protecting themselves. Luke 16 says they were lovers of money, Mark 12 says they took advantage of widows, in Matthew 21 we see the Lord Jesus going into the Temple and turning the tables upside down because, He said, 'They have made the house of God into a den of thieves'. This is what these false shepherds had done - because they didn't own the sheep and didn't really care for the sheep, when they didn't feed their need any longer, and when their own well-being was threatened, they ran and endangered the sheep.

But the Good Shepherd loves the flock - what a difference! This is the wonderful thing: the Good Shepherd leads His sheep out of such harm and into safety, His safety, His fold. Now please notice this, in verse 1 this sheepfold appears to be Israel over whom these Pharisees leaders claimed to be shepherds. Now a sheepfold, in these days, was just an enclosure of rocks, four rock walls with a hole, a gap, in one wall which was the door - just an opening. Now I want you to see this, because I have never seen this before myself, and I imagine some of you have never seen it. Watch the progression here in the first couple of verses of chapter 10, look, verse 2: 'He who enters by the door', this opening, of Israel, this sheepfold where the Jews are, 'is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice' - now watch the direction here - 'and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out'. He is taking them out of the sheepfold. Now watch this, verse 4: 'And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice'. So He brings them out, leading them, going before them - now look at verse 7, look at the directional language here: 'Then Jesus said to them again, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters', goes in, 'by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture''.

Do you see what's happening here? He's bringing them out of fold where there is danger, He's calling them and He's leading them ahead of Him into a fold where they are safe - His fold, where they can go in and out and find pasture. Did you ever see that before? There are two folds: one of them Jesus is leading them out of, and the other He's bringing them into - away from the Pharisees, away from the danger, away from the stranger, the thief and the hireling, and into His safe fold.

Look at verse 27: 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me'. A traveller to the Holy Land on one occasion tells about stopping one day at a watering place, and he saw three shepherds come down to water their flocks - there was a total of about 100 sheep. Soon the three flocks got intermingled, and an outsider could never have distinguished between the sheep, who the sheep belonged to - but soon one shepherd walked away a little distance from the flock and then gave his call. When he called, his flock separated themselves from the others and followed him - that's exactly what you have here. Jesus is calling into the sheepfold of Israel where these people are being fleeced and destroyed and killed by dead religion, and He calls with His voice, and those who hear Him, those who are receptive to Him, move out to Him, hearing His voice.

Now I want to ask you here this morning: have you ever heard His voice? Is there someone here this morning, and you're that seeker or that searching person, and you're hearing His voice at the moment? Maybe even in this very message you are hearing the voice of Jesus Christ calling you to be saved, calling you to repent of your sins and believe in Him - to change your mind about the way you're living your life, and to come to the cross where He died for you and be cleansed, and be forgiven, and have the power of the Holy Spirit come into your life and give you victory over sin. Maybe, like the sheep, He's been separating you from the flock that you've once belonged to - maybe it's a religion, maybe it's a church where you don't hear the Gospel - but because He's calling you, you're moving toward Him. You haven't taken that final step of faith, but He's wanting to translate you from the kingdom of darkness - one fold - into the kingdom of light, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God's dear Son.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep. He speaks to His sheep, they're not like strangers to Him. He protects His sheep, so He's not like a thief. He gives His sheep life, so He's not like the hireling who runs away from danger. Now let's look closer at the Good Shepherd as we come to the end of the meeting. The Good Shepherd loves His sheep, and I want you to see in several ways how He loves his sheep. Now I want you, by the eye of faith please, to really try and see this Good Shepherd.

First of all we see that He loves His sheep personally, or individually. Look at verse 3: 'He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out'. Now these days, whether you go to the bank or you phone somebody up to pay a bill, we're all only numbers, aren't we? They don't know you by your name, but your number. It's so impersonal, but it's not like that with God. He knows you by name, which means He knows you personally, He knows you individually, He knows everything about you! Though you're only one sheep in a great flock, whatever that flock is, Jesus cares about you. His parable in Luke 15 would indicate - He told the story of 100 sheep, and the Shepherd finds out, counting them one night, that one is missing; and He leaves the ninety and nine that are safe in the fold to go out to the one sheep that has wandered into the wilderness. He goes and brings that sheep back on His shoulders through all the dangers, because He loves us individually - that's the Good Shepherd!

He also loves savingly, look at verse 9: 'I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture'. Now a door is an entrance, isn't it? It's a way into some place, it's a threshold that crosses a barrier. Positively it could mean that when you enter a door you enter shelter, you enter safety or warmth, or even home. Negatively it can mean when you enter through a door that you leave the cold, and the elements, and any danger or peril. Sure, when you're on a long journey and you've broken down, you couldn't get the car started, what do you look for? You look for a door, a light that is on, a place where you can get help - home! Jesus says: 'By Me, if any man enter in through Me, you will enter the door of salvation, you will come into spiritual shelter and security - it's a fire escape from hell and an entrance to heaven and home by Me, not by anyone else, only Me!', Jesus says. Don't look anywhere else but Jesus!

A wonderful illustration of this is the Old Testament Ark that Noah built. The Bible tells us that Noah was commanded to just put one door in the Ark - I don't know how many we would have put, but God said only one door. It was a picture of how there's only one door to salvation, through Jesus Christ. It's all looking forward to this day when He would say: 'I am the door'. I imagine that as those animals travelled to the Ark before the flood of God's judgement came, that there might have been two golden eagles in the sky flying and soaring in the heights of heaven, but they had to come down - they had to come right down to where the door was to go through. If there were two snails crawling along the dirt, they had to come up to the door. But whether it was the eagle or the snail, they all had to come the one way - through Jesus. Have you done that? The Bible says: 'Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is one name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved'. There can be many churches and many beliefs, but there's only one flock and there's only one Shepherd, and there's only one way to be saved: Jesus.

He loves his sheep personally, He loves them savingly - we see something else: He loves them sacrificially. Verse 11: 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep'. Verse 15: 'As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep'. Verse 17: 'Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again'. Verse 18: 'No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father'. I don't think it's without significance that this Good Shepherd labours the sacrificial aspect of His love more than any other. He loves His sheep - that's why He's a Good Shepherd! He demonstrates His love for His sheep in that He lays His life down for them. He is not like a hired hand! An old hymn - and it is a very old one - but it captured this thought when it said:

'None of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night the Lord passed through
'Ere He found the sheep that was lost'.

Do you understand what Jesus suffered for you, that He might save you as a lost

sheep? Do you know? Do you know about the cross? The sacrifice of Jesus as He took your sins, as He bore your shame? He loves you sacrificially.

We see something else: He loves His sheep satisfyingly. I love this, the end of verse 9, these sheep who enter through the door will go in and out and find pasture, and at the end of verse 10, though the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy, Jesus says: 'I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly' - have it to the full. The Amplified Version says: 'have it till it overflows'! Is that the kind of life that you have? I think a lot of Christians don't have that life. They might have some kind of residual life within their breast, but it's not bubbling over and overflowing - this is pasture life! You can go in and out and get satisfaction! It's like Psalm 23: 'He makes me lie down in green luscious pastures, He leads me beside the still waters, He restores my soul' - that's what Christ does for you! It's not just getting your sins forgiven and escaping hell, but it's life that overflows!

Philip Keller was a Shepherd, and he wrote a book 'A Shepherd's Look At The 23rd Psalm', and he says in it: 'The strange thing about sheep is that because of their make-up it is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met'. Here's the four he gives: 'One, due to their timidity they must be free from all fear' - that's what Psalm 23 says, 'I will fear no evil'. Are you free from fear? Is that your problem? Is that the thing that binds you? Some phobia, some paralysing anxiety? Christians, many of whom are shackled by this, don't realise how it is sapping from them their God-given right of a satisfying life filled with the Holy Spirit, overflowing in joy and meaning! The Lord wants you to lie down without any fear!

The second thing he said about sheep: to get them to lie down they must be free from predators, enemies. Are you free from the devil? Has the devil got his claws on you through habits, through your lifestyle, maybe even through dabbling in the occult? You're cursed? The Lord wants to free you from all predators. Thirdly, they have to be free from hunger to lie down - they have to have food. Are you hungry here? The Lord wants to satisfy you. There's a fourth thing that has to happen for the sheep to lie down, and it's more relevant to believers: they have to be free from friction with others of the flock. I'll maybe talk more about that tonight in the preaching, but you know: you will never be satisfied in your heart if you've got something against your brother or your sister. Pasture means freedom - people who are living a life of sin think they're free, they don't want Jesus because they don't want their freedom to be trampled upon, their style to be cramped - but it's not freedom at all! Because what the devil is doing is: he's wanting to fleece the flock, he's wanting to slaughter the flock and feed upon the flock - and that's what he's doing with your life. Yes, there is a buzz in sin at the beginning, the great magnetic attraction of it - but once he gets you in his sights, he destroys you - and you know that now, don't you? He wants to destroy your life, Jesus wants to give you life, He wants to give you true freedom. For the Christian, the grass can never be greener on the other side if you have this life to overflowing.

Quickly see: He loves His sheep personally, savingly, sacrificially, satisfyingly - but He

loves them intimately. This is beautiful, verse 14: 'I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by sheep'. Not only does He know them, but they know Him. How well can we know Him? Look at this, verses 14 and 15 - the New King James and the Authorised Version I don't believe really translated this the best way - if you have the English Standard Version or the NIV you will read this, verse 14: 'I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and am known by my own - just as the Father knows me even so I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep'. What that is saying is that the same union and communion and intimacy that was always between the Father and the Son is now between the Shepherd and His sheep! That's incredible! You wouldn't think it to look at some of you folk here this morning! You can know your Saviour the way the Father knows the Son - now don't ask me to explain that, I haven't even begun experientially to explore that, but that's what that verse says! He loves us intimately, He's not withholding any knowledge of Himself from us - He wants us to know Him completely!

He loves His sheep intimately, but look also: He loves them by leading ahead of them. Verse 4: 'He goes before them'. Now in the Middle East, unlike here in our country, the shepherd does go before, in front of, the sheep. He calls them and walks before them and they follow him. He doesn't drive from behind, and he doesn't need a sheepdog. That's exactly the way it is in the Christian life: the Lord Jesus never asks us to go anywhere or do anything that He has not gone or done Himself before us. He's out in the front as our Saviour, the Man who lived life here as a man, apart from sin, who faced temptation and trial. He is one who can sympathise, and therefore He can lead and He can guide us, and He can be our example to follow. It's wonderful, isn't it?

See something else: He loves His sheep - I found it hard how to put this one, I thought of the word 'audibly', He loves them audibly, or He loves them communicatively - what am I talking about? Look at verse 27: 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me'. He is reiterating what He said already in verses 3 through 5. Now listen, sheep are pretty dumb animals, perhaps the dumbest of agricultural beasts that we know - and yet they still recognise the voice of their shepherd. Do you? I wish I had time to go into this, maybe another day, but God still speaks, and Jesus still communicates with His sheep - through the Word, yes, but also through the Spirit. I want to ask you here today: do you hear His voice? You may claim to be one of His sheep, but do you hear His voice? Does He communicate with you? You say: 'Audibly?' - well, I wouldn't restrict Him, would you? I haven't heard Him audibly yet, but often it is inaudibly, the still small voice - do you hear Him? That's how He loves you.

Finally, He loves His sheep personally, savingly, sacrificially, satisfyingly, intimately, by leading ahead, audibly, communicatively, and He loves them securely. Verses 28 and 29, look at it: 'I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand'. One of the greatest truths in the Bible is found herein. Some people think you can be saved today and lost tomorrow - you can't! That's not to be found in the Bible. As Jesus puts

it here: with His sheep, He puts His nail-pierced hand over them to protect them in God's hand - His nail-pierced hand is over you. Then God comes along, and He puts His hand over Christ's hand, and over the Christian believer - which means that our security is not down to us. If you say that the Christian can ever be lost, you're saying that there is some force stronger than the hand of Christ and the hand of God. That's real protection, isn't it?

Can I ask you here today: do you have that? Are you secure in time and forever in eternity? George Adam Smith once went to the Middle East, and he saw one of these folds and a shepherd - just this stone wall with one opening. The shepherd was there, and he asked the shepherd, he said: 'There's no door actually on that gap that is the entrance'. He says: 'No, we don't need one'. He said, 'Well, how do the sheep stay in at night, and how do you keep predators out?'. This is what the shepherd said: 'I lie down in that gap, that entrance. I am the door, the sheep are safe and predators are kept out'. That's how the Good Shepherd loves the sheep.

There was once a little girl who was taught at Sunday School the 23rd Psalm. She was taught the beginning of it on her five fingers of one hand: 'The - Lord - is - my - shepherd'. She trusted Jesus Christ as her Saviour and her Shepherd, and one day she was killed tragically in an avalanche, and was buried under tons of snow. When they dug her out they found that she was holding onto her fourth finger: 'The - Lord - is - my...' - Shepherd. Is He yours?

Let us pray. Maybe there is someone here, and you've never trusted Christ - well, why not trust Him now? The devil has tried to destroy you and wreck your life. Why not say: 'Lord, I repent of my sins', from your heart, 'and I believe in You, Lord Jesus, as my Shepherd, the One who died for me, and I ask You to save me now and give me life'. Can you do that? Is there someone who we would call a backslider here, you have gone astray as one of the sheep? Is there a believer here - I imagine the place might be full of them - who is one of the Lord's sheep but is not experiencing this life to overflowing? Maybe it is because of friction with other sheep in the flock? Will you come to the Good Shepherd this morning and let Him minister to you?

Father, we thank You for Your word, there is so much in it - we really are rushing through it, and we feel, Lord, that we are only dipping our toe into the edge of the water. But I pray that in the Spirit, people would have got a glimpse of the Good Shepherd. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - August 2011
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Portions From John - Chapter 4

"Aiming High By Stooping Low"

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Good evening, good to be back. We're turning in our Bibles tonight to John's gospel chapter 13. We were in John chapter 10, I know, this morning - and don't worry, I can count! This is the sequence which I've been given these chapters in, because the chapters we deal with in the morning lend themselves more to evangelistic themes in the gospel, and so it's a little bit out of sequence - but I can understand why that is, there's more teaching here tonight particularly for believers. So we're back in John 11 next Sunday morning preaching the gospel, but tonight we're turning to John 13.

Now just by way of introduction before we read: John 13 through to John 17 comprises what's called 'The Upper Room Ministry', but it's effectively a farewell from our Lord Jesus to His beloved disciples - and of course it ends with that great intercessory prayer in chapter 17 when He prays for His own. But we're looking tonight in chapter 13 at an object lesson that they would never, ever forget: the Lord Jesus washes the disciples' feet.

So that's how He opens this instruction in the Upper Room - and in chapter 13 we're reading down to verse 17 from verse 1: *"Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, 'Lord, are You washing my feet?'. Jesus answered and said to him, 'What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this'. Peter said to Him, 'You shall never wash my feet!'. Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me'. Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!'. Jesus said to him, 'He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you'. For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, 'You are not all clean'. So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you*

if you do them".

When we come to chapter 13 in John's Gospel it is effectively 'Countdown To Calvary' - we are in the last week of the life, of the earthly ministry, of our Lord Jesus. Some churches call it 'Holy Week'. We're probably on the day that is Thursday of that week - there's a bit of debate, but we'll say it's Thursday. The disciples have met together in the Upper Room to observe the Passover, and we read at the beginning of the chapter: 'Jesus knew that His hour was come'. Now, more than any other of the four Gospels, John emphasises that Jesus is on a heavenly timetable - His Father's will. We read in chapter 2 and verse 4 at the incident of the marriage feast of Cana, Jesus said to His mother: 'My hour has not yet come'. In chapter 7 in another incident, and chapter 8 as well, He says again: 'My hour has not yet come'. Then when we come to chapter 12, if you look at it, and verse 23, we read: 'Jesus answered them, saying, 'The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified''. We read Him saying in verse 1 of chapter 13, our text, that the hour had come - and then when we come to John 17, that great intercessory prayer, and verse 1, it says: 'Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: 'Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You''.

What was this divinely appointed hour? Well, very simply: it was the hour in which the Lord Jesus would be glorified, He would be crucified, suffer death, be buried, three days later resurrect, and then ascend to heaven. From a human point, it seemed anything but glory - it was suffering - but from the divine vantage point, God saw it as glorious. The Lord's earthly ministry would be over, in close to 24 hours He'd be hanging on a cross. Though the cross is not mentioned in this portion of Scripture, it casts a shadow over every word - not least this object lesson of washing the disciples' feet. I want you to notice this and see the parallels with the washing of the disciples' feet, and what the Lord Jesus Christ would do for us as His children at Calvary.

Look, it says in verse 2 that Jesus rose from supper - He rose from a place of comfort and rest, just as He rose from his throne in heaven, a place of comfort and rest, to come to this earth to be our Saviour. Look on, it says He laid aside His garments, He took off His covering just as He laid aside His glory in coming to this earth, and took off the heavenly covering. It says He took a towel and girded Himself, verse 4 - He was ready to work, just as He had laid aside His glory, and then took upon Himself the form of a servant and came ready to work for God and on the behalf of mankind. Then it says He poured water, verse 5, into a basin - He was ready to clean, just as He poured out His blood to cleanse us from guilt and the penalty of sin. Then in verse 12 it says He sat down again after washing their feet, just as He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, the right hand of the Father, after cleansing us from sin and having risen again from the grave.

Is it any wonder John began this chapter, ending verse 1 with these words: 'He loved them to the end'. Literally it means, 'He loved them to the outermost', to an infinite degree He loved them! He demonstrated this love by washing their feet, but that was pointing - surely, was it not - to Calvary. He gave Himself completely in this object lesson. I mean, He could have taken a wet flannel and just wiped the dust off their

feet, but He didn't. He gave Himself completely to this act to indicate how, going to Calvary, He was giving Himself wholly to the Father's will for God's glory and for us. It's wonderful, isn't it?

Now it's easy here to celebrate the cross redemptively - all the great truths of our salvation - and fail to appreciate practically what Jesus was teaching in the washing of the disciples' feet. What I mean by that is: Jesus links the cross with service. I have to say that I find most of the time in the New Testament when there is teaching on the cross it always has a practical application. I'll give you two examples - Philippians 2: 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus', and then it talks about the humiliation of the Lord Jesus and His condescension, and how we ought to condescend to one another, how we ought to forbear and think of others as greater than ourselves, and serve them and be long-suffering with them. So it's connected - there was feuding in the church of Philippi, and that was the point that Paul was making, but he uses the cross. Then in 2 Corinthians 8 and verse 9 we see exactly the same: 'He who was rich, for our sake became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich' - and Paul says, 'you know the grace of the Lord Jesus'. If you look at the context, he's exhorting these Christians to give money, to give money to those saints who were in need. Now we would think that, perhaps, abhorrent, to use the cross as a motivation to give money - but Paul used the wonder of the sacrifice of Jesus in a very practical way: how it ought to affect our lives as Christians.

Now, as we read here we read that Jesus knew many things here. He knew Judas was going to betray Him, verse 2. He knew that the Father, verse 3, had given all things into His hand. There are great profound truths in this portion of Scripture that we don't have time to go into - but what I want us to concentrate on is this great object lesson of washing the disciples' feet, and I want us to see what the Holy Spirit has to teach us this evening through this. First of all this object lesson teaches us a lesson in security, that's the first thing I want to bring to your attention. If you look at verses 1 to 3, you will see that the emphasis is on what Jesus knew. He knew that His hour was come, He knew that Judas would betray Him, He knew that the Father had given all things into His hand. Then in verses 4 and 5, the emphasis is on what Jesus did. So, because of what Jesus knew, He did what He did in washing their feet and ultimately going to the cross.

Now think of this: Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hand, He knew who He was, He knew where He came from, He knew where He was going - and so He enters into this act, and ultimately on the way to Calvary, not as a mere victim of fate, but as a victor and the master of His own destiny. It smacks of Him being in sovereign control of this hour. Now this knowledge that Jesus had relates directly, I believe, to this object lesson. Here's the reason: we often think like this, do we not, when we look at this incident, 'Wow! Look at who He was, the Son of God in flesh', and we marvel at what He did, who He was and what He did washing the dirty feet of the disciples. From such a height He stooped so low for this deed! Now that's true of course, but there is a great danger of missing something else very important when we focus on that. The title I was given here tonight is: 'Aiming High By Stooping Low', and there's no doubt about that - that is what this passage is teaching us. But have

you ever considered that here we have One who was stooping so low because of how high He was? Let me repeat that: He was able to stoop so low because of how high He was.

Let me explain: He knew that the Father had given all things to Him, that's what John says. He knew what His destiny was - and if you have all things in your hand, you'll have no problem picking up a towel. Perhaps I'm not explaining myself? Let me apply it like this: have you ever considered that pride, the thing we all have a problem with - and some of us, including myself, have enough to sink a battleship - pride actually comes from insecurity, have you ever considered that? You might say: 'Well, that sounds contradictory, because I would have thought pride came from a sense, or even an overt sense of security, self security'. Well, listen carefully to what I'm about to say: I believe the desire to exalt oneself comes essentially from a dissatisfaction with oneself - so you have to overcompensate, if you like. You see, the tragedy of pride is that security can never be found outside of God. Lucifer find that out, didn't he? He would exalt himself, and he was cast down. He wasn't satisfied to get his satisfaction, his identity, his meaning, his security, from God - so he sought it in self, but you cannot find security in self, and then you become insecure. But when you find security in Christ, and you realise who you are in Christ, and what you have in Christ - you've nothing to prove any more, because you're secure not in yourself or your achievements, but in who Christ is and what He has done! You're satisfied in Him, so you don't need to find satisfaction in yourself or your own achievements. You know that you have been born of God, you know that you are in Christ, you know that you have all things, you know that you are going to God - so whatever you do, whether it's something grand and God uses you in a mighty way, or whether it's something menial or humble, it doesn't affect your worth because you do not derive your worth from what you do but from who you are in Christ!

Are you getting this? So I know that it is marvellous and awe-inspiring to see the stoop from the heights which He stooped to do what He did in this task of washing the disciples' feet, but I want you to consider tonight that actually it was the heights of security that He was in that enabled Him, with confidence and security in God, to take such a low step. You see, the irony is: in God's economy it is through humility that we show our security. To resist humility and be proud and assert oneself shows that we are insecure in our relation to God. I haven't got time to go into this, but if you want an example of this you see it in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. Corinth was a church that was broken up into factions because of schisms that took place over saints that followed particular personalities that enamoured them, preachers that they liked, teachers, Christian leaders. We read in 1 Corinthians 3, listen carefully as I read it to you, 21 through to 23, 1 Corinthians 3:21: 'Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours' - do you hear that? You don't need to boast in anyone who's particularly gifted or profound, because all things are yours. Listen: 'Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come; all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's'. So he's saying: don't find your identity in the personality that you're following, while you get a sense of satisfaction because, 'Paul, he's got the brains', and 'Apollos, he's the gifted orator', and 'Cephas, he's got the charisma' - people like him, he's a man's man. Don't derive your identity

from that, derive your identity from God, what you have in Christ. Christ is God's, and therefore all things are yours - do you see it?

When we give in to pride and a competitive spirit we show that we are insecure in our relationship with God. If you have to prove something, you're insecure - but if you have nothing to prove, you can wash someone's feet. It's an object lesson in security, but see something else: it's an object lesson - as we have obviously stated already - in humility. The Jewish laws and traditions said that a teacher or Rabbi had no right to expect his disciples to wash his feet. They might be his understudies, but it was wrong for him to expect such menial service of them. It was customary that the lowest servant of the house would wash the guests as they entered into a house - not all the time, but particularly for formal meals, just like this Passover meal would have been. Now, look at verse 2, it appears that midway through the meal Jesus rose from the supper to wash their feet. Now the Authorised Version and the New King James which I'm reading tonight says: 'And supper being ended', but other texts actually say, 'And during supper', during the meal. If you go down to verse 4, that seems to be borne out by that verse, 'rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself'.

Irrespective, what is very clear is that they ate this meal with dirty feet. You say: 'Well, so what?'. Well, they ate this meal, most likely, if it was the Passover, around a U-shaped table that was very low in height. They didn't put their knees under the table, it wasn't high enough. They didn't sit in chairs, they sat on the floor - in fact, they reclined to eat the meat. You may have seen it in pictures - but by reclining it meant that your feet, at such a low height of a table, would be very close to the person beside you eating. In the dust of the desert of the Middle East, you can imagine how dirty feet would become. So it appears that they had started eating and they were halfway through the meal - why didn't any of the other disciples wash the feet of the rest? Why didn't a disciple do this first? Why was it left to Jesus? Well, we've read from verse 1 that Jesus knew many things, didn't He? One thing He knew was the pride that was deep down in the heart of these disciples.

Don't misunderstand me, I think that any of them would have washed Jesus' feet - but they couldn't have washed His without washing the others, so no one got their feet washed. Someone put it like this: 'It would have been an intolerable admission of inferiority among these fellow competitors for the top positions in the disciples' hierarchy'. What they mean by that is, if you look at Luke's gospel chapter 23 - don't look at it now - but it wasn't minutes after this event that the disciples were arguing among themselves who was the greatest! Can you imagine that? They would wash Jesus' feet if they didn't have to wash the other boys!

It was an object lesson in humility. Now, the more I think about this act, the more profound it becomes. I cannot share with you tonight in the time we have what is in this portion of Scripture, but I believe the problem is: all we ever seem to do about this portion of Scripture is think about it. If you look with me please to verse 13: 'You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I

have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them'. We think about it, we preach about it, we spiritualise it - but Jesus says: 'Blessed are you if you do these things'.

Now, I'm going to give some of you a shock: I want to wash someone's feet here tonight! How do you feel about that? Are any of you at this moment feeling a little bit of panic? My wife might! 'Who is he going to pick? I hope it's not me!' - why wouldn't you want it to be you? Why? Would it be that you might be embarrassed, someone washing your feet? Why would you be embarrassed by letting someone serve you? I'll give you the answer, the answer is: pride - that's why! To be served by another often demonstrates, in our warped mentality, that we need others - and we don't want to demonstrate that we need others, we want to demonstrate that we don't need others! It makes us feel vulnerable when others serve us at times and, plus, we have been conditioned through education and through media and through society to be self-sufficient. It feeds our ego, our self-satisfaction.

Now I'm serious, I'm not just using an illustration - I'm going to pick one of you tonight. I'm just looking around! You're saying: 'Not me!', aren't you? 'Don't pick me!' - are you going to crawl under the seat? 'I don't want to do it! The preacher washing my feet?'. What if Jesus was the one looking around to pick someone to wash their feet? How would you feel about that, never mind the preacher. Jesus, the Son of God, how would you feel then? Well, how did Peter feel? Look at verse 6, He came to Simon Peter, and Simon Peter said to Him: 'Lord, are You washing my feet?'. Peter said in verse 8: 'You shall never wash my feet!' - and verse 8 is a strong double negative, Kenneth Wuest translates it like this, 'You shall by no means wash my feet, no, never!'. Well, I'm going to wash somebody's feet - who will I pick?

Well, I'll put you all out of your misery, I've already asked Trevor Alexander to come up to the front here! He's going to come, he's going to bring a basin - now, did the Lord not say 'Do this'? I want you to consider, if it was you sitting on the seat, and I was doing this to you, how you would feel. I want you to think about that, really, as Trevor comes.

Now let me just say before I do this that there is the potential of this being humorous, because when we're embarrassed, and when we feel awkward and other people feel awkward for you, we tend to laugh things off - but I want you to resist the humour tonight and try to appreciate what this actually means. OK? [*David washes Trevor's feet*]

Now, I know all of you couldn't see that, but you got the gist. Trevor, I only want to ask you one question: how does it feel to have your feet washed?

Trevor: 'I suppose, to see you get down on your knees and to, you know, put feet in the water, it's unusual and also quite humbling - and perhaps a bit embarrassing as well, especially with all these people here!'.

That's all I want to ask you Trevor, thank you for obliging. Now, Trevor said it was humbling. Many years ago I visited India, and some of the dear Indian people - very poor, poor people - they got the whole team who were away in India, lined them up, and did what I have just done to Trevor. It was the most humbling experience of my life - these poor Indian people washing my feet. That's exactly the words that I used to express that experience: how humbling it was. Now if you ask me - I was doing it here tonight, that's the first I've ever done that - how I feel, the answer is exactly the same: I feel humbled. It was hard to do that, it takes boldness - not timidity - to be humble in an active way. Don't think it's timidity or fear, it's much easier standing behind the pulpit here, and above contradiction almost! It's very different than formality. I wonder how the Lord felt? Did He feel humbled? Of course He didn't, because He had no pride from which to be humbled from, had He? He was humble, He was there, He was it!

It's very powerful, isn't it? What an illustration of Philippians 2 verses 1 and following, but we'll read from verse 4: 'Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross'. Now listen, put all this together for a moment: the Father had put all things into the Son's hands, and yet He picked up a basin and a towel, and that was printed indelibly upon the consciousness of the disciples. Eventually they got the message, because in 1 Peter 5 and verse 5 we read that Peter said to elders, by the way, and all of the assembly: 'Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility'. The scholars believe that this idea of clothing yourself with humility is exactly the same terminology that is thought of when Jesus girded Himself with the towel to wash His disciples' feet. That's what you leaders ought to be doing, you're meant to be servants washing feet. Peter went on to say: 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble' - as someone put it, 'He resists the proud, but can't resist the humble!'.

Oh, there are so many lessons from this object lesson - particularly in relation to humility. Here's another one that I want to share with you tonight, listen carefully: you must learn to be served by Jesus before you can learn to serve Him properly. Have you got that? You must learn to be served by Jesus before you can learn to serve Him properly. One of the signs that you are learning this is if you let Jesus serve you through His body, that is, the church, other believers. Do you take service well when others serve you, or do you react proudly? Some of you might be familiar with William MacDonald, many of his writings are brilliant, and a preacher of the word of God, outstanding expositor of the Bible. When he first went to the Lord's work, he went out looking to God alone for his needs, and he believed - as many do, and you know this - that God would move the saints to touch their hearts to give and to provide for his need. But this was a real problem for William MacDonald, because he served in the Navy - I think it was - and then he went into business, and he was a

very successful businessman. In business he had developed a work ethic, and he believed that whatever you needed, you got yourself, with your own graft and the sweat of your brow. So this idea that you went out and didn't earn a living, as such, but waited on God to touch the hearts of saints to give you finance - he felt a wee bit guilty about it. It didn't sit right. In fact I heard it recently described - by an unbeliever, I have to add - as tramping through life living off charity with religion as an excuse - very nice!

Pride really has a hangup receiving unconditionally, doesn't it? Some of us even have problems receiving a compliment. We don't realise that that's not humility - provided we don't let it puff our heads up - but we imagine that there's nothing, at times, to compliment. Well, anyway, to go back to MacDonald for a moment. On one occasion a lady, after a meeting, gave MacDonald a gift. Within the gift, the envelope, there was a poem, and this is how the poem went. Listen carefully, it says:

'I hold him great who, for Love's sake
Can give, with generous, earnest will, -
But he who takes for Love's sweet sake,
I think I hold more generous still'.

'He who takes for Love's sweet sake. I think I hold more generous still'. You see, if you're going to minister effectively for Jesus, you've got to learn what it is to receive service and ministry from Jesus, and from His body, the church. Temple, the preacher, said: 'Man's humility does not begin with the giving of service, it begins with the readiness to receive it - for there can be much pride and condescension in our giving of service, but there is very little pride at times when we receive it'. It's hard for pride to receive ministry of this kind.

It's an object lesson in security, you need to be secure to minister - knowing what you are in Christ and what you have in Christ. It's an object lesson in humility, and part of that is that you have to learn to take from God's hand before you can ever give - because we have nothing to give of ourselves anyway, until we have taken from Him. Peter bore that out, didn't he? Because it's also an object lesson in fellowship, verse 8, Jesus said to Peter after he protested, 'No! Never wash my feet': 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me'. Jesus was using a term in Greek, 'louo', which means 'to bathe, to bath, to immerse'. You must allow Jesus to wash you completely, and it's in the perfect tense which means this is settled once and for all and you never need to be washed again. This is salvation, this is regeneration, where you come into union with God through Jesus Christ. Judas hadn't got this, that's why Jesus said at the end of verse 10: 'You are clean', Peter, 'but not all of you are clean' 'You are not all clean', He says, repeats again in verse 11.

Are you washed tonight? Is there someone here that is not cleansed of your sin? But once that happens (and it only has to happen once), because we walk in a defiled and wicked world, we get dirty feet, and you must have your feet washed before the Lord - spiritually speaking. Verse 10, look at it all: 'He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you'. So let me try

and sum it up: Jesus uses this word 'louo' for regeneration, where we get washed completely clean of our sins, but here in verse 10 He uses the word 'nipto', which means 'wash a part of the body', for this washing of the feet. He's saying this: 'You're clean, cleansed and forgiven, when you come to Christ in repentant faith, trusting in Him alone' - but because you get dirty and defiled as you walk through this life, you need your feet washed. So if the bathing is union, this washing of the feet is communion. The bath speaks of being cleansed of the penalty of sin, and the feet being washed by the basin speaks of being cleansed of the pollution of sin we pick up every day. It's all of what John talks about in 1 John chapter 1, when he says: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and we make God a liar. But if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' - but we must walk in the light, as He is in the light. We must walk before Him to have our feet cleansed, and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, goes on cleansing us of all sin.

Now that's evangelical doctrine about justification, and about communion and fellowship, but consider this - linking all of this together tonight - consider: true humility grows out of a constant relationship with the Father through the Son. I believe there is an allusion here to the fact that unless our fellowship with God is right, our fellowship with others won't be. Jesus said to Peter: 'Peter, yes, you have to be washed all over', and he said 'Wash me from head to toe!', and Jesus told him 'You're already clean, but you have to have your feet washed'. He's teaching them: 'Unless you receive ministry from Me, unless you allow Me to serve you - and sometimes I will serve you through the ministry of the church, the body - unless you do that, you'll not be in a fit position to minister to others'.

You see, when we're not right with God, we're not right with our brothers and sisters. Genesis chapter 3 teaches that, where God's relationship with man was broken through man's sin, and then in chapter 4 man's relationship with his brother was broken because of sin. You've got to get your fellowship with God right, and unless you're fellowshiping and relating right with him, you'll not relate right with others. The church today desperately needs this lesson on humility, because it is filled with competitive spirit, criticism, jealousy, backbiting, bitterness! The only sign that that is, is that we're not right with God! We're not receiving from God. I want you to consider this, and I believe this is a word from God to someone, or more: I consider Trevor a friend, but Jesus was at the feet of a traitor! It doesn't say 'He washed everyone's feet except Judas, named Iscariot'. Is there someone who has betrayed you, and the Holy Spirit of God is calling you to wash their feet? Wow! Peter wasn't ready to minister to others because he hadn't learned to receive ministry from the Lord yet. Are you not able to minister to others effectively because you haven't been cleansed of bitterness, you haven't been freed of a competitive spirit?

What an object lesson on security and humility and fellowship - but see finally, just to sum up: it's an object lesson in service. As a whole, the Romans in their culture had no use for humility. The Greeks despised manual labour - but do you see what Jesus does? He exalts these virtues to the highest place, and He tells them: 'Yes, you aim

high by stooping low. You climb the ladder in the kingdom of God by going down'. He's teaching them that the highest rank in the power structure of the kingdom of God is the servant! It's an object lesson in service. Warren Weirsbe says: 'The world asks, 'How many people work for you?'; but the Lord asks, 'For how many people do you work?'".

But more than all that, look at verse 17, Jesus says: 'If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them'. If you mark your Bible, you should maybe mark the word 'do' - especially between 13 to 17, these active words. Jesus is saying: 'You will be truly blessed, you will be happy if you do these things'. Listen to what He's telling us: true happiness - you know that thing that everybody out there is searching for, irrespective of their background, their class, their creed; everybody's wanting to be happy, even you. You want to be happy, don't you? Well, blessedness comes, true happiness comes through humble service. Blessed are you if you do these things! Now listen to what He's saying: 'You cannot be happy if you will not be humble!'.

I think I said here once before that you cannot be happy unless you are holy, but equally: you cannot be happy if you will not be holy, but you will not be holy if you will not be humble. The order here is important in the mind of God as He imparts it to us: first there is humbleness, then there is holiness, and then there is happiness! What are you trying to find your happiness in? You must first be humble before God and before men, then you will be holy, and then you will be happy. Now I was thinking about this, and I thought to myself: isn't it ironic that when we think of Christian service, you know, Christian work, full-time work, we in the church tend to think of elevation, don't we? Don't we? An exaltation - I mean, be honest, don't we? Someone being made a pastor, or being made an elder, or going to the mission field, they are promoted in a spiritual sense to another level - that is exactly the opposite of what Jesus is saying here. He is teaching us: 'You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He who was rich, for your sakes became poor - and He came to serve'. It was because He knew who He was, it was because of what He knew; it was because He was secure in God, and in the will of God for this hour, that He could do it. A Malay proverb puts it like this: 'The fuller the ear of rice grain, the lower it bends' - the fuller the ear, the lower it bends.

'Wouldst thou be great, then lowly serve;
 Wouldst thou go up, go down;
 But go as low as e'er you will,
 The Highest, has gone lower still'.

He was made sin for us - but here, I come back to this: we could celebrate this redemptively, and that's wonderful and we've touched on that, but it's practical - you must do it! If you want to be blessed, you must do it. You can be moved by this meeting tonight, and I daresay you might have been moved seeing that tonight - I was moved doing it, Trevor was moved receiving it - it's a very, very sacred moment in a sense. We can be inspired and stirred emotionally, and even spiritually, by a portion of Scripture like this - but you will not be truly blessed until you do it!

Now you say, 'David, what are you saying? That we have to wash everybody's feet now, is that what you're proposing?'. Some might say: 'Do you not know that this is a rite and an ordinance in the Roman Catholic Church, and in the Orthodox Church, and certain sects of Christendom do this, and we wouldn't have anything to do with them'. Well, look, I'm not interested in any of that, all I'm interested in is John 13 - but it might be a good exercise once in a while to do this, just to remind ourselves what actually happened. But I don't believe the Lord is enshrining that this ought to be a thing always being done in the church, He's speaking to us of a principle of serving one another. This was a cultural form that happened, and the most menial servant did this in the home, but whatever it is today to do tasks that we at times may feel are beneath us, to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, we must serve one another in that manner!

Now some people spiritualise how we do this, wash one another's feet, and they say: 'Well, it's washing through the Word, as you share the Word with Christians who have been defiled and backslidden, and are out of fellowship with God, and then you renew them', and so on and so forth. Well, that may be an application, but let's not go against what Jesus says here: 'Do', He says, 'Do'. If you look at John's other writings, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John - what are they all about? There's a lot of truth in them, but they're also about love - and if you see your brother in need, and shut up your heart of compassion against him, how dwells the love of God in you?

Now I'm almost finished, but we need to ask a question: when did the disciples learn to actually do this? We heard the Lord exhort them 'Do this to one another. You have seen Me do it, do it to one another'. We saw in 1 Peter 5 verse 5 that with Peter, the penny had dropped years later - but do you know the point at which the disciples learned what this was all about? Pentecost! That's right! In fact, the penny dropped regarding everything at Pentecost. Here's the lesson from that: to wash one another's feet is not natural, it is supernatural, the old nature goes against it because it is, in fact, the nature of God in Christ that is imparted to us by the power of the Holy Spirit. You look at the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy - but they all emanate from that first characteristic: love! It's agape love, that's the love of God, it's supernatural! That's why you have to go against the grain. Jesus didn't, He didn't have to humble Himself, He was humble - but if we're going to do it, we're going to have to humble ourselves, we're going to have to count the sin nature dead and ask for the fullness and power of the Spirit to walk as He walked!

You see these Apostles and disciples were going to be the foundation of the church that it would be built on. It would not survive if they did not learn to serve one another, and started lording it over one another. I want to ask you, having heard this message tonight: will you now seek opportunity, by the power of the Spirit, to wash someone else's feet? On Friday afternoon when I was sort of finishing off this message, I noticed that the sun momentarily came through the clouds. It was time for a cup of tea, and I went out into the back garden to catch whatever rays I could in a half an hour. I was sitting down meditating on what I had been studying, and I just said to the Lord: 'Lord, I don't go about saying, 'Lord, whose feet can I wash?'. I said, 'Lord, would You teach me how, and show me how, to wash people's feet?'. Now, I'm

not exaggerating, a few minutes after that the phone rang, and a person who was very very distressed, that I've been dealing with of late, came on the phone at the point of breaking - and I spent an hour and a half on the phone with them, and I was absolutely exhausted after it, but I realised how I can wash feet.

'He humbled Himself to the manger,
And even to Calvary's tree;
But I am so proud and unwilling
His humble disciple to be'.

Someone has summarised this portion like this: 'God's formula for spiritual help and joy: one, submit to the Father; two, keep your life clean; three, serve others'. Go and do likewise, and you will be blessed.

We're going to close in prayer just now, and then the praise team is going to come and lead us in a final song, 'The Servant King', very appropriate. After that the meeting will be over and I will go to the door, but let's just close in prayer - and in this moment please, I'm conscious God has been speaking. Maybe there is someone here with a root of bitterness in their heart. Please think of this, I mean I just despair at times when preaching, that people just - it's as if they're watching television, and it's not talking to them, and they don't apply it to their situation. Listen: there is someone in your life, and they have been a traitor to you, or they have deeply hurt you. I'm not saying that you deny what they've done, or legitimise it, because it might be very wicked - but you need to learn to wash their feet, even if that's just praying for them every day. Could every believer here tonight say to the Lord just now as we pray: 'Lord, give me an opportunity' - by the way, it's a bit inconvenient to wash people's feet at times, and you can get your own hands dirty, but that's the cost of service - will you say, 'Lord, give me an opportunity to wash someone's feet'..

Father, I thank You for the Lord Jesus, for His humility - and to think that He is the revelation of Your heart, O God, and we just cannot conceive of this: the great God of heaven, and He reveals His heart, and it's a humble one! The great Lion of Judah, but His heart is of a Lamb. Oh Lord Jesus, teach us Your way, help us to follow You, to wash one another's feet. The irony is, Lord, it's our pride that would stop us doing it - and yet what is the result of it? Humility. Maybe folk here tonight just need to exercise their will, against their intuition and emotion and embarrassment, and just go and do something, that they might be blessed. So teach us now how to serve, that in our lives we might enthrone Him, each other's needs to prefer, for it is Christ we're serving. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - August 2011
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Portions From John - Chapter 5

"A Tested Friendship"

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Well, thanks very much for the welcome, and it is good to be back with you again at Scrabo over these weeks - I do count it a privilege. We're turning in the New Testament to the portion allocated for this morning, which is John chapter 11 - and I hope, God willing, to be in this portion of Scripture this week and next Sunday morning, John chapter 11.

We begin reading at verse 1, John 11 verse 1 and I'm reading from the New King James Version: *"Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick'. When Jesus heard that, He said, 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it'. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was".* Down to verse 11, please: *"These things He said, and after that He said to them, 'Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up'. Then His disciples said, 'Lord, if he sleeps he will get well'. However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him'. Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with Him'. So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Then Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You'. Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again'. Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day'. Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?'. She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world'. And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, 'The Teacher has come and is calling for you'. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, 'She is going to the tomb to weep there'. Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died'. Therefore, when Jesus saw her*

weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, 'Where have you laid him?'. They said to Him, 'Lord, come and see'. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, 'See how He loved him!'. And some of them said, 'Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?'. Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone'. Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, 'Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days'. Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?'. Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me'. Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!'. And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Loose him, and let him go'. Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did".

Let us pray briefly for a moment. If you do know and love the Lord, I'd ask you to pray with me now that God may speak by His Spirit to some who are gathered here this morning without Christ, or who are estranged from Him. Let us pray: Father, we thank You for Your word, we thank You for these stories of the Lord Jesus Christ, how He walked among us, the great works and miracles that He performed - this being one of the greatest, the reviving of Lazarus from the dead. Lord, we pray that this morning everyone here will spiritually have that resurrection in their spirit. We pray that they will be brought back from the dead, the dead trespasses and sins, the tomb that they find themselves captivated within. We pray, Lord, this morning, that You will send forth that beam of power and light from Your presence that will quicken them, that Thine eye would diffuse the quickening ray, that they may awake, the dungeon flamed with light, may their chains fall off, their heart be free, may they rise and go forth and follow Thee. All of us Lord, perhaps some of us who have had tragedy enter our lives, and perhaps have allowed ourselves to become estranged with the Lord Jesus - we pray that You will speak, Lord, whatever our needs might be now, we pray that You would minister by the Holy Spirit. We ask these things in the all-victorious name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

I want to speak to you this morning - I'll take a more conventional look at this passage next Sunday morning, but I want to speak to you under the heading 'A Tested Friendship'. Now friendship is a true blessing. A dictionary definition of 'friendship' reads thus: 'a person with whom one enjoys mutual affection and regard, a sympathiser, helper, or patron'. The Bible bears this out in Proverbs 17: 'A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity'. You've heard the saying: 'Blood is thicker than water', yet at times we can't choose our relatives, as the saying goes, but we can choose our friends. Often we go to our friends before we go to our family in a crisis. It's certainly the case that you go to a neighbour, perhaps, before you go to family, because they are nearer to you when tragedy strikes or some kind of crisis. But even the best of friends can let us down, isn't that right?

I want to introduce you this morning to a Friend, One who far excels and exceeds the most ideal earthly friendship that you could conceive of. Just imagine for a moment for me the values of the best friend, and imagine those values and characteristics to an infinite extent - yes, even to perfection. Well, that's the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, He not only has all the attributes that you could imagine being in a good friend to infinite perfection, but He has many more attributes that you will never find in an earthly friend, that an earthly friend could never possess, and He has them. A parent can pity a child, and yet that parent, with all the pity, can watch that child perish with no power to help them. Friends can be liable to change, they can be like a broken reed - you can't trust them or lean on them. You might find the wisest and most learned individual in the world who can inform you greatly regarding your particular predicament, but they might be, in their hearts, too superior to sympathise with you or help you. Whereas, in the Lord Jesus Christ you've got the ideal and the perfect friend - because not only does Jesus look at you, wherever you are and whatever you're going through, and He pities you; not only does He want to help you like any good friend would or could, but He actually can help you! He can do something about your condition. Unlike many friends, He will never fail you, He will never change. In fact, though He knows all things because He is God's Son, He is omnipotent, all-knowing, omniscient, all-seeing, He will always accommodate you irrespective of how lowly you are, how simple.

It's remarkable, that's why He was known in the gospels as 'the Friend of sinners', the Friend of the ordinary people, the Friend of the poor and the humble - and to poor, smelly fishermen, He said: 'I have not called you servants, but I have called you friends, for I have told you My heart'. Isn't that remarkable? Indeed, He said to the little children, 'Let them come to Me, and do not forbid them' - but are you aware today that Jesus wants to befriend you? He wants to be a true friend to you, like none other - and maybe that's exactly what you're in need of today.

Now I want you to see first of all in this chapter that this was a friendship begun in the heart. You've heard the saying: 'Home is where the heart is', and Lazarus, and Mary and Martha his two sisters, lived in a place called Bethany which was on the east slope of the Mount of Olives, about a mile and a half east of Jerusalem. Now we know from the gospels that the Lord Jesus didn't have a home to call His own when He went into His ministry, indeed He said: 'The foxes of the ground have holes to live in, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head'. But if there was any place that Jesus would have counted as His home, it was Mary, Martha and Lazarus' house in Bethany - He loved that little family, and He often rested beneath their roof. Now, use your imagination and try to conceive of the sweet moments that Mary, Martha, Lazarus and Jesus would have spent together. These three siblings, spending time beside their hearth with the Son of God! Time spent in intimate conversation, I would love to have been a fly on the wall then!

People today, I was thinking about this, they would pay billions to experience this. It might surprise you, I think there are some from the States here this morning, but do you know what the going rate is to meet President Bill Clinton? 750 dollars, just to

meet and greet him, and then get a photograph taken with him, and also purchase a ticket to be in the first four rows of an auditorium where he is giving a speech - 750 dollars! I'll never forget as a boy watching a BBC news report about Her Majesty the Queen popping into a pensioner's house in high-rise flats, and sitting down to a cup of tea - it was in china of course - a nice cup of tea in china with this poor old lady in her flat - I was just gobsmacked at this, flabbergasted that Her Majesty could condescend to come in some afternoon and share a cup of tea with someone who was insignificant, as far as the whole general scene of things in our nation is concerned. But can you imagine, if that is a big jump for you and for me, can you imagine what it would have been to share a meal with the Lord Jesus in the privacy of your own home? What would people pay for that today?

Maybe you're sitting here, and you're thinking: 'Yea! Boy that would be great! How I would love to welcome Jesus into my home! How I would love to prepare for Jesus a meal with my hands!'. Well, let me tease that out for a moment: could you really entertain the Lord Jesus in your home? Or, to put it another way: do you think the Lord Jesus could be at home in your house the way He was in Mary, Martha and Lazarus' house? I heard a story once of a preacher who was having hospitality with some folk out of the church, and coming through the door, as you often do, they threw out the quip: 'Make yourself at home'. Immediately he kicked off his shoes and he put his feet up on the coffee table in the lounge. They looked at him, their eyes popping out, 'What are you doing?'. 'You said, 'Make yourself at home', that's all I'm doing!'. We say things that we don't really mean. You might say here this morning: 'How great it would be for Jesus to be in my house', but be honest - what would Jesus see if He came into your house? Could you give Him the keys to every room in your house, every locked cupboard in your house, and say 'Go ahead, Lord Jesus, look wherever You like!?' Could He make Himself at home?

What would He find in the drinks cabinet? In the magazine rack? What DVDs would be stacked up? Would He witness the odd row or cold moment or, perhaps more drastic, bad language, violence, various types of abuse? I want to say to you this morning, better than the Lord Jesus coming into your home: the Lord, rather than being entertained in your home, desires to be entertained in your heart. He wants to come in and live in you. We were preaching last Sunday morning on John 10, how He is the Good Shepherd, and His sheep hear His voice, and they follow Him; how He is the door of a new sheepfold, leading them out of an old sheepfold where they are in danger and prey to predators and to hirelings, hired hands, and to thieves, robbers and murderers - false shepherds - but He is the door into new life, life to the full, life overflowing. That's what Jesus wants to do for you, but He wants to come into your heart. He is the Door, but He wants to enter into you also. I know it's to Christians, but Revelation 3 verse 20 is a wonderful illustration of this, He says: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with Me'. He doesn't just want to save you, He wants to change your life, He wants to come in and transform you from the inside out. Just as the sheep were able to go in and out and find pasture, He wants to come in and out of your heart to sup with you, and you with Him, to commune with you, fellowship with you.

That's a different thing, isn't it? It would be one thing to try and keep up appearances and entertain the Lord Jesus for a half an hour in the afternoon around a cup of tea, but coming into your heart - whatever is in your home is only a reflection of what is in your heart, for out of the heart, Jesus said, proceeds drunkenness, fornication, lies, and all sorts of wickedness. Are you rude enough to say to the Lord Jesus: 'Well now, no thanks, not today' - like He was a vacuum salesman or something, or going round the doors selling encyclopaedias, He's not even the Jehovah's Witnesses, that you want to slam the door in their face - no! This is the Lord of glory, and a minute ago perhaps you were considering what it would be like to entertain Him in your house, but the thought of Him entering your heart - you can't stick that, because your heart is in a worse state.

Maybe your problem is with intimacy. What am I talking about? Well, many people have a problem with intimacy, they don't want anyone getting too close to them, in on them. The reason is: they have had bad hurts in their life. So, like 'hedgehog syndrome' we call it, they curl up, and the prickles go out, and everybody has to stand away from them because they don't want to be hurt again. At some time they have opened their heart to another, and that person stuck a dagger in it. I've heard a lot of people who once had pets, and their pet dies, and maybe they're even living alone, and a friend will say to them, 'Why don't you get another wee dog, or another cat?' - and they say, 'No, no! I don't want to get attached again, to have to lose it when it dies'. Now, if that's the way we are with pets, how are we with people? How are we with loved ones who let us down, and friends who betray us? Or maybe you, as a child, had no affection or intimacy from your father or your mother, or maybe you're here this very morning and there's a lack of love in your marriage or in your relationship, and a spouse or a partner is not showing you affection but aggression? You have developed a hard shell, and it's just to protect yourself - but here's the problem: when Christ comes along and He offers you true friendship, true deliverance, true salvation, real love, unconditional grace, He can't get in on you! You won't let Him in, but this hard shell is a mask that is covering a multitude of secret sorrows, pain, and even sins, and you feel that no one understands.

Now listen, I believe this is a message from God to someone in the gathering this morning: I urge you to unfold your heart to Jesus. I urge you to know that He understands. I grant you, no one else may, but He understands! I invite you today to go to Jesus, and open your heart to Him, because He wants your entire confidence. He wants you to feel comfortable to go in and out and find pasture, sustenance, and satisfaction. He wants to sup with you, and you with Him. He wants you to be in a friendship whereby you need withhold nothing from Him, you can just bare your soul - and the Bible says that if you will do that, He will withhold no good thing from you. If you make your secrets known to Him, the secret of the Lord will be with you. It's a two-way relationship! I want to say to you today: there is nothing that you cannot bring to Him.

There was a man in my house the other day who is involved in evangelism. He was up at the North West 200 giving out leaflets and talking to folk. He said he met a young man there, and that young man said, 'God could never save me'. He said, 'Why's

that? Why you?'. I know this is quite graphic, but we need to waken up to these facts, there are people who feel that they are beyond the pale of God's salvation, that Jesus wouldn't want anything to do with them. This young man said: 'I am a rent boy, and God would have nothing to do with me'. That man had the privilege of showing that young man the Gospel, but that young man couldn't grasp it, because he couldn't get over his hurts, he couldn't get over his pain. He had been abused, and now he was in this cycle that the devil had him in, and he couldn't conceive that anyone could love him the way he was. Listen to me this morning, and you need to hear this: there's nothing you cannot bring to the Lord Jesus Christ. Just imagine now, I know it's hard perhaps, but imagine the Lord Jesus came through those doors, imagine He walked down the aisle where you are and He came directly to your seat. He sat down beside you, and He took you by the hand, and He looked into your eyes and He said: 'Now child, tell me all about it' - that's what He wants to do.

He is here! I really wish we could believe this! He can do it for everyone. He's not walking down an aisle, and going to one person in particular. He is God who fills heaven and earth, and therefore, by His Spirit, He can deal with each of us as if we were the only person in the world! Will you let Him into your heart?

I've got to move on. It was a friendship begun in the heart, but see something else: it was a friendship interrupted by death. You see, Mary and Martha had let Jesus in, not only into their home, but into their heart - but they felt He had let them down. Is there someone here like that, and you trusted Christ in the past, but some tragedy has come into your experience and you feel the Lord has betrayed you, failed you? Look at verse 6: 'So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was'. 'Jesus, this friend of Yours in Bethany that You're always talking about and spending time with, he's sick and he's going to die. We know You love him, so You're bound to just have a sprint to Bethany now, go as fast as You can to help him' - but what does it say here? Jesus delays! Maybe you're here, and you need out, you need help, you need deliverance in a situation, and God has not come through for you? You can't understand it, you've let Jesus in, but He's let you down. You feel like He's forgotten you. Maybe you're what we call a backslider, and you have happy memories of Bethany, a Christian home perhaps, but where is God now in your crisis, in your tragedy?

'Bethany', do you know what it means? In the original language, 'House of Song'. Once there was a song in your heart. It's also the place where Jesus cursed the fig tree, it's a place of faith. Maybe you once had a song, and you once had bold faith? In the next chapter you are going to study, in the next sequence, this is the place where Mary anointed the Lord Jesus' feet with that precious ointment, it was a place of worship. Maybe you once knew what it was for the whole room to be filled with the fragrance of your worship? We're going to see that this was a place of victory and power, resurrection, He raises Lazarus from the dead. Maybe you once knew victory and power? But this house of song now has become a house of affliction, and their friendship has been interrupted in death - is it a death for you that has caused your friendship with Jesus to be interrupted? Is it a disease? A tragedy? A crisis? A broken relationship?

See the reaction of these two sisters: Martha doesn't understand, like we don't understand when any of these things happen. But here, note, Martha, though she didn't understand, she went out to Jesus. Yet Mary shows the reverse, she also didn't understand, but she did not go out. Now listen, there are things in life, no matter how spiritual and in touch with God we are, or intelligent, or how well we know this book, there are things in life that we will never understand! But what is your reaction to them? Do you blame God? Do you let them drive you into God's arms, or do you allow them to drive you away from Jesus?

Now, before we see the miracle, and I'm going to dwell more on that next week, but before we see the resurrection from the dead of Lazarus, I want you to see into the heart of this Friend of yours. Look at verse 35: 'Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, 'See how He loved him!'. Verse 38: 'Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it'. Can I tell you today: the Lord Jesus Christ looks down upon you now in this room, and His heart aches for you, for He loves you. You don't maybe realise it, but you have no greater Friend than He. He is the Saviour, and He sympathises with you even in death. If it's a bereavement that has interrupted your friendship with Him, and your fellowship, here He is standing at the grave of a loved one, and He can sympathise with you because He knows what it is to experience the death of a friend. We believe His father, His earthly guardian here on earth, Joseph, died when Jesus was very young. He knows what it is to grow up, potentially, grow up in a one parent family. He knows what it is to feel deserted, to feel betrayed, to feel friends let you down - because He took flesh and blood, and ultimately He went to the cross and He took our sins and our infirmities, and He died for you! That's why John could say: 'Greater love has no man than this, but that a man lay down his life for his friends' - there's no closer relationship than Jesus and what He did on the cross. The old hymn put it like this: 'In every pang that rends the heart the Man of Sorrows had a part'.

We see Him weeping here in John 11 over the wages of sin. Isn't that what the Bible says? 'The wages of sin is death'. I know the Lord was going to raise him again, and I know He knew He was going to raise him again - but He was weeping over what sin had done to humanity, the pain that it causes, the anguish, the wrench of two souls being parted through death. We see Him saying over Jerusalem: 'Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you would not!', and He's weeping over the waywardness of God's people. Maybe you're here, and you've wandered away from God, and walked away, maybe you were never walking in His direction anyway - but do you know that the Saviour weeps over waywardness? We see Him weeping in Gethsemane as He's going to the cross. He's in the garden, and His soul is near to death, and He is weeping because of the weight of sin that He's going to take upon Himself at the cross - the wrath of God for you, He's going to be in your place and bear your judgement, and He's weeping at the contemplation of how His holy soul would take upon itself the wrath of God for our sins.

This is all emotion, but it's the emotion of the Son of God for you! Have you ever felt the emotion of the Son of God for you? Picture the scene: Martha is looking for

someone, and she's looking on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho that winds past her village of Bethany, the one that Jesus would be on as He was coming to heal her brother - but her earnest eye strains and strains over and over from dawn to twilight, and it's too late because her brother expires, he's dead! He is now dead four days, what a scene! Then eventually Jesus turns up - too little too late! Have you ever felt like that? Too little too late! Martha runs along the road, tears streaming, her lip quivering, half in reproach to Jesus and yet half in hope, she says: 'Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died!'. She's so confused, she wants to believe, but she can see the stark reality of death before her! How can God turn this around?

Is that where you are? Jesus was waiting. Do you know what He was waiting for? Until all her hope was gone. Jesus was waiting for Lazarus to die, for He could only raise him from the dead if he was dead. This was for the glory of God. I feel I'm talking in the Spirit here: there are folk here, and you feel that your situation is beyond even God. You're at the end of your tether, and you ask the question, 'Why? Why did God not intervene before now?' - and here's the reason: God wants to bring great glory out of your deliverance. He wants to bring great glory out of your healing. He wants to bring a resurrection to your home, and perhaps even to your heart that has been wrecked with the death of sin.

We haven't got time to look any more, but this friendship that began in the heart and was interrupted by death was reunited in resurrection. Jesus called to the tomb: 'Lazarus, come forth!', and he came forth! It's a wonderful picture here in chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, just look at it: 'Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him' - dinner with a dead man! Eh? People would pay for that, wouldn't they? I wonder what they talked about?

Do you know this: I believe Lazarus would have been probably doing a lot of the talking, thanking and praising Jesus in gratitude for what He had done - because He was his Friend, and though it momentarily felt as if He had failed him and failed the family, He hadn't. He was waiting, as Isaiah says, waiting that He might bless them more abundantly - that's why God is willing to touch your life, to change your circumstances. I believe that if you could open your heart and embrace Jesus all the more in the midst of your tragedy, understand that it is God's will for this moment, your deliverance would be all the more accelerated - it would come quicker.

Maybe you're not a Christian here today. There are two very stark reactions. It says in verse 45: 'Many who had seen these things believed on Him', and then in verse 46, 'But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did'. If you look at chapter 12 and verse 10, the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also! Unbelief in their heart, they weren't content with just killing Jesus, they wanted to kill all the evidence of His supernatural power - they wanted to take Lazarus out. What is in your heart this morning?

Let us pray. Now it's imperative that you just take a moment, and all of us do, in prayer. Believers, please pray. Maybe your relationship with Christianity has been a

tested one, maybe you have never believed and been saved and repented of your sins, changed your mind about your sins, and changed direction to Christ. You need to do that today, there is no no man's land - you're either for Him or against Him, you're either His friend or you're His enemy. Will you be His friend today? Will you say: 'Lord Jesus, I am a sinner, and I thank You that You died for my sin, and I repent of my sin. I confess and forsake it, and I turn to You in faith and ask You to be my Saviour, and come into my life and into my heart and change me'? Will you do that? Maybe you're a person who once believed and once confessed Christ, but your friendship has been interrupted by tragedy, misunderstanding and confusion. Will you come today, and rather than, like Mary, sitting in the house of your mourning with the door shut to Jesus, will you run out to meet Him? Yes, run out with your questions, run out with your heartache, but just open up to Him and He will do a miracle.

Father, we thank You through the stammering voice of man that the still, small voice of God can be heard in the Spirit. I pray that it will be heard by some hurting, hard soul that needs healed by the grace of the Lord Jesus, a heart that needs His friendship. Lord, I pray that You will minister by Your Spirit and draw souls to Jesus now; and indeed that all of us would revel and relish in our communion that we can have under our roof, or indeed anywhere that we are, in our hearts. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - September 2011
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Portions From John - Chapter 6

"Love And Betrayal"

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Now we're turning tonight in our Bibles to John's gospel chapter 13. If you were here last week, we were looking at the Lord Jesus as He washed the disciples' feet in preparation for the cross - a demonstration of His love for them. You remember, it just came to me as I was sitting down at the back, how the Lord said that He needed to wash our feet continually - but Peter objected. Jesus said: 'Look, if I don't wash you completely, you can have nothing of Me'. So we had a demonstration last week you remember, of washing of feet, and this week we've had a demonstration of the bath! So you've had a demonstration on both evenings, and it's wonderful - and we wish our brother well in the will of God, and we know he will be blessed for obeying the Lord in the waters of baptism.

We're going to read together verses 18 through to 35 of John chapter 13, and I'm reading from the New King James Version. The title of my message tonight is: 'Love and Betrayal'. So John 13 verse 18: *"I do not speak", Jesus says, "concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me'. Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me'. When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me'. Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, 'Lord, who is it?'. Jesus answered, 'It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it'. And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, 'What you do, do quickly'. But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, 'Buy those things we need for the feast', or that he should give something to the poor. Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night. So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come', so now I say to you. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another". Amen.*

Let us pray together, and as I have said previously: if you know and love the Lord, do enter into prayer with me that God will speak tonight through His word to meet every need, whatever that might be. So let us all pray together: Father in heaven, we thank You for the record of the life and ministry of our Lord. We thank You for what we have witnessed tonight, a demonstration of obedience to the Lord Jesus - and it's reminding us already of His death, His burial, and His resurrection. We thank You for our brother, Philip, who has been baptised. Lord, we pray that You will bless him and, dear God, that he will know what it is to walk in obedience and the joy of it. 'Happy are you if you do these things', the Lord Jesus said. Lord, we do pray that You will protect him from the enemy, because we know that our Lord, when He was baptised to fulfil all righteousness, pointing to the cross, in Matthew chapter 3, it wasn't very long - we read it in Matthew 4 - that He was tempted of the devil in the wilderness. We know that, Lord, the devil and his demons detest it when we make a public confession of our Lord, and so we pray that You will protect our brother, and indeed us all as we seek to live for Christ. We pray that You will speak to us now, and that You will minister to each of our needs. Lord, we all have need of You. There might be unbelievers in the place tonight, we pray that by Your Spirit You will speak on through the word. There might be those cold in their faith, those who are struggling, Lord. We know we all struggle at times, Lord, we pray that You will speak whatever our circumstances might be, for the glory of the Lord Jesus. Most of all we pray that You will presence Yourself with us now, for Christ's sake we ask it, Amen.

I did say to you last Sunday evening that these chapters, from chapter 13 right to chapter 17, comprise of what's called His Upper Room ministry. The Lord Jesus Christ has met with His disciples to celebrate the Passover and institute The Lord's Supper, and John gives us a record that no other gospel writer gives of the ministry that He shared with them there. It ends, of course, with chapter 17, the intercessory prayer, which has come to be known as the Great High Priestly Prayer of Christ. It is the 'Countdown to Calvary', it is the last week of the life and ministry of our Lord - some call it 'Holy Week'. I think I said last week that this is probably Thursday, I should have said it was Wednesday late, probably the early hours of Thursday morning of that last week. In verses 18 through to 30, Jesus had just washed His betrayer's feet - along with the other eleven, Judas got his feet washed; and we know that the Lord Jesus had knowledge, He wasn't ignorant of what Judas had in his heart, and that it was his intention to betray. We read in verse 2 of chapter 13 : 'And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands' - Jesus was in complete knowledge, and yet with all that He knew about Judas, He did not reveal Judas' secret in this portion that we read tonight. He certainly addressed him, and He addressed the company, but He did not declare who was the betrayer.

Jesus, with the towel in His hand, is the perfect example of humility. We saw that last Sunday evening. Now Jesus, with the bread, again is the perfect example of humility - but Judas, with the bread given into his hand by Jesus, is the perfect example of hypocrisy and treachery. What a juxtaposition, comparison between these two! Now Judas, of course, we know from Mark's gospel, has been solving the problem of the chief priests and scribes. They wanted to betray Jesus at an opportune moment that

would not cause public unrest. So Judas betrays Jesus secretly at the dead of night into their hands. Now I want you to understand something: we talked this morning about friendship, and what true friendship was from John chapter 11 - to betray someone is not the same as being their enemy. That's a great misunderstanding many have. You see, the essence of betrayal is that you can betray to death and yet still show a measure of affection toward the one you're betraying. Essentially betrayal comes from the hand of a friend, that's what makes it betrayal. Someone has put it like this: 'A betrayer embraces you with one arm, and stabs you in the back with the other'.

Here we have the greatest betrayer of all time, who was essentially a friend to the greatest Man of all time, Jesus Christ. I want you to know something: Judas professed to be a friend of Christ, and I believe that the greatest betrayers of Christ today are still those who profess to be His friends. You see, you can be affectionate toward the Lord Jesus Christ, but ultimately in your heart, and even in your actions and your secret life, betraying Him. I want you to consider this evening the privileges that Judas had. It's remarkable when you look at this character, he was a privileged man!

The first reason: he heard Christ's words. Now we have got the delight of reading His words. I highlighted those that might be in red in your edition of the Bible, but imagine what it would have been like to have heard those words originally spoken first-hand from Jesus Himself! Imagine sitting on the hillside listening to the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest sermon ever preached. The first time the Beatitudes were spoken from God Incarnate: 'Blessed are the poor, Blessed are the meek, Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled'. The 'Golden Rule' as it's called, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Turn the other cheek. Love your enemy'. Imagine being there! Imagine being there when the Lord Jesus taught the parables, the Good Samaritan for instance, or the story of the Prodigal Son. Imagine being there when some of the disciples came to the Lord Jesus and said: 'Teach us to pray, even as John taught his disciples to pray', and Jesus says, 'In this manner pray: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done...' - you know the rest, but imagine hearing it for the first time! You could say it in your sleep, but imagine being there when no one had ever heard anything like this before!

Judas heard Christ's words, he sat on the edge of the crowd when He taught the great multitudes, and then he was in the private audience of Christ in the waysides during the twilight hours where the disciples were instructed personally by Jesus. Yet Judas himself never truly believed! It's remarkable, isn't it? He did not know Christ by faith himself. We could go as far as to say: he knew Jesus personally, but he did not know Him savingly - that's an interesting one. You could be here tonight and you know Jesus personally, in the sense that you know about Him, you know as much as the rest, you perhaps went to Sunday school, Bible class, you might have been catechised or whatever they do in your particular tradition of Christianity - and you feel that you are familiar with this Man, this God-Man. You might go as far as to say that He is the Saviour, and the Saviour of the world - but though you know Him personally in that sense, you don't know Him savingly, He has not saved you!

Judas heard Christ's words, see something else: Judas saw Christ's miracles. He was there when the little lad brought his lunchbox of five loaves and two fishes, and the Lord Jesus took it and blessed it and multiplied it, and fed 5000 people besides women and children. Judas was on board the boat when Jesus stood up and stilled a storm miraculously, and they were left saying: 'Who is this Man that even the wind and the sea obey Him?'. So Judas saw Jesus give blind eyes sight, deaf ears hearing, dumb tongues speech, lame legs able to walk and leap and dance. In fact, Judas saw Christ raise the dead! We saw that this morning, John 11, Lazarus - and other occasions. We could say Judas lived a diet of daily miracles, but he never had the miracle of new birth wrought in his heart. He was not born-again.

Maybe you're here tonight and you believe in the supernatural. You do well to believe in it, because it's real. It's the way God does things. Maybe you've even seen the supernatural, perhaps a miracle has been performed in your own life or in someone that you love - maybe it was at a time when there was a great crisis in your experience, or in your family, and you prayed and God heard your prayer, and you will have no one explain it away. You know God answered prayer, and yet you have never had this miracle of the new birth in your heart!

Judas heard Christ's words, he saw His miracles, but thirdly see: he saw Christ save others. He saw the woman at the well, John chapter 4, a couple of chapters before this. She was married five times, the guy she was living with was not her husband. She was trying to satisfy the aching empty void in her soul with relationships and sex. Jesus said: 'I'll give you water', she was at a well, 'but I'll give you spiritual, living water, and if you drink of it by faith, you'll never thirst again'. She did, and it says she went into her home town and she told many of the men, and many believed in Samaria - but Judas didn't. Judas was there when the madman of Gadara, who no one could control, society had given up on and they had put him in their equivalent of a padded room, just at the side of a hill where there were graves, nobody went near the graveyard and they chained him up there - but he wouldn't even stay in the chains. Jesus came, and Jesus delivered that man of thousands of demons, and he was left seated at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. Judas saw it, but was unaffected by the power of God himself.

Judas saw the tax collector, little Zacchaeus, repenting. He had lined his pockets with the taxes that he had stolen off the people on the behalf of Rome, and he was hated by everyone - and yet salvation came to that little man's house. He repaid fourfold everything that he had received, and he gave half of his goods to the poor - but even that didn't move Judas from his sin. Are you here tonight, and you've seen people's lives changed? Maybe they're sitting beside you. Folk in your family, or in the neighbourhood, or in the workplace, folk who have come to this church - but like Judas, you remain unchanged.

He heard Christ's teachings, he saw His miracles, he saw Christ save others - but see also, and this is the most staggering, I think, to me: he did Christ's work. That's right! We read that the Lord Jesus sent the disciples out to spread the word of the kingdom.

He had seventy disciples, and He split them into twos, and He sent them preaching the gospel. When they returned they proclaimed: 'Even the spirits, Jesus, are subject to us in Your name' - I don't believe that Judas was an exception to that. I believe that Judas was engaged in the work of God, I believe that Judas was even performing miracles in the name of Christ - and yet he had rejected God's own work in his heart. Maybe you find that staggering, but we read in the gospels that on judgement day Jesus says: 'Many will say on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did I not prophesy in Your name, did I not cast out devils in Your name, did I not do many mighty works' - the word is 'miracles' - 'in Your name'. Jesus says: 'I will say to you, 'Depart from Me, I never knew you!'. The reason He gives in qualifying that statement is: 'You did not obey the word of God'. You didn't truly repent and believe.

You could be a minister in a church, a pastor, an elder, you could be a Sunday School teacher and not be born-again! Our churches, sadly, are greatly affected by this. It's not a new phenomenon. In 1735 John Wesley, who later became the founder of Methodism, set out as a missionary to Georgia in a colony of America. He was an ordained Anglican minister, as was his father before him. Two years into his missionary work, this is what he said: 'I went out to convert the Indians, but, oh God, who shall convert me?'. What a statement! Engaged in the work of God, but the work of grace had never been done in his life.

You know, this is a real evangelical problem: false profession, people who grow up in the ranks of the church, and just sort of slip into the way of doing things. They know how to pray, they know intellectually about Jesus and what He has done, but they have never truly been born-again. Now it's by simple faith, childlike faith, a child can do it, but we've got to make sure we've entered into such an experience. It's generally agreed today, right across the whole spectrum of the evangelical church, that this is a problem. The late Bill Bright of Campus Crusade said: 'Many who call themselves Christians are not really biblical Christians at all. Although they may be religious people who attend church regularly, they have never experienced the new birth and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ'. Dr Rod Bell, President of the Fundamentalist Baptist Fellowship of America, believes that 50% of people that go to church are lost. Evangelist Luis Palau said: 'Of 80% of Americans who claim to be Christian, few live any differently from pagans or atheists, as though God has no claim on their lives'. Dr James Dobson, the Christian psychologist, admitted: 'The majority of Americans are dabbling in religious expression that has no substance'. Can I say to you, particularly young people here tonight: make sure that you are genuinely born-again! It's horrifying to hear some Christian leaders say of the young people, and not so young, that if you sat them down and asked them: 'Give me the Gospel in a nutshell', they can't tell it.

Now I know Judas was ordained to this role, and there's great mystery here and I don't claim to understand it. We see it prophesied there in verse 18, quoting Psalm 41 verse 9: 'I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me''. There's great mystery of the sovereignty of God in this matter, but I have to say to you tonight: I do not believe in any form of God's sovereignty that nullifies man's responsibility. Though God is

obviously sovereign in this regard, and it baffles us, I am sure that Judas is guilty and complicit in this crime. Verse 21: 'When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me''. I believe the Lord was giving every opportunity for Judas here, to show that Judas was responsible and was complicit, and Judas had made choices all the way through his time with Christ.

Imagine the grace of our Lord here. He had just washed the disciples' feet, and His betrayer's to boot - what humility! See the depravity of Judas: he had his feet washed by Christ, he knew the plan that was already hatched in his heart to conveniently betray Christ - and yet he went through with it. Jesus knew he was the one Jesus was speaking of. Verse 22 says the disciples were aghast, 'the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke'. Judas was not aghast. Don't think for a moment that the disciples doubted themselves, they weren't saying personally, 'I might be the one, I might be the traitor!' - because it wasn't long before this, and indeed after this event, that they were arguing among themselves who would be the greatest. Rather they were contemplating among the others who was the worst! We read from Mark that they were saying, 'Is it I? Is it I?', and the inference there is, 'Surely not me! Surely not me!'. Jeremiah says the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, who can know it?

In verse 26 we read: 'Jesus answered, 'It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it''. Now, to break bread with someone in these ancient days was a token of fellowship, a pact of friendship, of mutual trust - and so it was a most wicked treachery to break bread, to fellowship with someone, and for them to go and betray you. David said prophetically of this moment: 'Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me'. How tragic! How must the Lord of glory have felt? Verse 27, when Judas received the bread dipped in bitter herbs, we read that Satan entered him. Then he left to notify the chief priests where Jesus could be found, setting off a chain of events that would lead to Calvary, to the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus. Now I want you to see this please, verse 27, Jesus said to him, Satan had entered him, Jesus said: 'What you do, do quickly'. In everything the Lord Jesus is in complete knowledge and in compliance with the purposes of God to go to the cross, to bleed and die. We saw this last Sunday evening, that when the Lord washed the disciples' feet, He gave Himself wholly and completely to it, laying off His garments, girding Himself with a towel, washing their feet having poured out the water, drying their feet with a towel, and then sitting down. He is in control, He has complete knowledge of what is going to happen - the Father has given all things into His hands, where He's going, and what He's going to do. Wonderful.

Now I have got to say to you tonight that I don't believe that Judas set out to betray the Lord in the beginning. I believe Satan noted that he was acquiring a taste for a secret sin. You see, he was appointed treasurer - we get a hint of this in verse 29, 'For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, 'Buy those things we need for the feast', or that he should give something to the poor'. We know that Judas was a thief from the beginning, if you go back to chapter

12 and the incident - it hasn't been dealt with yet - but the incident of Mary of Bethany anointing the Lord's feet. She took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard and anointed the feet of Jesus, the monetary value of this would have been about a year's wages. Judas protests in verse 5: "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?". This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it'. This was his secret sin, this gave, humanly speaking, this gives Satan a foothold in his life that became a stronghold, that ultimately allowed him to eventually betray the Lord.

Can I ask what your secret sin is that might cause you eventually to betray Jesus? J.C. Ryle, that famous evangelical Bishop of Liverpool, said: 'Open sin has killed its thousands, but secret sin its tens of thousands'. That's why Mark says in Mark 14:11 of this very event: 'He sought how he might conveniently betray Him'. We can conveniently betray the Lord Jesus. Maybe you're one who professes to be His friend - sure most people in our province, and indeed in this island, call themselves 'Christian' in some shape or form. You may have heard his words, saw His miracles, saw Him save others, you might even be doing His work of a kind - but you're betraying Him.

But we've got to move on, what a contrast we find in verses 34 and 35. We've seen the greatest example of betrayal, and now we see the greatest exhortation of love, verse 35: 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another'. Now, how is this a new commandment? You know, did the Old Testament not teach people to love each other? Of course it did. Did Jesus, before this moment in His parables and teachings and example, not teach to love one another? Well, yes, He did, but the ancient Greek word here for 'new' in verse 34, it implies freshness, a freshness in this command, or the opposite of being outworn. So this is not a different commandment, but a reiteration in freshness of an old commandment. It isn't that this commandment to love one another has just been invented, but rather that it's going to be presented in a new and in a fresh way - and here it is: 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another'. 'You've to love one another as I have loved you'. Now the Old Testament taught: 'Love your neighbour as yourself', but now this new law says, 'Love your brother even more than yourself, to the very point of death, laying your life down for one another'.

So the command to love wasn't new, but the extent of the love here was new, and it was being displayed in the life of Jesus, washing the disciples' feet - but, as that was a figure of going to the cross, this would be demonstrated in the greatest way ever. Romans 5 and verse 8: 'God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us'. Jesus says: 'That's the way you've got to love one another'. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and give Himself for it - but it's not confined to marriage - wives, you're to love your husbands like that; brothers, you're to love brother and sister; sister, you're to love sister and brother like that. 'By this all will know that you are My disciples', verse 35 - this is to be the distinguishing mark of all true believers. Now, if you want more on this, John

elaborates on it in his three epistles, 1st, 2nd and 3rd John at the end of the New Testament. In 1 John alone he teaches: 'One who loves his brother abides in the light'. He teaches that: 'One who loves his brother, God abides and dwells in him', but 'One who doesn't love his brother cannot love God', but because of God's love in our hearts, one should love his brother. So again he is emphasising this truth that love is the mark of the fellowship of true believers - and that means all other criteria are secondary!

A lawyer came to the Lord on one occasion, and said: 'Which is the greatest commandment?'. Jesus said: 'To love the Lord your God with all your soul, with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength; and the second is like to it, love your neighbour as yourself'. He agreed with that, because that's what all the Jews believed - this was, indeed, the sum total of the whole of the law and the prophets. So the Lord established love as the highest of all spiritual virtues. Ultimately, first and foremost, love toward God, but whenever that's in the right place, then love to one another. The law and the prophets are summarised in this - in other words, this is what the Bible is all about!

I read an interesting book not that long ago by an author called Gayle D. Erwin, the book is called 'The Jesus Style', and it talks about living life as the Lord Jesus did in our lifestyles. She quotes from these verses, 'A new commandment I give to you', and this is what she says, listen carefully, it's remarkable: 'I was shocked', she says, 'to find that such a statement was missing from the great doctrinal statements of denominations, missing from the great systematic theologies, missing from the creedal statements and, most unfortunate, missing from our daily lives'. This great commandment that summarises the whole of the Bible, that is personified in the manifestation of God Incarnate - it's missing! It's the very characteristic that we ought to have that distinguishes us from the people in the world as belonging to God!

In fact Paul said - we don't have time to look at it - 1 Corinthians 13: 'Without the love of God you're nothing'. It doesn't matter what you do, you can give your body to martyrdom, but without love you're nothing! Richard Sibbes, the puritan, said: 'We are as we love, not as we know'. The great evangelical problem is: we can't get past our brains, especially those of us who are well-schooled in the Scriptures! We are as we love, not as we know. Calvin said: 'Whatever is devoid of love is of no account in the sight of God'. He's just saying what Paul said, 1 Corinthians 13: without love everything is nothing! It's more than this, this very love does not just identify us as belonging to Jesus, but it actually witnesses the life of Jesus to those around, it testifies of Him. Francis Schaeffer said: 'Love, and the unity it attests to, is the mark Christ gave to Christians to wear before this world. Only with this mark may the world know that Christians are indeed Christians, and that Jesus was sent by the Father'.

Now almost every denomination you go to, irrespective of where it is, they have their own little list of criteria that defines them - I'm not saying all of them, but many of them tend to look down at those that don't match their criteria. We need to be very careful we don't transgress a command of the Lord here when He says it is love that distinguishes us as brothers and sisters, and it is that love between one another that

will actually - and you read it in 1 John, this is a remarkable statement - the love that we share with one another will actually prove God's existence, and that Christ came in the flesh as the manifestation of God. That's how powerful our love among each other can be!

But what do they see? Come on now! What does the world see? I mean, just take Northern Ireland for an example - what does the average Joe Bloggs out there say to you? He doesn't go to church, doesn't have any Christian background, and you mention religion or Christianity as they conceive of it, what are their immediate thoughts? Do they see us bickering amongst one another, fighting amongst one another? Do they identify it with politics? Do they see us as, rather than loving one another, seeking to maximise the faults of the other? Proverbs says: 'Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins'. Listen, this is a remarkable statement, and I want it to be indelibly burned on your consciousness: the only aggression a Christian should be known for is aggressive love.

Thomas Fuller made a remarkable statement that I've been thinking about all week, listen to this: 'If God should have no more mercy on us than we have charity one to another, what would become of us?'. Let me repeat that: 'If God should have no more mercy on us', in other words, if He should remove all His grace and protection and care of us, and the only thing He leaves us is the love that we have for one another to look after each other, what would happen to us? Would we become like the dodo? Describing first century Christians to the Roman Emperor Hadrian, Aristides said, listen: 'They love one another. They never fail to help widows. They save orphans from those who will hurt them. If they have something, they will give freely to the man who has nothing. If they see a stranger, they take him home and are happy as though he were a real brother. They don't consider themselves brothers and sisters in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit in God'. Is that the way we live? Not just among our kind, by the way. Jesus said the tax collectors love tax collectors, and you love people that are like you - you're not any better than they. Vance Havener said: 'Tertullian writes that it was said of early Christians, 'How those Christians love one another!'. Today the world might sometimes be more inclined to say, 'How those Christians hate each other!''.

'A new commandment I give to you'. Oh, we obeyed the commandment tonight, didn't we? 'Commandment of the Lord: be baptised', we've got to do it. We obeyed the commandment of the Lord this morning to break bread and drink from the cup, and remember the Lord in His death. What about this one? 'Love as I have loved you'. Love is practical, or it's not love at all. You might be able to tell me the four Greek words for love - that's wonderful, but practically love rolls its sleeves up. There was once a professor who wrote a very learned book on love, the only defect was that the professor had never been in love. When he took the manuscript to the typist to prepare for the publisher, the typist turned out to be this very lovely young lady. When their eyes met, something happened to the professor which was not in his book. He was happier in five minutes with love in his heart that he had been in 30 years with love in his head.

There is something that needs to happen 21st-century Christianity here in our country. We need a revival of unconditional true love, amongst one another and to those outside. He commands us to love, but as I close maybe you would just turn to one verse. He not only commands us - and, know this, Jesus and God never command us to do a thing in the New Covenant that we cannot do and He does not empower us to do. In Romans 5 verse 5, as I said last week, washing people's feet does not come naturally - whether we do it literally or metaphorically - helping people and ministering to people doesn't come naturally, it's supernatural. Equally so, this love, when you look at 1 Corinthians 13, it is agape love, it is the very love of God, it's a fruit of the Spirit. He commands it, but He gives the power, He enables it. Romans 5 verse 5: 'Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out', or shed abroad, 'in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us'.

It's the Holy Spirit that gets you born-again, and it's the Holy Spirit who fills your heart with love. If you want this love, you need to get it from God. I know that there's probably no one here like Judas - is there anyone like Judas? But there might be someone who's professing to be a friend of Christ, but you're betraying Him. Will you be a true friend tonight, and will you repent and confess your sin, and come to the cross, and become His true friend by obeying Him and being saved? Allow the Spirit of God to come into your life. Maybe you're a Christian, and you truly want to know this love - come to the same place, the Lord Jesus and His cross, and repent of sin and lack of love, and maybe bitterness, or jealousy, or strife. You maybe need to forgive someone for hurting you. I'm not asking you to say that what they did was correct - you're not even meant to condone something that is wrong - but maybe you have to let go of that thing and give it over to God, as Jesus did. He gave over to His Father, who judges righteously, Peter says, all the wrongs that were done to Him. 'Judgement is Mine', says the Lord. Do you have to do that tonight? Let God - maybe if you don't let go of that bitterness, God cannot fill your heart with this love.

Let us all pray. Is there someone here tonight, and you really want to engage with God in this regard? You want to be saved, maybe some of you young people - now, I don't want to do the devil's work and cause you to doubt your salvation, but if you're not sure, make sure. Maybe you're not so young, maybe you know that something is missing, you're not filled with the Holy Spirit, He's not controlling, you're not completely surrendered, you're not producing fruit to the Spirit of God - maybe you're not showing love? Who here tonight will surrender and say, 'Lord, come in and pour in this love into my heart, that I might obey Your commandment'? I need to do that. I don't think I could love any of you unto death - maybe one or two of my own family, but that's really pushing it, isn't it? We love ourselves so much.

Father, I thank You for Your voice. I thank You for the Holy Scriptures, but for the Holy Spirit who still makes them living and powerful, and applies them to our own hearts. Lord, may we heed Your voice tonight, and may we learn - oh Lord, we can get everything so right - we baptised tonight, Lord, and we believe that this is the way to do it, but Lord how much time and energy do we grapple in our minds and with our hearts and wills in loving each other; and, at times, loving each other when we are most unlovable; loving people that we don't agree with; blessing those who curse us;

praying for those who despitefully scheme and abuse us? Lord, I can't do that, but You can do it through me; and I pray that all of us here tonight will surrender and allow self to die, reckon it dead on the cross as we've identified it here tonight as being dead and buried. May You live in and through us for the glory of Christ we pray, that others may see Him and glorify God His Father in heaven, Amen.

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Portions From John - Chapter 7

"The Resurrection And The Life"

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Well, good morning to you all. It's good to be back with you in Scrabo again, and enjoying this last day of fellowship and ministry of the word this morning and this evening - and I'll be back in the not too distant future again for another session, and look forward to that in God's will. But this morning we're looking back at John chapter 11, where we were last Sunday morning. We took the whole section, and we looked at it really from the perspective of Mary and Martha, and what it was to feel let down by the Lord Jesus - in that He delayed in His coming. They wanted Him to heal Lazarus, he had not yet died, and then of course He waited until he was dead - and all the emotions, and the thoughts, and the doubts that they had in the midst of their suffering. But I want to come at this chapter a little bit differently this morning, I want to take verses 21 through to 26, these most famous verses in this chapter that we didn't really take time last Sunday morning to deal with. I want to look at: 'Jesus, The Resurrection And The Life'.

So let's read verses 21 through to verse 26: *"Then Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 'But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You'. Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again'. Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day'. Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?'"*.

Let us pray together, and do unite with me in prayer. Pray with me now that the Lord will speak, speak to you - don't ask Him to speak to that poor unbeliever that might have come in. Well, do pray about them, but pray for yourself as well - we all need to hear from God. I hope you've come to hear from Him. Maybe you're here and you're not a Christian, and that question hangs in the air for you: 'Do you believe this?'. Maybe you have struggled with doubt, and some of the issues revolving around death, the afterlife, and resurrection? Well, come to the Lord now. Maybe you have even lost a loved one recently, or perhaps you have been given a very bad prognosis with your own health? Let's come to the Lord. The Lord wants, I believe, to minister to people's hearts here by His Holy Spirit. So let us come and welcome Him to do that in our lives, whatever circumstances might be.

Father, we thank You that we can come to You, and indeed You welcome us and want us to come to You with our burdens, and with our cares, and with our questions, with the inconsistencies in our hearts that we sometimes feel toward You and toward the things that happen to us in this life that we don't understand, and we cannot make sense of. We come to You now, Lord, the One who knows all things - and not only

knows everything, but has all power to meet are need. We pray through the Lord Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that You will minister to every need in this place just now. We want to see Jesus, we want to experience the One who is the resurrection and the life. In His name we pray, Amen.

Now I believe that it is significant that this miracle of the raising of Lazarus - maybe we've just jumped into these verses, and you don't know what happens around them. Well, Mary and Martha had lost their brother Lazarus. The three were good friends of the Lord Jesus - and, of course, as you read the latter end of the chapter, there is a great miracle where Jesus comes to the tomb where Lazarus is lying and now should be rotting after four days dead, decomposition has set in, by this time the body would be stinking. He cries with the voice of omnipotence: 'Lazarus, come forth!' - and Lazarus comes forth, like a mummy with these graveclothes around him. Jesus tells them to lose him and let him go free. What a wonderful miracle!

Now, it's the last miracle John records before the cross. It's not the last miracle that Jesus did, perhaps, but it's the last one that he records in his gospel before the Lord Jesus goes to die for our sins. Arguably it's the greatest miracle of our Lord Jesus. Now the Jews superstitiously believed that the soul stays near a dead body, and near the grave of a dead body, for about three days. There was this hope among Jews that somehow the soul would re-enter the body, and the person would come to life again - of course, it never happened, but this was their superstition. Therefore it was accepted that, up to three days, something might happen - it never did, but something might happen - but certainly after four days there was absolutely no hope of resuscitation of a dead body.

This is what we see in verse 17: 'So when Jesus came, He found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days'. Now, that is highly significant, because inherent within that statement is hopelessness: 'Jesus, You've come too late!'. Utter hopelessness in the face of death which, let's face it, is the way our society reacts to this morbid subject. We think of death as the great leveller. Any medical folk here will know that once you pass that line of death, and pass the opportunity of resuscitation, it's too late to do anything. It is the great horizon, thus far and no further. You cannot reverse. Death is irreversible. We know that intellectually, scientifically, but some of you have known it very personally for you have lost loved ones - maybe most recently. Or maybe it's something that you ponder yourself - let's face it, who of us don't? 'When it comes to my time, what will death be for me? What will it be like? How will I cope? How will I pass through? Where will I be, if anywhere, after it?'. Everybody thinks that way at one time or another - if they don't, they should!

Albert Camus said: 'Neither in the hearts of men nor in the manners of society will there be a lasting peace until we outlaw death' - but we cannot outlaw it. As you often hear around the grave, 'In the midst of life we are in the midst of death'. Woody Allen said: 'I don't want to achieve immortality through my work, I want to achieve it through not dying'. It is the king of terrors, and the terror of Kings. Paul the apostle called it: 'Man's last enemy'. Now listen carefully to what I'm about to say: if Christ can do nothing about death, then whatever else He can do amounts to nothing. Can I

repeat that? If Christ can do nothing about death, then whatever else He can do amounts to nothing. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15: 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable' - miserable!

But the great good news of the Gospel message is not only that Jesus died for our sins and was buried, but that He rose again! Jesus has done something about death, He has defeated this great enemy totally and permanently! This is what is encapsulated in this statement: 'I am the resurrection and the life'. If you've been going through John's Gospel, you probably know by now there are seven great 'I am' statements - some say there might be eight. This is the fifth: 'I am the resurrection and the life'. You only have to listen to those words to realise that no mere prophet or apostle could speak such words, but only the One who knew He was God. I think there is an allusion here to the very name of God: 'I AM the resurrection and the life'.

I want you to understand what Jesus was doing for Martha here. We talked about her confusion last week, we'll not repeat that - but what the Lord Jesus was doing was, He was moving Martha from an abstract belief in resurrection that will happen some time at the last day. He was moving from this concept of resurrection at the last day, to a personal and a present trust in Him who can raise the dead today! What Jesus was saying, announcing He was the resurrection and the life, He was effectively, if we could paraphrase it, saying: 'I can give life any time, Martha'. You see, she said: 'I know he'll rise again at the last day, I know that'.

Now, I want you to understand what we're offering here as we preach this message, what we want you to lay hold of and accept. It's not a new idea. There might be ideas spoken of, of course, we think in concepts and ideas - but it's not essentially an idea, it's not a new principle for a better lifestyle. What we offer you is a Person, and a relationship with this Person that will bring resurrection and life to you! Martha believed in the abstract idea of resurrection and life way in the distant future, as perhaps you do as well. Most people believe in God, many of the new modern atheists would lead us to believe otherwise, but it's not the case - most people in the world, maybe not so much the West, though I think probably still the West, but certainly in a global capacity most people believe in some kind of deity and some kind of afterlife. You might be one of those, and you have an abstract idea of future things, and even God and Jesus - maybe you accept Him as the Son of God and someone special - but Jesus, see this, desired for Martha to lead her to a knowledge of He Himself as the resurrection and the life, and for her to have, through a relationship with Him, the personal certainty of life everlasting.

So I'm asking you this morning a very pointed question: have you a personal relationship with Christ which has given you eternal life? Well, have you? Or is all you have, like Martha, some indefinite kind of assent in your mind to a belief of some kind: 'Oh, there's a heaven somewhere, some time; and God is out there somewhere at a distance watching us'. Have you some kind of conception that's a bit of a blur really, and if you were asked to put it down on paper you couldn't be too specific, it's very uncertain and evasive. Certainly, whatever your concept of afterlife and God is, it gives you no help here and now - it's not helping you through life! It certainly doesn't

give you any definite certainty for the future, isn't that right?

Look at verse 23, Jesus purposely expresses Himself in general terms in order to draw Martha out: 'Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again''. You see, He wants to make her think - and He wants to make you think, by the way. D.A. Carson says: 'This is a masterpiece in planned ambiguity'. He was deliberately not being very clear, because He wanted to tease out of her mind how she had this concept way in the future, but wasn't counting upon Jesus to do anything in the here and now. Now, of course, on one level Jesus' words could be taken as no more than a doctrinally sound attempt at bringing solace to Martha who had been bereaved of her brother. I mean, we could understand Jesus here in verse 23 as saying: 'Well, Martha, the resurrection will take place, and your brother will be restored to bodily life' - and Jesus believed that, He does believe in a resurrection, just like the Pharisees also believed, and the Sadducees didn't of course. I imagine, I have to say, that this probably was the standard procedure for pastoral care of the day. You know, you go up to somebody who has been bereaved and say: 'There, there. There's going to be a resurrection some day, and you'll meet your loved one'.

This is how Martha understood the words of Jesus, as if He was talking about that last day, away in the distance - for in verse 24, Martha said to Him: 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day'. Now, is it the case that Jesus could do no better than dead religion of His day in comforting people who were bereaved? Is that the case? Of course it's not! For in verse 25 He says: 'I am' - present tense - 'I am the resurrection and the life'. You see, Jesus was offering immediate relief in the face of death. He offers up to all who believe in Him, all who receive Him, He offers you immediate relief! I love that.

Now, of course, you might say: 'Ah, but hold on a minute! Martha got a literal resurrection! She got her brother back'. Well, that's the prospect of all believers. Yes, in the last day that will happen, and we believe that when Jesus comes again at the last trump, that He will take His people, who are living, to be with Him - but those who are dead, first, will rise again and be translated, and go to be with Jesus in the air. We believe this - but Jesus was offering, I believe, much more. In effect, what He was doing for Martha was He was moving the doctrine of resurrection out of the future and into the present. You see, Martha was looking into the future, knowing that Lazarus would rise again and she would see him - but Jesus wanted to centre her attention on the present, to know that 'Wherever I am, Martha, there is resurrection and there is life. Wherever I am there is resurrection power'.

Now listen to a couple of verses in the New Testament that bear this out. Romans 6 verse 4, listen: 'Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life' - that's resurrection language. Galatians 2 verse 20: 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me'. Philippians 3 verse 10, Paul said it was his great desire: 'that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His

sufferings, being conformed to His death'. You see this? This life is something that the believer knows now. Yes, they look forward to a resurrection when Jesus returns, but this life comes as a result of faith in Christ. Not only is Jesus the conqueror of death by and by in the resurrection on the last day, but He is this always. He is always the conqueror of death - and that is, I believe, the truth, exactly the truth, which Martha failed to grasp. Her sights were set to the future, Jesus said: 'I am, Martha'.

Now this is probably totally irrelevant to some of you, but there is a slight resurgence among circles similar to yours here of a teaching which is very akin to 'soul sleep' - but it's even worse, because it's teaching now the destruction of the soul between death and the resurrection. There was a conference recently in the Park Avenue Hotel during the summer, where some folk from America were brought over by people who are sympathetic to this teaching, and they were teaching this very thing: effectively robbing the believer of the hope now to be with the Lord. They've got all sorts of cultish ways of twisting Scripture and reinterpreting them to fit into their mould - but there are many more clear Scriptures than this one, of course, in that regard, but I have to say that this is a marvellous one in commentary to their false doctrine. He is the victor over every form of death! Paul said to Timothy: 'Christ has abolished death, and brought immortality to light through the Gospel'.

This life is not found in a principle, or in a prophetic calendar, but in a Person. What Jesus was saying when He said: 'I am the resurrection and the life', is 'the whole power to restore, to impart and to maintain life, resides in Me'. Can I tell you: that's what John's Gospel is all about. It does talk about the future, it does talk about resurrection, it does talk about what happens when Jesus comes again and believers are given new bodies - but it also talks about having that life now. John 1 verse 4, the introduction: 'In Him', Jesus, 'was life, and the life was the light of men'. He's the life!

Turn with me to John 5 to see this. A lot of people would relegate this life just to resurrection, but John 5 in verse 24 - this is a passage, of course, on resurrection, bodily but also more than that - these two verses, verses 24 and 25 of John 5: 'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life', present, personal possession, 'has', 'and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life' - when? At that moment of faith - and death is a judgement. Now, that's spiritual resurrection, we would call it 'regeneration', being born-again. It comes by having faith and repentance. But here's the resurrection physical, verse 25: 'Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live'. So there is this seeming paradox: 'The day is coming, but now is, when the dead hear the voice of the Son of God'. So there is not only physical resurrection to look forward to - praise God for that! That is the ultimate consummation of all God's plans. He wants us, body, soul and spirit, to be together in the image of Christ - but there is life now for those who believe in Him, that very resurrection life that Jesus brought.

I'm getting excited, but it's something to be excited about! Ephesians chapter 2 talks about this, even when we were dead in trespasses, we have been made alive -

Ephesians 2:5 and 6, we have been made alive: 'together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus' - when? When? Now! Now! You're in heaven! Are you going to tell me that when I die and rot in the grave that I'm just going to cease to exist, and I'll be separated from God, and separated from my loved ones, and even separated from the life that I now have - I have it now! Are you telling me God's going to take it away?

We must affirm the literal resurrection in the future, no doubt about it, and I don't think we talk about it enough - but we must not deny that the believer has such life, spiritually, now. John chapter 8 and 51: 'Most assuredly', Jesus said, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word', listen to this, 'he shall never see death'! We know John 3, don't we, 15 and 16? 'Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life'.

The ordinary, mortal life ebbs away, doesn't it? Life in this body, natural life - but the life that Jesus gives never ends. I believe it's in that sense that Jesus said: 'Whoever lives and believes in Me will never die'. I know people allude it to the rapture - I believe in a rapture, but I don't believe necessarily that that's what the Lord is getting at in this verse. I believe He's getting at this fact: that when you believe in Christ, even when you're alive you've got that life, and you'll not pass through death like other people do.

Is there someone here who fears death? I know it's not a question you're asked most days in the week - I was actually asked it on Friday! I went into the barbers for a haircut, and the girl with the scissors asked me: 'Do you fear death?! After I wiped the sweat off my brow for a moment or two, just checked I had still both ears, my answer was: 'Well, I don't want to die' - I think it's a very unhealthy thing to want to die - 'I'm not looking forward to dying, the process, however it comes, but am I afraid of what will be there after? No'. Now, if you told me now: 'You're going to die tomorrow', I might be a wee bit afraid - because I believe God gives you the strength and the grace to face death when you're going to, and sometimes people who are dying face it better than the people around them because they have extra grace for dying from the Lord. But I want to ask you: do you fear death? You know, I know that there are people who put their head on the pillow at night, grown men, and they sob like babies, weep into their pillow, because they fear death.

John Wesley said: 'My people die well' - strange thing, to think of dying well! Why, why does the Christian die well? Listen to Hebrews 2:14 and 15: 'Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood', we human beings are made of flesh and blood, 'Jesus Himself likewise shared in the same', flesh and blood, 'that through death He might destroy him who had', past tense, 'had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage'. Jesus, at the cross, when He shed His precious blood and died, tasted death for every man, woman, boy or girl - I believe that. Having done so, has potentially released us from the fear of death if, 'Do you believe this?'.

Have you, all your lifetime, been subject to a fear of death? There is no reason why, because Jesus says: 'If you believe in Me', listen, 'you will never, never die'. You will simply take an instant transition from the old life into the new, you will pass through the natural process, but you need fear no evil, Jesus says, 'For I, your Good Shepherd, am with you to comfort you'. Jamieson, Fauset and Brown put it better than I could in their commentary, listen: 'The believer's death shall be swallowed up in life, and his life shall never sink into death. As death comes by sin, it is His', that is, Christ's, 'to dissolve it; and as life flows through His righteousness, it is His to communicate and eternally maintain it'. He quotes Romans 5:21: 'so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord'. He goes on: 'The temporary separation of soul and body is here regarded as not even interrupting, much less impairing, the new and everlasting life imparted by Jesus to His believing people'. That's what it means to be a Christian, to be in the body of Christ, believers! And if the Head is alive, how can any part of His body be dead? Burkett put it like this: 'Oh love stronger than death! The grave cannot separate Christ and His friends'. I like that.

Other friends accompany us to the brink of the grave, and then they leave us - but neither life nor death can separate me from the love of God in Christ. Do you believe this? I think it was Samuel Bengel who said: 'No one is ever read of as having died while the Prince of life was present'. Do you notice that? In the three resurrections that Jesus performed in the New Testament, He was absent for their deaths - but when He is there, He breaks up every funeral, for He is the present resurrection and life; he who believes in Him shall never, never die!

He's not a mere Teacher on resurrection and life, He is the Divine Author of resurrection, whether spiritual or physical, and He is the Root and the Fountain of all life. Do you believe this? I'm asking you a question: do you believe this? What the Lord was saying to Martha is: 'Can you take this in, Martha? Can you receive this? Can you embrace it in your heart?'. He's not challenging Martha to debate, like you might debate on the door with the Jehovah's Witnesses. He's not interested in debate, He knows the truth already! He's not wanting intellectual assent, He's not wanting her to tick a box or quote a creed - He wants her to put faith! We find in John 11 the word 'faith' in various forms, 'belief', 'believe', it's found at least eight times - this is what it's all about! Do you believe this? You see, you can, like Martha, have a general faith in biblical ideas, and the future, and concepts - but have you a specific, a personal faith in the One who is the resurrection and the life? Have you come to Him? Have you surrendered yourself to Him? Have you repented of your sins, and confessed them, and renounced them, and received His forgiveness? Because it is this saving faith in Him that will make you become an instant partaker, an instant partaker of the life that shall never end! Do you have it? Or do you have a fear of death?

Francis Louis XIV decreed that the word 'death' would not be uttered in his presence - he still died. In contrast, Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, commissioned a servant to stand in his presence every day and say these words: 'Philip, you will die'. You will die, most likely, one out of one people die. You will die.

How will you die? Do you know that this One can deliver you right now from the fear of death? Some of you believers have a fear of death - God has not given the spirit of fear, do you know that? If you have a spirit of fear in you of any shape or form, it does not come from God because He doesn't give a spirit of fear. He gives a Spirit, the Holy Spirit which is a Spirit of power, love, and a sound mind. So you need to get rid of the spirit that the devil has given you, the spirit of fear, and take the Spirit God has given you, the Holy Spirit of the One who is the resurrection and the life. I believe He wants to deliver folk here this morning.

Now I said I wasn't looking forward to death, I'm not - but I have a couple of the hymns picked, and they're all resurrection. I think my favourite is the Easter hymn by Charles Wesley. One of the verses goes like this, close your eyes and think of this:

'Lives again our glorious King,
Where, O death, is now thy sting?
Once He died our souls to save,
Where thy victory, O grave?

Soar we now where Christ has led,
Following our exalted Head,
Made like Him, like Him we rise,
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies'.

Hallelujah! Christ the Lord is risen today! Sons of men and angels say - and Scrabo Hall, if you can liberate yourself - say 'Hallelujah!' Let us pray.

Now, as we've bowed our heads, I'm conscious that God is speaking. You know I don't like to rush, but I hate rushing at the end of the time when God has been speaking, because there is a brooding of the Holy Spirit on a gathering like this. God is doing things, and when we get up and start blethering about nonsense - even at times we can sing a hymn, and it can be the bird of the air that snatches away the seed - because God doesn't want you to do anything right now, He just wants you to listen and respond. We want to facilitate Him and you in that two-way exchange of receiving what He offers you: deliverance from sin, deliverance from the fear of death, deliverance from the judgement of hell that is before those who do not believe in Jesus - the hell that He took on the cross, that you might never experience it. Who here this morning will receive Jesus as their Saviour, and receive life? You know you haven't been living - is there someone just where you are?

You say: 'David, what do I do?'. Well, there is a sense in which it has all been done, all you need to do is receive it - but there is something to do, and that is repent and believe. That's what Jesus taught and the Apostles preached: you need to change your mind about your sin, that's what repentance is, change your attitude to sin - that it's not a good way to live, and that is going to effectively damn your soul forever. You need to change your mind to turn from it to Christ for salvation, and believe in Him - not go out and do good works until you die, but believe in Him to come in and live through you, to enable you to live the life that He wants for you. You've just got to

take it by faith, and say: 'Lord Jesus, I repent of my sin, and I ask You to come in and be my Saviour. I believe in You'.

Child of God, what about you? Are you in bondage to some fear, even the fear of death? There's a wonderful verse in Joel chapter 2, I think it's verse 36, that says: 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered'. We preach the gospel through that - but, you know, the gospel, salvation, being born-again, is only the start of the process of deliverance - that's when God gets a hold of you start to do a work on you. Maybe you need to be delivered here this morning from fear, even the fear of death. In the name of Jesus, kick it out, kick it out, say that it has nothing in you, because you are Christ's - it has nothing in you, that fear of death, and welcome the Spirit of power, love, and a sound mind, welcome the Holy Spirit to fill you and take control of you.

Father, we thank You for Your still small voice. We thank You that Jesus still is the resurrection and the life. We know that this message will be difficult for some here, but Lord we know it's necessary - we either believe it or we don't. We choose to believe and receive that life that shall never end. Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You endure the death of all deaths, that we might have life ever more. We worship You, Conqueror of death, of the grave and hell, the One who has the keys on Your girdle of death and hell. We worship You, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and may You be Lord of every life here this morning. For Your glory we pray, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - September 2011
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Portions From John - Chapter 8

"The Cure For Care"

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Well, good evening, good to be back again to share God's word. We're turning tonight to John 13 and, if you can remember, we finished just short of the end of the chapter, and that was on purpose because we're going to look tonight at verses 36 of John 13 right through to chapter 14 verse 6. Now, I was allocated these portions as usual and tonight was emphasised as being an evangelistic evening. Now I know that hasn't, perhaps, been announced or emphasised, so there will be both teaching and gospel in this message, and encouragement hopefully, and it will fit very well, actually, with what we were looking at this morning from John chapter 11, 'I am the resurrection and the life'. I'm taking as my title tonight: 'The Cure For Care'.

So we will begin reading, please, at John 13:36: *"Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, where are You going?'. Jesus answered him, 'Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward'"*. Now let me just pause there, because I mentioned this morning in passing a revival in an old untruth, heresy, which is very like 'soul sleep' - but is even worse, as far as I can see, because it is purporting that the soul doesn't sleep, it actually ceases to exist. What these teachers are now doing in mainline evangelicalism, some of them, are telling us that there is no intermediate heaven - that when you die, you just cease to exist, and that the resurrection, that's what we all ought to look forward to (we ought to look forward to that, and I think often we don't emphasise resurrection as we ought), but it's not until then that you will live again and be 'recreated' in effect. Now there's a problem right through the Scriptures if you take that particular viewpoint - very clear passages, some of which we will touch on tonight, not in relation to that of course but they will be very relevant. This is a very interesting one in the light of what I have just shared of this particular heresy, Jesus says: 'Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, Peter, but you shall follow Me afterward'. Now the 'you' here is the second person, which means it is directly pointed at Peter. It is an inference to Peter's death in martyrdom, that he would follow Jesus in death for Jesus. He would not follow Jesus as Jesus was going to the cross, and then eventually through resurrection to heaven, at that moment - but he would, not long after. So he was following Jesus, even before resurrection.

Let's read on, verse 37: *"Peter said to Him, 'Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake'. Jesus answered him, 'Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times. Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I*

go you know, and the way you know'. Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?'. Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'".

Let us pray, and let us all together pray that God will come and meet with us, and speak to many hearts here this evening. Father, we thank You for Your word. We thank You for the power of the Gospel, we thank You for the Holy Spirit who has been given to the church, and we thank You, Lord, for any evidences we have of His ministry amongst us. We pray for that afresh tonight, that the Holy Spirit would come and take the Word and apply it to our minds and our hearts, that our very spirits would be touched with the quickening power of the Holy Spirit taking the Word of God and applying it to our lives. We pray tonight that it might please You to come, and to illumine those who are still dead in their trespasses and in their sins, people who are weighed down with sins, burdened with their lives. Lord, we pray for believers who also feel heavy laden. O God, so many cares and concerns that, at times, destroy the peace and joy that we ought to have in our Lord. So we pray tonight that You will minister to them too, and all of us together that we might be encouraged as we contemplate these great eternal truths. So Lord, hear us we ask, for we ask alone for the glory of our Lord Jesus, and we ask for the help of the Holy Spirit now. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Most of the chapter divisions in Scripture are helpful, but occasionally they obscure something that God perhaps has intended us to see. Therefore we can fail at times to connect two chapters in their theme because of a man-made division, when God may well desire that we should read them flowing seamlessly. Now I do believe that here is one such instance, between the end of chapter 13 and chapter 14 - that's what we've read together. So just look at it, taking the last verse of chapter 13 and the first verse of chapter 14: 'Jesus answered Peter, 'Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times. Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me'.

Now, of course, the 'Let not your heart be troubled' is in the plural, He's addressing all of the disciples - but there is a truth here that I believe has often been obscured by a division of chapter 13 through to 14, and it is this: Peter, on the brink of denial, predicted by the Lord Jesus Christ how he would deny Him vehemently, we know, with oaths and curses; the next breath that comes from our Saviour is, 'Peter, don't worry'. Is that not precious? 'You believe in God, believe also in Me'. We know from the other gospel records that He gave other reassurances to Peter that Satan desired that he would sift him like wheat, but 'Peter, I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not' - but imagine, I mean, what would we do in such circumstances? I mean, if someone who we knew was about to sin grievously, how would we treat them? You see the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, what grace! 'Peter, you're going to deny Me, but don't be troubled!'.

Of course, in verse 37 Peter felt that he would have died for Jesus right then - but later we find that his devotion was only based on emotion. There is a profound truth there, because - by the way, emotion is not sinful, sometimes you'd think, in certain

Christian circles, that there was something evil about emotions. Emotions are vital to the Christian walk, but emotions cannot be our power, nor our foundation for our faith. They are very fickle, emotions, they've got to be regulated by other more superior principles: truth, faith in the truth, and then the emotions will come into line. But Peter made this statement: 'I will go even to die with You, Lord', based on his emotions - but when his circumstances changed, his words changed. We must beware ourselves of what we say we would do in any given situation, if we are not presently in such a situation.

Do you understand what I'm saying? Well, let me illustrate it to you: sometimes you say, 'Well, if I was him', or 'If I was her, that's what I would do' - is it? Are you sure about that? Even in relation to God, we can contemplate what we might do in any given situation - but Scripture warns us to be very careful what we might say in an emotional moment. Sometimes we have to be careful, even in gatherings where we're being called upon to make commitments - and, of course, I'm all for that, put all the pressure on that you can biblically and in the Spirit for people to make commitments, but we've got to make sure that they're not based on mere emotion. The preacher said in Ecclesiastes: 'Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed; better not to vow than to vow and not pay'.

Peter didn't know his own heart, and sometimes we don't either. We say we would do this or that in certain situations, or 'I'm going to do this for God'. It's good to have ambition for God, but we've got to make sure it's based on the right foundation, not merely on emotions but on a surrendered will. When we come into the Acts of the Apostles, we see a different Peter - a Peter who is no longer building his decisions on emotion, but building his Christian life upon the finished work of Christ, the resurrection, and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. That's what turned Peter into the humble dynamo - that's what he is. Beforehand he's all courageous and bold, but when it comes to the moment he is weak and fickle - but then we see, after Pentecost, he becomes humble and yet in the same instance he becomes bold and courageous! Interesting, isn't it?

It's no wonder that the disciples were troubled - as I said, the 'you' is in plural here in chapter 14. Here's why they were troubled: one of them would betray the Lord, we saw that last week. Then they have just heard the Lord directing Peter personally, predicting that he would deny the Lord. So one of them is going to betray the Lord, one of them is going to deny the Lord, and I'm sure when the others heard that Peter - you know, big, courageous, bold Peter - was going to deny the Lord, they started to doubt themselves and thought: 'Well, if Peter is going to deny the Lord, what hope is there for the rest of us staying true and faithful?'. They were troubled.

But no doubt the biggest shock was Jesus telling them: 'I'm going away'. In verse 33 of chapter 13 He said: 'Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come''. What a

shock! Where is He going? Can we not go with Him? How can we get to where He is going? They were so troubled! You know, trouble and care, whatever label you wish to put on it, anxiety, worry, fear, phobias of all sorts, there are many psychiatric labels put on many symptoms that don't really get to the heart of the problems - but ultimately our world, with all the helps that we have, mod cons and technological advances, we are a society completely weighed down by care. If ever there was one, it is ours. Trouble on every hand.

Now, what did Jesus share with them to cure their care? Well, there is twofold truth here. The first thing is: Jesus encouraged them by telling them, first of all about Himself, and about the Father. The second thing He did was: He then gave them the hope of heaven. First of all He tells them about Himself and the Father, and that's very interesting because the Lord knows the medicine that you need for your condition. Whenever you're in trouble, the thing that you need the most is a good dose of personal knowledge of the Father and of the Son. Now, if any of us are weighed down with care, or any sort of problem or crisis, and we come to some kind of spiritual physician or counsellor, the last thing we expect them to write on their prescription, proverbially speaking, is: 'You need to learn more about the Father and the Son'. You wouldn't expect that, would you? You'd want some technique of some sort, some spiritual tranquilliser bottle to take, a shot in the arm - the first thing the Lord does is He tells them: 'You need a dose of the knowledge of the Father and the Son'. Now that correlates with Isaiah 26:3: 'You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Him, because he trusts in God'.

I came across a wonderful quote this week by Corrie Ten Boom, she said: 'If you look to the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. If you look at God, you'll be at rest'. You might think it's simplistic, but there is a great profundity in the simplicity, let me tell you, because I know about it. When we get our eyes fixed on God and His great attributes, and His Son Jesus in whom all of His character and nature is perfectly revealed, when we get our eyes upon Him it somehow lifts us out of ourselves and our situations. That's the first thing the Lord did: 'You believe in God, don't let your heart be troubled. If you believe in God, believe also in Me'.

The second thing He did was, He gave them the precious promise of heaven and His return for His own people. That's something we now can lay hold of by faith, it's to us as well: 'If I'm going away, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also'. Promises about heaven and about the future that will sustain us through life's greatest troubles - that's why they're given to us, to get us through! Is that how we use them? As I've had the privilege of going through these Scriptures the last couple of weeks with you, I've just marvelled at our wonderful Lord and Saviour - particularly in this thought of how He is going to Calvary. This is the countdown, it's 'Holy Week', we might call it, coming to Good Friday. The Lord Jesus, most likely, is in the early hours of Thursday to Friday morning. It really is impressive that instead of the disciples lending support to Jesus in His hours before the cross, the Lord had to support them in their trouble - does that not blow your mind? Can I just remind you, was it two Sunday nights ago, they all walked past the basin at the door, and He takes off His garment, He girds Himself with a towel, He pours water into the

basin and washes their feet of the dirt; then He dries their feet with a towel, and He sits down. We saw that as a picture of the cross, giving Himself completely to what He would do for them, and how He humbled Himself in service, how we ought to as well - but here He is doing the same, He's ministering to their needs. It's before Calvary, don't forget - though He's the Son of God - He's a human being; and yet, when He could have had His sensitivities so ministered to, He ministers to His own.

I remember reading a little booklet a number of years ago, J.N. Darby gave an address on Luke 12:37, the verse that reads, the Lord is speaking: 'Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them'. That's a prophetic verse about when He comes again, and Darby called his address: 'The Lord Jesus, A Servant Forever'. This is what he says in it, one quote: 'I bring you to a place', Jesus says to His own, 'where you are to sit down, and it will be My delight to minister to you'. That is the heart of John 14 - isn't it wonderful? He's going to take us to glory to minister to us! But do you remember, we saw this morning, Jesus is the resurrection and the life, now. So He wants to minister to you in your trouble tonight.

You don't have to give in to your emotion, perhaps like Peter, and despair. Of course in heaven He will forever banish our troubles, and He will minister to us in person - but you can have this now! Believers, I really feel an urge to re-emphasise this to you: you need to know this life now, 'Come unto Me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. The thief comes to steal, to kill, to destroy; but I am come that you might have life overflowing'. Is that what you're experiencing, believer? That is your blood-right in Christ - yet so few know the joy of their salvation.

The human being has always longed for such a place as heaven. The concept of heaven is as old as man himself. Next to the idea of God, the idea of some sort of heaven is the greatest conception that has ever occurred to the human mind. The sense that we live forever somewhere has shaped every civilisation in human history. I'll give you a couple of examples: the Australian aborigines pictured heaven as a distant island beyond the western horizon. The early Fins thought it was an island in the faraway East. Mexicans, Peruvians and Polynesians believed that they went to the sun, or to the moon, after death. Native Americans believed that in the afterlife their spirits would hunt the spirits of buffalo. The 'Gilgamesh Epic' is a Babylonian legend, and it refers to a resting place of heroes, and even hints to a tree of life. In the pyramids of Egypt the embalmed bodies often had maps with them, placed beside them to guide them into the future world. The Romans believed that the righteous would picnic in the Elysian Fields while their horses grazed nearby. Very different ideas, I grant you, but there is a unifying testimony of human history that mankind believes in life after death. There is the odd rare breed of the atheist among them, but anthropology suggests that every culture has an innate sense of the eternal: that this world is not all there is! You've got it as well, and even the atheist buries it in his great intellect, or suppresses it with a sinful lifestyle that he excuses by his philosophy - but Scripture clearly testifies, Ecclesiastes 3:11: 'God has set', or planted, 'eternity in the human heart'.

So heaven is not wishful thinking originating from us, but rather it is a hopeful anticipation that God has planted in us, Ecclesiastes says - not that we have designed heaven to meet our innate needs, but in fact God has designed us to need heaven. Are you with me? I don't know if you're a sceptic or not, but maybe you're sitting there tonight saying: 'I don't need heaven'. Well, ask yourself: where does the human longing for joy come from, the yearning for peace, the striving after perfection, the need to belong, the need to be loved, the quest for justice, and the search for satisfaction in all sorts of quarters? Where is that derived? C.S. Lewis said that since his childhood he had a longing for beauty, holiness, and eternal everlasting joy that, he said, was beyond all earthly satisfactions. He testified that whilst an atheist for some time, he decided that all these things - religion and so forth - were imaginary. But then he asked himself a question, listen to it carefully, he asked himself: 'Can one really have such an inherited and all-consuming longing for something that does not exist?'. Then he says he realised that all his old experiences of joy had been pointers, reminding him that he was made for another world. He then reinterpreted all those longings for joy as, in fact, longings for heaven and for God for ultimate meaning. This is what he said: 'There have been times when I think we do not desire heaven; but more often I find myself wondering whether, in our heart of hearts, we desire anything else'. What he is saying is: our search after meaning, our search after satisfaction - incidentally, in all the wrong places - is in fact something that God has built into us, He has set eternity in our hearts to have this longing for something more than ourselves and our lot. It is a longing for heaven and for God.

The sceptic will say: 'Ah, it's escapism' - is it? Is it escapist for an unborn baby to reach for birth? Is it escapist for a shipwrecked sailor on a raft to dream of land? Is it escapist for a seed too long to be a flower, a caterpillar to be a butterfly, a prisoner to dream of release? No, it's not escapist, it's real! It's what you long for when you know that there is something that exists beyond your predicament - you're not there, but you long for that experience. It is real, it's not escapist! Because it is real and God has put it in our heart, it is in fact escapist not to believe in heaven. C.S. Lewis sums it up by saying this, remarkable statement: 'No philosophical theory which I have yet come across is a radical improvement on the words of Genesis, that 'In the beginning God made Heaven and Earth''.

Someone will say: 'Well, you can't know for sure, can you? I mean, it's a nice anticipation, it's a bit of a spiritual placebo that might have an effect on you and make you feel a little bit better - but you can't know for sure'. The common quip is: 'No one has ever come back to tell us, have they?'. Well, better than someone coming back to tell us, Someone has come from heaven to dwell with us, Jesus. That's what the Gospels are all about, and in fact in this, John's Gospel, it's said of Jesus: 'He who came down from heaven', chapter 3 verse 13. John fills his gospel with many signs that attest to His heavenly identity, that He is the Son of God come in flesh - and, just before His return to heaven via the cross, and the empty tomb, and His resurrection, Jesus says: 'I am going away, and I'm coming again; and if it were not so I would have told you'. Manys-a-time I've preached that statement around an open grave, and I often paraphrase it like this: 'If it were not the case, I would have been the first

to tell you' - that's what Jesus is saying. If there's no heaven, if there's no hell, if there is no afterlife, if there is no resurrection, if death is all there is - you die like a dog and you're done for - I would have been the first one to tell you that it was not so!

Now, your issue is: is He to be believed? Is He telling the truth? Is He a deceiver, Jesus? Or is He deceived Himself? Now, if He were either deceiving or deceived, He died for the lie - and in fact His apostles followed suit, and thousands of Christians have died for this lie, believing that death was not the end. Rather all the evidence points to what Jesus said in verse 6 of chapter 14: He is the truth. He doesn't just speak the truth, He is the truth. All you have to do is weigh up not only Christ's words, but His ways, His life, everything He did - the proof is overwhelming that He is the truth, and the truth is: He died for our sins. Those indiscretions morally; those transgressions crossing the line of God's law and standard that He has given us enshrined in the Ten Commandments, that prove that we have fallen short of the mark of God; those things that actually bar us from the presence of the Holy God of heaven, and exclude us from heaven, and would doom us to hell - those are the sins that He went to the cross for, and He bore in His own body that we might be reconciled to God. He buried them in the tomb, and He rose again from the grave, and He is the only One who can save us. He is the only way to God, and that's why He says in verse 6: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father but by Me'.

That blows out of the water political correctness, doesn't it? Religious multiculturalism, that we have to say every road leads to God, and all gods are the same and all religions are the same - plainly either Jesus is wrong, or our society is wrong, and I know who to believe: the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who proved He was the way, the truth, and the life. You can't have a middle ground here, you've got to stand with Christ or stand against Him. He doesn't simply stand there teaching about the way, and He's not even pointing to the way, He is the way! Because the Apostles saw this, and came to God through Him, they died for this, the martyrs died for this, the saints died and fell asleep in Jesus believing this - that death is not the end, and those who have repented of their sins and believed in this Jesus, crucified and risen, shall never die! The great evangelical question is: do you believe this? Do you believe this?

It requires an answer - what is your answer? This sounds like a real contradiction, but: believer, do you believe this? Some of us are practical atheists when it comes to these things. We have given a mental assent, but it hasn't fallen down that journey of a number of inches to our heart and affected our lives? You see, this is the problem: our lives are not being changed, permeated by these truths. Do you know the connection of the thoughts, and the emotions, and the will - that's the soul, essentially. The way we think affects the way we feel. If you've got problems with emotions, you need to start redirecting your thoughts - like Philippians 4 - and think good things rather than bad things, and stop feeding your head with negativity and sin perhaps, and this worldview, and the system that we see pumped at us via the media on a daily basis. You've got to stop it! Stop it! Feed your mind with truth, and it'll not be long until your heart changes, and your emotions transform, and then your

actions start to change - because your emotions drive you to do what you do, so what you believe affects the way you behave. Paul's epistles are all about that: the first couple of chapters, belief, doctrine; last chapters, behaviour. Get the truth right, and your emotions will be right, and your actions will get right.

But what a comfort for the Christian life, that in life at any moment Jesus could come - we believe that, that the clouds could rend, and the trumpet sound. The dead in Christ rise first, and we that are alive and remain shall be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. But even in death, in death we can go to be with Christ in the presence of God. That's what Paul's great hope was: absent from the body, and present with the Lord. He's not talking about a resurrection body there, is he? 'Absent from the body, and present with the Lord', he was betwixt to, in a dilemma about whether to stay to minister to the saints, or rather to go and be with Christ which is far better! The Christian hope: do you have it? Imagine a country where there are no tears, no more heartache, sickness does not exist, pain is never felt, death never occurs - so there are no undertakers, no gravestones. There is no bloodshed, old-age is banished, tiredness is not even a phenomenon, burdens, goodbyes, disappointments, class distinctions, divisions, no accidents, no doctors, no hospitals - why? Because it's a place where there is no more sin, and it is sin brings the curse into our universe, and sin brings the curse into our lives! But Jesus says: 'Don't be troubled. Don't be troubled, for in Father's house there is no more sin'. It's a holy house. I remember learning that old hymn as a child, based on Revelation:

'There is a city bright;
Closed are its gates to sin;
Naught that defileth,
Naught that defileth,
Can ever enter in'.

How do we get into heaven if sin can't get in and we are sinners? Because Jesus is the Saviour of sinners, who cleanses sinners of sin and makes us fit to go to heaven. You see, you can't cleanse yourself of sin. Religion will tell you that: 'Clean yourself up, and maybe Peter will say at the gate' - and he's not even at the gate - 'maybe he will say, 'OK, you're clean enough, come in'' - that's not the way it works, it cannot work that way! The only One who would be worthy to be let in on that basis is Jesus, because He's the only perfect One. But what He has done on the cross, there has been a transfer where He has taken our sin, so that we might have, by faith, His righteousness. So if you come to Him tonight, confessing that you're a sinner, and repenting of your sins - changing your mind about your sins - He will give you God's righteousness that will allow you to enter heaven, because it's a holy place!

But Father's house is also a happy place - it's not just a house, it's a home. You might be living tonight in a house that isn't a home. Many of our houses are filled with bad memories, but in this home there are only good memories. There are no tears. It's a home that is beautiful beyond description, and better: it's permanent. Are you a young person here tonight, and you grew up in a nuclear family, and all of a sudden -

for reasons unknown to you, or at least the depth of them - something happened and wrenched Mum and Dad from each other, and you've grown up between two houses, in the brokenness of a marriage? It has affected you with disappointment, it's not what you would have wanted, it's not what you're Mum and Dad would have wanted I'm sure, but this home is different: Father is never going to desert you, the home is not going to be broken up. Maybe you have lost a loved one - if they're in Christ, they will be there, what a wonderful thought of reunion! But the greatest thing about Father's house is - and this is what Jesus said to His disciples - 'I will be there, so that where I am there you may be also'. So the entire focus of heaven is being reunited with Jesus. Heaven is heaven not because of the streets of gold, or the pearly gates, or even the presence of angels, heaven is heaven because Jesus is there!

I remember hearing of a little black boy on the mission field who was dying, and he spoke of his desire to go to heaven to be with Jesus - it must have been to another missionary, who hadn't much sense it would have to be said. This adult missionary said to the young lad: 'But what if Jesus were to leave heaven, what would you do?'. The wee fellow said: 'I'll follow Him'. Then the missionary went on: 'But suppose He went to hell, what would you do then?'. At once the little lad, with an intelligent look and a smile, replied: 'Master, there is no hell where Jesus is' - there isn't, in life or in death. Maybe you feel like you're going through hell now - do you know what I read in the Daily Mail? I know you can't believe everything, but Arsene Wenger said that the last couple of months that he experienced as the Arsenal manager makes hell, going to hell, his going to hell a breeze. That's an awful statement.

My friend, can I ask you: do you know the deliverance of Jesus coming into your proverbial, metaphoric hell - whatever you're going through now? Do you know the certainty of what it is for Him literally to save you from the prospect of a future judgement, which He took upon Himself so that you wouldn't have to? That's the wonderful good news! What a cure for the troubles of life and death: to know who God is, and His heart by Jesus revealing Him in His love for us, dying for our sins, rising again, so that we might rise again, so that we might have eternal life within us now as a present personal possession, and one day the promise of going to be with Him in heaven - whether He comes to resurrect us, or whether we die and we go to be with Him - such a hope will get you through life and through death!

In 1952 young Florence Chadwick stepped into the waters of the Pacific Ocean off Catalina Island. She was determined to swim to the shore of mainland California. Now she had already been the first woman to swim the English Channel both ways. The weather was foggy and chilly, and she could hardly see the boats that were accompanying her on the swim. Still she swam for 15 hours, and when she begged to be taken out of the water along the way, her mother who was in one of the boats alongside told her that he was close to the land, and that she could definitely make it if she just kept going. Finally, physically and emotionally exhausted, she stopped swimming and was pulled out. It wasn't until she was on the boat that she discovered the shore was less than half a mile away. At the news conference the next day, she said - listen to these words: 'All I could see was the fog. I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it'. All I could see was the fog, but I think if I could

have seen the shore, I could have made it - do you see the shore? Do you see heaven? Do you see the hope and certainty of your sins forgiven, and being with God when you die and when Jesus comes again? For that will get you through life, that will get you through death, that is the cure for care.

Jesus said: 'In My Father's house are many mansions', many dwelling places, many abodes - do you know what He meant by that? Listen: there's room for all, and a place for each. Have you booked your place? 'Believe in God', Jesus says, 'but believe also in Me'. Do you believe this? For if you do it will change your life presently, and forever.

Let us pray. Now let's just take the moment, while God's Spirit is brooding over this gathering. Someone was talking to me about the need to linger, just when God shows at meetings. You know, I feel that we as God's people really need to be taught about God's presence. We don't even recognise His presence at times, let alone know how to preserve it. You see the stillness that is around having received the word of God, you see the heaviness and density. We need to reverence that, and realise that God is interacting with people. We need to allow ourselves time to wait in His presence - what is He saying to you? Is it your time tonight to believe and receive salvation? Someone here, a young person - maybe I have touched upon things in your life, raw spots that you need healing and deliverance for, you need the cure for your care - it's the Lord Jesus. This is a full salvation that He offers, it's not just wiping the slate clean for wrong things that you've done, and giving you a ticket to heaven - He wants to make you whole, He wants to restore what sin has done to you. He said: 'The Spirit of God has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to set at liberty captives, to give sight to the blind, to open the prisons for those who are bound' - that's His mission statement, is that what you've experienced? Experience it tonight, say: 'Lord Jesus, yes, I'm a sinner! Lord, I come to You with my sin, and I come to You with my baggage, and I come to You with my hurts, and with my past, and with all that I am. I just surrender myself'. Maybe there is a believer who needs to do this tonight? 'I just surrender myself to You, Lord, and say come in and just start to sort me out, save me, and take me, and make me whole'.

Father, I pray that Your word will not be lost on us. I pray that lives will be changed and transformed forever by the power of Your word and the Spirit. Lord, hear our prayer, thanking You that You can say tonight to maybe those who have let You down, and betrayed You, or denied You, or just worried about their present, or their future, or guilty about their past - may they hear the word of Jesus to them tonight: 'Let not your heart be troubled, believe in Me'. We could have read on tonight, Lord, to that wonderful verse: 'My peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid'. Lord, may people take this to their hearts tonight, for the glory of the Lord Jesus we pray, Amen.

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