

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of December 2017

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

Jesus is God The Giver of Physical and Spiritual Sight. – conclusion

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) -

Last week we noted that like all the 'signs' reported in John's Gospel, this sign, of the physical restoration of the sight of a man born blind, had a greater meaning and significance from the physical miracle. There are three main points to be made:

- That the physical change that came to that man was so very profound affecting not only his sight but his confidence and personality as well.
- The extent of the changes he experienced that day shows that as well as his physical sight being given, he also received the greater miracle of being granted spiritual sight. Our study was to draw a number of elements about this process, (a) The spiritual transformation can occur, as with this man, in one day; (b) that just as the giving of physical sight was done by Christ so was the giving of spiritual sight. Even today this is so as it is the Spirit that proceeds from the Father AND the Son who gives spiritual (in)sight. (c) The transformation is an act of undeserved kindness – grace. If any today can 'see' the truth about Christ it is an act of grace. Today we will take up the elements: (d) the transformation was an act of power; and (e) the man was not passive during the transformation.
- The third of the main points, which we will get to shortly, is a collection of three of the other important lessons in this Chapter 9.

d) An act of power. This man wasn't somebody who had lost his sight. He had never had it! This is not sight being restored. It's sight being created. This is why the man reported in verse 32: *³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.*¹

None of us was born into this world spiritually seeing. The power that works in you to bring you to spiritual vision is the same power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead. (says Paul in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 18 – 21) A great act of power. An act of divine might.

When we come into the world we are already guilty, because we are members of the human race which 'fell' in Adam. Already opposed to God. In (human) nature we find spiritual truth boring and to every man and woman God seems far away; Christ seems unreal; heaven is like a fairy tale; hell's threats don't seem real. It all seems ethereal², irrelevant even. Then you come to see the beauties of Christ: that God really has come amongst us, and died in your place. God laid in the tomb, but then has presented Himself alive by many infallible truths, (Acts 1:3) that the One sent by God was God Himself and the One sent by God who was God, has returned to God and is exalted in glory. You see it! Believe it, rest upon it, to love it. Not just to love a set of propositions in the mind, but the deep (in)sight brought by the power of God.

1 Some commentators, think that Jesus actually made eyes for the man who perhaps had none.

2 extremely delicate and light in a way that seems not to be of this world.

e) The transformations did not occur without the man's faith. It was totally the work of Christ. But the man was not passive. He wasn't a puppet. He heard the 'word'. What he heard was verse 7: *"Go, wash in the pool of Siloam"* And he obeys!

He descends the steps, to the pool. Kneeling down, he puts his hands in the water and rubs the mud from his face. As the mud comes off ... he sees! The change took place then, as he obeyed. Yet in such a way that he couldn't take any credit for it himself. It was totally the work of Christ but he was not passive. The change took place in such a way that we can say that no change would have taken place if the man had not believed and obeyed.

But when the change had taken place, he didn't come back boasting that he had believed and he had obeyed and therefore he could see. All he could talk about was that a man who is called Jesus: *made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight."*

He attributes it all to Christ, although he was not passive.

And that's how it is with spiritual changes. His walk to the pool to receive his physical sight has its counterpart in his receiving spiritual sight: The narrative takes us through the steps. He saw ... then he saw more ... then he saw clearly ... then he saw perfectly. Opposition was one of the means of washing the 'mud' off his spiritual eyes until he was led into the clear light by Christ Himself.

Christ's 'word' effected both the changes. It was Christ's word. You cannot effect the change to spiritual sight. It is Christ's word that must effect the change. But ... you can put yourself under the sound of Christ's 'word'. And then when you hear ... obey! As you obey the transformation takes place. Which would not take place if you did not obey. Yet when it has taken place you are the first to admit that the change has come about by the power and the grace of Christ.

We return to the three main points. A great change came over this man in just one day; and we see a little of how both the physical and spiritual change came about.

- Now the third point is that this chapter is full of other important lessons. We shall consider only three of them: One by way of teaching; one by way of warning; and the other by encouragement.

a) Teaching (verse 4-6): Learning from Christ's example. You are a 'follower' of Christ. Then you follow His example.³

Our Lord was conscious that he had a precise work to do while he was upon the earth. He knew that every detail of His life was timetabled for Him. All His work had to be done in an allotted span. There was a definite end time. If one thing was left undone all would be compromised. His task was to give light to the world. (This task has not ceased since He has ascended into glory. It was and still is His task.)

Yet He is totally devoid of hurry!

³ ⁴ *We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.* ⁵ *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.* ⁶ *Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud.*

A most impressive reveal, on the pages of the Gospel, is of an unhurried Saviour.

He stoops to make the clay. Think about it! A few moments ago and only a few metres away in the Temple, they were taking stones to kill Him. Probably His disciples were saying, "Hurry! Hurry! Let's get away from here." But our Lord in a leisurely way makes clay and does this miracle, although He is being harassed by the Religious authorities who are filled with hate.

It's a fact of life than nobody who is in perpetual ferment, ever did any great thing. Our Lord's time is full ... purposeful ... effective. But unhurried. If you're to be a follower of the Lord, Jesus Christ, and you wish to be more like Him. Meditate more often on verses 4 -6.

b) A word of warning:

Those who say, "We can see." Are the blind ones! (verse 39 - 41)

³⁹ Jesus said, "For judgement I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see', your guilt remains.

We are warned that people, like the Pharisees, who say, "We see" when they don't, are the blind ones.⁴

But this chapter shows there is no understanding at all in their lives. Jesus had said He was the I AM. The miracle He has just performed: a blind man can see – is fully consistent with His claim. They should at least have stopped and asked, "Is it possible that His claim is true in the light of the miracle He has done."

But no! "We can see." they said, "and we can see that this man is not what he says he is." The chapter is filled with the history of how they did everything in their power to avoid admitting that Christ's claims are to be believed. It's a sad chapter. (verse 16) ¹⁶ *Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."* (verses 18-20) ⁵ "Anyway how do we know he was blind?" They asked the parents who deferred to the son.

(verse 22) ²² *(His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.)*

They had already made up their mind about Christ. No matter what! They would not believe.

(verse 24) ²⁴ ... *We know that this man is a sinner."*

(verse 28) They reviled someone who followed Christ.

(verse 34) *"You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.*

How blind! Not a hint that there is any willingness at all that Christ's claims might

4 The religious teachers claimed to be able to teach the truth. "Want to walk in the paths of God? We can show you." "You need light? We can give you light." "You want to know the truth? We can lead you to the truth."

5 ¹⁸ *The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind.*

even possibly be true. Why not?

Because if Christ were right they would have to admit that they were wrong. If Christ was right, their lives would have to change.

That's what keeps people from Christ. Christ's claims are clear and well authenticated. The evidence is compelling. People will not believe because they can not stand the thought of admitting that they are wrong. They will not admit that Christ is who He says He is, because the moment they do their lives must change.

So they tell the world that they can see. "After all we have science. ... I've studied lots. I can see that Christ isn't who he says he is!" This is the final proof that they are blind. [note also verse 41: "*If you were blind, you would have no guilt*"; Not having the means to know is different from having the evidence for knowing and claiming to know better.]

c) An encouragement.

This man born blind but now seeing is a great encouragement in the Christian life. The simplest believer, with a changed life, is more than a match, for the combined might, of all his enemies.

There's devastating logic, in this once blind man as he talks to the religious authorities. "*Give glory to God. ...*", they say, (verse 24) which is a Jewish way of saying, "speak the truth". "*We know that this man is a sinner.*" But he says, "Whether He's a sinner or not, I'm not competent to judge! One thing I do know: I was blind now I see." Specially telling was this since they know it was Christ who made him see.

Next they say that we follow Moses and you follow him. We know where Moses came from. This fellow – we don't know where on earth he came from. Then some holy sarcasm in reply from this man who was a despised beggar only a little earlier that day. (verse 30 - 33) "*Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.*"³¹ "*We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does his will, God listens to him.*"³² "*Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.*"³³ "*If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.*"

Such compelling logic. They have no answer! So they do what unbelievers always do: Instead of answering they pour scorn on it and brush off – do away with – the person saying it.⁶

⁶ In the late 19th and early 29th Century, two highly educated Christian scholars wrote many times to defend the accuracy and authenticity of the Scriptures. Against the, so called 'higher criticism' that had spread from the German universities of the earlier Century.

This 'criticism', held that, the Bible was inaccurate on many points and not historically reliable. And that miracles don't have to be believed and the deity of Christ need not be accepted. This from university theological scholars! The two great scholars were raised up by God to refute this 'criticism'. One was B B Warfield, who answered all the arguments. Secondly a great scholar, unrivalled in languages, Professor Dick Wilson.

Wilson said, "Every time when anyone has been able to get together enough documentary 'proofs' to undertake an investigation, the biblical facts in the original text have victoriously met the test" While these two scholars were not physically 'done away with', their writings were 'buried'. Not to be found on the shelves of many theological libraries. The 'authorities' can't accept denial of their entrenched positions. People in spiritual bigotry aren't interested in evidence and facts.

So take heart from the once blind man: The simplest believer, who has a changed life, is more than a match, for the combined might, of all his enemies. So speak up in Christian witness. Because as you do a remarkable thing is true, the conscience of the unbeliever agrees with what you are saying. What you say is echoed to them in their conscience and some of them are convinced. Thank God! The sower parable applies. But most aren't, so they reject you. Yet the more they reject you the more convinced you become. This is part of the Christian experience.

The more they rejected this blind man, the more persistent he became. When he first started talking about Christ, he was only convinced that He was a man. But as they remonstrated, he became convinced that He was a prophet. Then he was convinced He was worth following. Then He was Godly! Jesus then eventually met him again and he became convinced that Jesus was God. His spiritual life developed as unbelievers scorned him.

That sort of thing happens even if you are out-argued. Sometimes you get arguing, sometimes not wisely, about the Christian faith and they out-argue you by high powered 'waffle'. They devastate you! What do you do? You go home, your heart is aching, you cry out to God and open your Bible and you are more convinced than you've ever been that He's *a very present help in trouble*, and you know that the Book you have open is none other than the Word of God. And you're driven into the arms of your Heavenly Father in the way you have not experience for a while. Their opposition has actually strengthened you. The more rejected you've become, the more convinced you've become. When you've been totally cast out, like the once blind man, the Lord Jesus draws near and unveils Himself to you. You see like you've never seen before, that He is the Son of God and your Saviour.

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Pray that this may be so for all the saints gathered here today! Amen.

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) -

We continue with John's eye-witness account of the 3½ years he spent with Jesus. John already knows what Matthew, Mark and Luke have written, so he adds other things that would otherwise be forgotten.

It is six months before the death of Christ. Starting at John 9:39 (from last week) we see the initial connection with the festival of Tabernacles, which was the setting of the previous several chapters⁷. However whilst there is a continuing theme in chapter 10, there is a time shift to the festival of Dedication⁸ when the unity of Father and Son is restated.

Initially in Chapter 10, while the Jewish Authorities are still present, Jesus takes up a second 'picture' to show that people are divided into two distinct groups. He wants this fact to be very clear. He even does it in two attempts.

There are those who are Christ's sheep and there are those who are not. There are those who do not have Christ as their shepherd. While those who have Christ know Him as the Good Shepherd. The world divided into two categories.

This 'picture' of the sheep was well known at that time and at that place. Not at all here in Australia! In the first three verses of Chapter 10, Christ introduces two images: the sheepfold and the gatekeeper. A field may have somewhere in it, an almost complete circle of stones. Not complete! There is a narrow gap where the sheep can come in and out – one at a time. “Here are the sheep,” He says, “in the sheepfold.” “They belong to somebody.” “Here in the gap stands the gatekeeper (or porter), he is looking after the sheep until the shepherd comes.”

But climbing over the wall would be those who want to have the sheep for themselves.

Our Lord was the legitimate shepherd of sheep as He begins to explain. However someone else looked after the sheep until He came. This was John the Baptist. He was the gatekeeper who allowed (facilitated) access to the sheep. There were others who wanted to 'get something out' of the sheep, who were not the shepherd. These were the Pharisees and Saducees – the Jewish Religious Leaders.

With the 'picture' of the sheep fold we can ask three questions about the sheep – they are answered here in Chapter 10:

- How can you tell that these sheep belong to the 'Good Shepherd'?
Because they hear the shepherds voice. (verse 43) ³ *To him the gatekeeper*

⁷ Chapter 7 is the start of the Festival of Tabernacles setting.

⁸ This festival is not one of the ones commanded by God for Old Testament times and purposes. It was instituted to commemorate the re-dedication of the Second Temple after its desecration during the inter-testamental period – not recorded in Scripture. However – perhaps to coincide with Christ's holiness with the Father – He matches this with the Temple dedication. A Temple whose connection with the Father He is soon to assume. (“rebuilt in 3 days”)

opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. We also know (verse 4 & 5) that, the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” You can tell that these sheep belong to Him because they hear and heed His voice but no other voice.

Verse 26 & 27: ²⁶ *but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*

Very often, at those times and in those place, many different flocks – belonging to different people – are put in the same district sheepfold. Although sheep might 'look' the same to us. This type of shepherd knew his sheep very well. He may have even given them individual names. Although all together in the fold they will be separated when their shepherd comes to lead them out

The first shepherd arrives. He knows his sheep. He stands at the gate and calls their names. As he calls the names those sheep push to the front. When he leads – they follow him: in a file behind the shepherd.

Another shepherd comes to call out his sheep. There can be many flocks in the same field, but they never get mixed up. Because they know the voice of their own shepherd and that's the only voice they follow. If a sheep is called its name by the wrong shepherd – there's not a flicker of recognition from that sheep. It's not the right word that matters it's the right voice.

When the right voice calls: the sheep responds and follows. “That's how you tell,” says the Lord, Jesus Christ, “which ones are my sheep. They hear my voice!”

That's still the test. The Apostle John said, “Whoever knows God listens to us;” (1 John 4:6) He stood as a preacher in the world. He preached what the Shepherd has said: Some people heard the message and loved it; to others it meant nothing and rejected it.

A 'sign' of a Christian is when he hears the Word of his Saviour – when he hears the voice of his Shepherd, he pricks up his ears, his attention is arrested and he wants to hear what is being said. How are you affected as Christ's Word is being preached?

In Christ's flock, when He calls, the sheep don't just lift their heads and then go back to eating. They follow Him. Not driven. They are led where ever the shepherd goes. Perhaps the Shepherd goes into the most extraordinary places: 'The valley of the shadow of death', for example!

The 'mark' of a Christian: not just absorbed in the Word of Christ, but also follows Christ. He believes what Christ gives him to know. Instructions in the Word on how to behave. The Christian's focus is to please the Shepherd.

Further consider verse 7-9: ⁷ *So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and*

robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Here is a further example from the practice of shepherds of that time. In the sheepfold many flocks could be accommodated. But a particular shepherd comes for his sheep and he leads them to a better pasture. Here there may be smaller 'folds' for the night. For an individual flock – no gatekeeper needed here. The sheep are safely led in at night and the shepherd sits in the door. Side on. One side to the sheep. The other side to danger. Sheep can't get out. Wolf can't get in. The shepherd is there! So then – the shepherd is the 'door'.

Out of many flocks He calls His own sheep. They share a new fold together. Christians do! A 'fold' where Jesus Christ is the controller and the guard. That oneness and fellowship, that sense of belonging with other Christians.

- What privileges do these sheep enjoy?

Again verse 9: *⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved* They knew what this meant in those days. A sheep left outside the fold at night would not be alive next morning. This was a 'picture' of 'life and death'. There was only one place of safety for a sheep at night-fall: in the fold with the shepherd as the door. The Saviour's sheep have the privilege of life.

What sort of life? (verse 10⁹) More abundant life! Only believers really enjoy life. Nobody knows where he comes from; why he is here; what he's for; where he's going to, with any certainty, except the Christian.

The Christian knows he's a creature of God; to enjoy God even in this life; been placed on this earth to bring Glory to God; to please God: and he knows that his ultimate destination is the dwelling place of God. There's a security and assurance in his life, which means he can live life with abundance – fullness.

Even more: verse 28: *²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, ...* The Scripture is quite clear. People who just remain as they are – perish. But nowhere is this described as annihilation. This 'comfort' to those who would live the motto: "Live for today, for tomorrow we die." is false. Perish in the Bible means unbelieving people live under the anger and punishment of God, throughout this life, in the grave and for ever

Perish does not mean exterminate. It means to be under the disapproval of an angry God. Millions of people, right now, are living under the anger of God, because their lives are an offence to Him. They will die under the anger of God if they remain as they are. Then they will continue eternally under this anger of God. They will have a living death (also called the 'second death' in Revelation).

Jesus says that His 'sheep' will have 'abundant' life not only in this life but eternal life. They shall never perish. They will never be in that awful condition where they continue, eternally, under the anger of a righteous God. They are delivered from it.

9 ¹⁰ *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

The 'sheep' also enjoy: (verse 14) ¹⁴ *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me*, Some people know the Christian religion. With any ordinary intelligence you can sit down with a book and you can find out what the Christian religion teaches. That's no privilege. The Christian knows more than that: he actually knows the Shepherd. Try and explain that to somebody who's not a Christian! Because ordinary, unconverted people are spiritually blind – as we heard in the previous chapter. Yet the Christian 'knows' the eternal, invisible Person who died for you and rose again. A living, bright reality in your life. You may not be able to convey this to other than another Christian. It is a privilege, that the 'sheep' have from the Shepherd. We know Him, who to know is life eternal.

Verse 11 - 15: ¹¹ *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* ¹² *He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.* ¹³ *He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.* ¹⁴ *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,* ¹⁵ *just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

As you trust in things other than Christ, the Shepherd, the time always comes when they let you down. The Lord, Jesus Christ doesn't let you down. The 'picture' we have in these verses is of a person who is paid to look after the sheep. He doesn't care for them. The wolf comes and instead of fighting for the sheep he flees. He lets them down.

On what do your hopes for happiness depend?

The money you have? Your good health? Your ambitions? Your career?

Material benefits and reputation in the community?

Perhaps then, they retire you early. You're not wanted any longer! So often these things let you down

But never the Lord, Jesus Christ! When bereavement comes to you and your family, He is there as a *very present help in trouble*. (Psalm 46:1). When bereavement comes to your family because of your death, you will 'know' union with Christ even at that moment of your death.

When sorrow comes, when loneliness is there. When the Devil comes to tempt you and says, "You're far too evil ever to be forgiven. You can never have peace with God, because of the things you've done". Never the less you have the Saviour coming to you and telling you that His blood shed for those sins is all-sufficient and that you're still accepted by heaven against all the accusations of your own conscience. And there is never, never any situation, where you are without the Lord, Jesus Christ.

These are some of the privileges the 'sheep' enjoy. The protection of Christ the Shepherd

Pray that this may be so for all the saints gathered here today! Amen.

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep - conclusion

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) -

Last week after a brief overview of the Chapter (10), we discovered that Jesus uses the (for them) familiar 'picture' of a solitary shepherd.

Three questions were proposed which were being answered using the sheep and shepherd example: How can you tell who a particular flock of sheep belong to; what privileges do those sheep enjoy, because of the particular shepherd; and why do these privileges result from that shepherd.

So far we have found that the sheep are identified because they recognise the voice of their shepherd and follow him. They find they belong together with that shepherd.

They also enjoy other privileges and benefits because of this belonging to that shepherd:

Like a 'door' that keeps them in the fold protected from the perils outside, this door also prevents danger entering their protecting fold. This the 'picture' of the shepherd sitting in the doorway of the fold at night.

The result is that the sheep have life, they do not perish. Christ develops this further: His sheep (believers) have life yes, but more so. Abundant life in this life and in eternity.

A great privilege is to know the shepherd. In the context of the Christian believer: to 'know' Christ. The Christian 'knows' the eternal, invisible Person who died for you and rose again. A living, bright reality in your life. A privilege denied to unbelievers, who can never understand what you have in this regard, – unless they become spiritually awakened by the free grace of God.

The true shepherd can be relied on to protect the sheep, while the hired one will run away when trouble threatens. (verse 14) *¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.* Another privilege! While all the benefits the world appears to offer fail to last and satisfy. But never the Lord, Jesus Christ! When bereavement comes to you and your family, He is there as a *very present help in trouble*.

You recognise your shortcomings and you despair that you can never be reconciled to God. Never the less you have the true Shepherd – the Saviour coming to you and telling you that His blood shed for those sins is all-sufficient and that you're still accepted by heaven against all the accusations – even of your own conscience. And there is never, never any situation, where you are without the Lord, Jesus Christ.

These are the privileges shown in the 'picture' of the Shepherd brought to us last week.

And now at verse 16 we find some more:

- ¹⁶ *And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.* Up until this moment when Jesus is speaking, almost every believer was a Jew. Some had got it into their heads that God only cared for the Jews. “O no”, says Jesus, “My sheep aren't restricted to the Jews. I've got other sheep as well. They don't belong to this particular fold, but they do belong to this particular Shepherd! Them also I must bring.” Our Lord is announcing there that the Gospel will go beyond the frontiers of the Jewish Nation – to all the Nations of the world. The time will come when believers from every Nation, from every race from every part of the world, will comprise only one fold. With only one Shepherd.

No this is not a plea for some form of Church unity movement. A religious organisation is not in and of itself a true Christian Church. It is possible to be members of religious organisations that call themselves churches and not know the Shepherd. People are trying to squeeze everyone who uses the name Christian into one fold. This is not what Jesus is talking about. He says, that they shall hear my voice and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd.

All over the world today there are people hearing the Shepherd's voice. Some for the first time. They are following the Shepherd. They love the Shepherd. He's everything to them. And they're found in all sorts of Denominations – and outside all sorts of Denominations. In all sorts of cultures and climates. With different backgrounds, ages, male & female. What they have in common is that they have the privilege to hear, know and follow the Lord, Jesus Christ. And the day will come when the whole flock is assembled into one fold. Gathered round the one Shepherd. Our Lord is speaking about the heavenly glories that await us.

On the resurrection day God won't be asking you if you were a Methodist, Baptist, Catholic, Protestant or even a Presbyterian. He will be asking if you are in union with Jesus Christ through faith in Him. All those that are true believers in their life on earth, of the Lord, will enjoy the privilege of an ever lasting destiny with the one Shepherd. This held out in God's Word, is a prospect of heaven. This a privilege the sheep enjoy.

- So we come now to the third question. Why do they enjoy these things? (verse 29) The Father chose them! He gave them to the Lord, Jesus Christ
Verse 11: ¹¹ *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* The Son died for them!
Verse 3: ³ *To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.* The Holy Spirit 'calls' them.
(Because Jesus doesn't stand in the world today as a physical Person. When he speaks, as He tells us later in this Gospel, we shall find that He 'speaks' because His Holy Spirit is in the world. It's the holy Spirit in the world which makes the Word of God real to you. Bringing it home to your conscience and heart.)

Consider now the end of the chapter as we finish today:

The world is divided into two!

Some cannot “see”. Some do.

Some are not the 'sheep'. Some are.

Some are strangers to the Shepherd. Some 'know' Him.

Some think nothing in particular of Him. Others rejoice in Him as the 'Good Shepherd'.

Two clear categories of people. One or the other: no middle ground. Nobody belongs to both sets.

As our Lord announced these truths He divided His congregation.

Verses 19 & 20: ¹⁹ *There was again a division among the Jews because of these words.* ²⁰ *Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?”*

They prove that they are not His 'sheep; by that question: “why listen to Him?”

Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice.” They said, “Why listen to Him”.

But there were others who said (verse 21): *“These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”*

Then our Lord gave teaching on the same subject, on a separate occasion (some 3 months later – now towards the beginning of winter, whereas the Festival of Booths was at the beginning of autumn. The Festival of Dedication was not one of those commanded in the Old Testament. It had been established during the historical period between the Testaments, following a successful restoration of the Temple after a period of desecration by the Greek overlords. This is now 3 months from the Passover season which is at the beginning of Spring and will be Christ's final visit to Jerusalem.)

He was asked a question: (verse 24) *“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”*

This led our Lord to give the answer that led to the astonishing claim of verse 30: ³⁰ *I and the Father are one.*” Immediately the Jews reach for the stones – the stones that were used to repair the Temple. They are picking up these great rocks and are about to stone Him to death!

“For which of my Good works are you stoning me?” says Jesus.

“We're not stoning you for your good works”, they said. “but for blasphemy because you're a mere man and you say that you are God!”

He counters with two arguments to show if it was sheer bigotry or honesty making them want to stone Him. He says, “Don't you remember in the Old Testament, the word 'god' is sometimes used of judges and rulers because they stood in the place of God, before ordinary people, in the courts. If the word 'god' can be used of judges and rulers, why shouldn't it be used of me who has an intimate relationship with God and

has been sent by God and has a right to the title? Why should you stone me because I say that I am the Son of God?" Then He says, (verses 37 &38) ³⁷ *If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me;* ³⁸ *but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."*

The blind man being made to see should have convinced them all, that they really were in the presence of God. But there is no convincing unbelief. No chance that the unregenerate, with a fallen human nature, will 'see' what is ever so plain to see by the true believer. Unless the miracle of insight through Christ's Spirit – the 'new birth' – has by God's grace been given to you.

Some people have made up their mind about Christ, without ever seriously examining what He has had to say. They have made their mind up because of this: that if Christ is right then they are wrong. And if they accept that they are wrong their lives will have to change. But their not willing (and not capable of willing in that natural state) to change their lives. They can never admit that Christ is right.

These Jews were in the same position as that. Christ had proved His claims, by the majesty of His words and by the works that He had done, their consciences knew that they were face to face with God. It was clear that He was the 'Good Shepherd' and that if they followed Him they could have everlasting life. But they weren't in a state where they could admit that they were wrong. So they made up their mind that they would stone Him to death.

There's not convincing unbelief – verse 39: ³⁹ *Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.*

The chapter ends with our Lord going over the river Jordan, back to the place where John the Baptist had been calling for repentance and baptising.

Our Lord will not come again to Jerusalem until the 'finger' on God's clock is exactly at the right hour – His time will then have come. When God on earth will die for the sins of those God the Father has given the Son.

Meanwhile he stays out in the 'wilderness'. Exactly the same place where John the Baptist had been. So just as crowds went out to hear John, some now come to Jesus there. And we remember as those people did (verse 41) that John never did any miracles, but everything that he ever said was obviously true of Jesus ⁴² *And many believed in him there.*

Isn't that astonishing? Jesus gave this marvellous teaching about the Shepherd and the 'sheep' in the Temple: we don't hear of anyone fully believing. Then, on reflection, some follow Him into the wilderness, to seek Him, find Him and believe in Him. We

can receive great encouragement from that!

Under ordinary, Biblical preaching a person may have their heart pricked a little bit. None the less they leave with no apparent change in them. No determination to 'seek' Christ. Yet it's possible that in the mercy of God, through the Spirit working in them, they come to their senses and in 'a total wilderness' as it were, they will 'seek' and will 'find' Him. It's so marvellous that no matter how much unbelief is around – and there's always plenty – there is still some faith around.

One more word of encouragement. Encouragement to keep up your efforts at evangelism. By this stage in the wilderness John the Baptist was a memory. He was dead. He had never worked a miracle! Yet Jesus called Him the 'greatest man born of a woman'. All He had done for years had been to speak true words about Jesus Christ.

Wherever you are, as a Christian, you can speak true words about Jesus Christ. Even when you're gone! Some of those 'true words' will bear fruit. On the strength only on the words you've said – because it was true – even when you are forgotten those true words will live on. They will bear fruit and somebody will seek the Lord Jesus Christ for themselves.

Christ has spoken true words to us today. We as true believers, let us resolve to speak true words about Him.

[2236]

Pray that this may be so for all the saints gathered here today! Amen.

God Glorified in the Raising of Lazarus

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) -

Today we make a start on considering John 11. We begin with two questions:

- What is the chapter about?

The main facts of the story:

Jerusalem is divided from its surroundings by deep ravines. On one side, over the Kidron valley, is the Mount of Olives. Walk out of Jerusalem; scale the side of the Mount of Olives; pass over the crest and reach, in a little over 2 miles, the little hamlet of Bethany. There is a home in this little village where lives two sisters, Mary & Martha, and their brother Lazarus. Jesus loved to visit. The Gospel's record shows He got great pleasure from his visits. He often made this a stop on His various visits to Jerusalem.

But Lazarus is ill! The sisters can see that he is obviously dying. Nobody else can help but the Lord, Jesus Christ. Not long before, they had seen Christ open the eyes of a man born blind. They know that Jesus has been able to cure the sick, make the lame walk and made the deaf to hear. If only He could be there, the situation could be saved. But He's the other side of Jordan – two days journey away. The best thing they can do is send a message. "Please come. Lazarus, your dear friend, is ill. Come as quickly as you can."

Our Lord, the other side of the Jordan, hears the news. But although he loved this family and loved to be with them, He deliberately waits two more days (after the time taken for the message to reach Him), before He starts the journey. When He eventually arrives, Lazarus has already been dead four days. The funeral rites have been completed (quickly by custom) and the body by now has begun to decompose in the cave in the mountain-side, which is his tomb.

Martha comes to meet Jesus outside the town as He approaches. Jesus speaks wonderful words to her. But the grief stricken, disillusioned, Mary remains in the home. However when Jesus sends a personal message to her, she too rises to come to meet Him on the road. He also speaks words to her.

Then Jesus, weeping and groaning (the Son of God shedding tears on our earth) and praying is led to where the tomb is. He speaks but three commanding, words, loudly: "*Lazarus, come out.*"

Then. One of the most wonderful sights in the New Testament. Their hearts must have broken with joy. The family now reunited. (Though afterwards in their tight little family they would have looked back on the sight of Lazarus walking out with the burial wrappings still hanging on him as he waved his arms and stamped his feet to free himself from them. Happily recounting with joy the most incongruous amusing sight. Jesus had said: "*Unbind him, and let him go.*")

Many sympathisers and others had come from Jerusalem to be near the sisters.

They had followed them to the tomb and saw the miracle. ⁴⁵ *Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him,* But others went to the Authorities with the story. Who meeting in Jerusalem repeat their determination to put Jesus Christ to death. *Caiphas, who was high priest that year*, speaking for them all: decrees that Christ must die.

The chapter ends as it began with the Lord, Jesus Christ, together with His disciples, going to another lonely wilderness. (Probably north of Jerusalem to a place, then called, *Ephraim*.)

- Question 2: Why did Jesus deliberately wait two days before setting out?

Picture the scene:

Here is Lazarus getting more and more weak. It's plain he's going to die. He's the only man in the household. Which in that culture was a significant responsibility. They send a message to Christ. Perhaps then they watch at the window, or friends at the edge of the village keep a look out for them. Their brother is sinking and at last he dies. Still no word from Jesus. The funeral and body preparation is done immediately. (Usually on the day of death in that climate.)

Still no word from Jesus. One, two, three, four days pass. Still none!

Mary, at least, seems to have thought that the Lord had let them down.

Meanwhile 'beyond Jordan', the messengers have come. (verse 3) *"Lord, he whom you love is ill."* Jesus was particularly 'close' to this family, yet He deliberately waits 2 more days. Why?

Consequently, with the time for the messengers to travel and His eventual travel time, He arrives 4 days late! So why wait that extra two days?

It was not because He lacked loving concern, sympathy and compassion for His dear friends. (verse 5) In fact when He did arrive, when He saw Mary weeping and the mourners weeping by the tomb, *he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled*. (verse 33) He even wept! Don't think that Jesus is heartless or that He lacks love or compassion. Our Lord wept at the tomb of Lazarus.

Here's a personal lesson for you: You've cried to God for help and the prayer hasn't been answered – yet. You feel you must have what you ask – right now! The Lord appears to delay. You ask, "Why? Why Lord?" The answer to you and many others will be found in this chapter.

The Lord delayed because their view of Him was too small.

Look at verse 27: They, represented by Martha's words, knew who Jesus was. *"Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."* She knew who Christ was. (verse 21) *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* ²² *But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."*

Mary also (verse 32): *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”* They knew who Jesus was and that He had an unique power, which could prevent sick people from dying. Which could cure people who were ill. But this view of Christ was still too small!

They thought that with Jesus Christ there was a limit called “too late”! They thought that there are some situations, with which Jesus Christ could not cope. That there are some situations that are actually beyond Christ.

The purpose of Christ's delay, was to show to them forever, and to us, that there is no situation which is beyond Him.

Look at Christ's own explanation of the illness, verse 4. *“This illness does not lead to death. (He didn't say that Lazarus wouldn't die but that it wouldn't lead to death!) It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”* He shows His disciples that there is a purpose in this illness. It was the glory of God. That the Son of God might be glorified by it. This illness will lead to something that will exalt the Son of God. Which will magnify Him so that everybody will see forevermore His power and His Person.

Verse 11 - 15: *“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.”*¹² *The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.”*¹³ *Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.*¹⁴ *Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died,*¹⁵ *and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”* So our Lord, without being told, knew that Lazarus was dead. (He was only told in the message that Lazarus was 'ill', remember.) He told them plainly, because the death of a believer (Lazarus was a believer) is only like a sleep. It's a temporary thing. When the body of a believer is laid to rest, it looks to be asleep. Though it then decomposes it is only a temporary condition of the body. (The conscious soul of a believer is already 'with Christ'.) Just as sleep is a condition of life, death for a believer is a condition of continuing 'life'. At the last day Christ will 'call forth' the body from that temporary condition.

In this sense Lazarus's body was asleep. Christ knows this, but he waits for a further two days so that it can be seen for evermore that Lazarus is truly dead in the earthly sense. That this was not just a middle eastern fever which seems like death, but from which one may recover. Jesus knows Lazarus will be laid in a tomb and the body will begin to decompose, so the unique stench of death fills the cave. There will never be in anyone's mind a doubt that Lazarus was really dead. Jesus waits the two days to show that humanly speaking Lazarus is irrevocably dead. So that a marvellous display of His power will be seen.

Having answered the two questions let us now look at four groups of people in this narrative, this history.

- The sisters.

Martha: She shows tremendous faith. (verses 21 & 22) *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*²² *But even now I know that whatever you*

ask from God, God will give you.”

Martha's faith could stretch to believing that Lazarus wouldn't have died if Jesus had been there. But her faith couldn't quite stretch to believe, although she wanted to, that the Lord Jesus would actually raise Lazarus from the dead, there and then. She was hoping against hope, that what Jesus had done for the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17). And for Jairus' daughter. (Matthew 9:18–26, also in Mark and Luke) Jesus would now do for her brother.

Jesus promises in verse 33 *“Your brother will rise again.”* Could He mean 'now' thinks Martha. Could he really mean now? So she tries Him out, verse 24: *“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”* But everything inside her is hoping that Jesus will say, “No I don't mean only then, but now!”

Instead she hears the wonderful words of verses 25 & 26: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”* Jesus teaches her in those gentle though authoritative words that death for a believer is not a tragedy.

That's one of the greatest things about the Gospel.

Death for the non-Christian is a tragedy. This life is the only life he cares about. Then it will be gone. His hands will never stretch out to touch his riches again. His body will never enjoy his sport or his travel or any pleasures again. Everything he lives for will be finished. All that's in prospect is a fearful looking forward to judgement. After judgement the pains of hell forever. As a just reward for the way he has lived Godlessly – without God in his life.

Death for an unbeliever is a tragedy!

But death for a believer is not a tragedy. When we know Christ we know Him as 'the resurrection', the 'life'. The believer dies with the hope of resurrection. The hope of life. And remember the Biblical meaning of 'hope' is: a certainty that is yet to be unconditionally brought to pass.

Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Praise God this can be written over the coffin of every believer.

[1961]

Pray this be so for all the saints gathered here today.

Next week we continue consideration of the effect of the raising of Lazarus on further groups of people, then and now.

God Manifest in the Flesh

Per S Olyott

Today's 'observance'¹⁰ is not to remember santa claus and the attendant 'spirit' of goodwill and giving – that is so valuable to the retail industry – nor principally the angels nor the shepherds, Mary nor Joseph, Simeon nor Anna nor even the 'wise men' – who do not appear at Christmas Day. What we have come to remember is the astonishing truth found in 1 Timothy 3:16.

*¹⁶ And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:
God was manifested in the flesh, (NKJV)¹¹*

From this we have 3 questions to ask and three points to make.

The Questions:

- God was manifest in the flesh. **Why** did this happen?

For sinners to be 'saved' somebody must live the Law which they had broken. For sinners to be saved someone must bear the penalty which they deserve. Christ merely as God, was not capable of the obedience required. Christ merely as God was not capable of bearing the suffering required. Therefore it was necessary that the Godhead, to save us, must not only take upon Him a created nature, but our nature.¹² There is a necessity that the Saviour must be a man, because those who are 'fallen' are men and women. That's why this event took place.

Why did it happen? Because it was a necessity for God to be manifest in the flesh.

- The second question is **how** did this happen?

First of all there was a conception in the womb of one of the race of mankind. It was in that way that the Lord Jesus Christ truly became the 'son of man'. Which is a title He constantly used throughout His ministry.¹³ He became a descendant of Adam; a child of Abraham; a son of David – through the genealogy of Mary. Three great ways, predicted of Him, just as God had promised.

10 Church tradition, since the sixth century, has kept December 25 as Christmas Day. There is some value in recognising this celebration:

A way of expressing unity with the rest of the Christian Church and an association with the Christians who have gone before, in previous centuries.

But there are also dangers in observing Christmas Day. Historically the tendency has been for churches who recognise 'special days' to de-emphasise the observance of the 'Lord's Day'. Those traditions (some of which are Christian in name only) which observe a 'church calendar' most strongly are generally those who think the least of the (Christian) Sabbath Day – which is alone commanded by God.

Today then is a day of Christian liberty. If you wish to observe Christmas Day then it's in your liberty to do so. And vice versa. It's not part of your liberty to 'bind' Christmas Day on another. This is not a 'Sabbath Day'. However it has some value from a family and friends point of view and it provides evangelistic opportunities, that may not be as apparent at other times of the year. Of course it's always a blessing to meet with the 'Lord's Family' as we come together like this this morning.

11 This translation is used because: There is dispute about various of the Greek manuscripts that are presently available. See:

<https://www.tsbibles.org/resource/collection/156A9AA2-2086-4C4E-BE0A-08A4508415DA/God-was-Manifest-in-the-Flesh.pdf>

12 We 'fell' because we had a federal head and if we are to be saved we must have a new federal head. The stage where the fall of mankind took place must be the stage where the redemption of mankind takes place. There must be a man who is the new head of a new race amongst mankind.

13 Daniel saw a vision he described in this way, which was a vision of Christ: Daniel 7:13. Coming in the clouds of heaven and having everlasting dominion. The One like a man who nevertheless originates in heaven and comes by divine initiative. All descriptions of deity!

But this conception in the womb of Mary was not an ordinary conception. It was a conception by the 'power of the Holy Spirit'. (Luke 1:35)

The power of the highest overshadowed Mary. He was formed of the substance of Mary's body, but without the agency of a man. So He was the 'seed' of a woman, but not in any sense the seed of a man. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. That was a remarkable fulfilment of the old – the first – Messianic promise. That the 'seed of the woman' would crush the serpent's head. (Genesis 3:15) Though He is the Son of Man, He was not the son of a man. So there was a conception, and then a birth. The conception was supernatural and therefore the child in the womb was holy. But the birth was not supernatural. There was supernatural protection of the child in the womb, so that He was not defiled by sin in any sense, but the birth was not supernatural. It was a natural birth with the exception: that He, who was born, was without sin. (which otherwise, every human – born of a woman – since Adam – does inherit) This exception was because, and only possible because: He was God manifest in the flesh!

- **When** did this happen?

Galatians 4:4: ... *when the fullness of time* ... When everything was ready! However you look at it, the birth of Christ was at the proper time.

It wouldn't have been appropriate for Christ to have been born before the 'flood'. The ground was cursed – yes. There was violence everywhere – yes. And yet the dire effects of sin hadn't been seen in their fullest measure – man had been in existence for at least 1000 years. In comparison with us he had a measure of immortality (consider Mathusala's age 967: – Genesis 5:27) There had to be an universal judgement to show to men the dire effects of the 'fall'. To show to men and women, that left to themselves there was no hope of any recovery. So Christ did not come then.

Even before Moses: wouldn't have been a fitting time, because the need for Christ was not so evident even then as it later became. From the beginning there had been a primitive remnant religion in all the tribes (but it was mostly corrupted) from the days of Adam. However at the time of Moses there were still people – beside the Jews – who had true faith.¹⁴ It wasn't until the whole world was pagan – with the exception of Israel. Until the rest of the world had lived in spiritual darkness for some time, that it was the 'right' time.

Until, in fact it was clear to the whole world (including the regularly 'backsliding' children of Israel) that the necessary heavenly physician, the Saviour, should come. When darkness was at its blackest and there had been centuries without any prophetic witness – 400 years between Malachi to John the Baptist. And when it was plain to all that the Jewish Kingdom had lost, for ever, its glory and power to bring light to the world. When paganism had run its course for

¹⁴ In the time of Abram a 'priest' of 'God Most High', Melchizedek, blessed Abram in the name of God, creator of heaven and earth. Genesis 14:18-20. To distinguish Christ's priesthood from the Levite dynasty (who all died and were often corrupt) he was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 5:10, 6:20, 7:1-21.

centuries so that men and women knew that they, by themselves, could not give themselves new characters; nor bring themselves to be right with God; nor pardon their own sins. When it was plain to all that man unaided cannot bring himself into favour with God. It was then, that God was manifest in the flesh!

Now three things to note:

- The **greatness** of this event.

The birth of Christ was a greater and more wonderful thing than had happened in the history of the world until then. The Creation of the world was a great thing – for God to speak and for everything to be created out of nothing, by His mere Word, was a great thing, but not as great as the incarnation of Christ. It was a great thing for God to create a creature and to rule a creation, but a far greater thing for God to become a creature. God becoming man was the greatest event in history up to that moment. That person, so born, was the greatest person who ever was or will be. Because He was God manifest in the flesh.

- The **circumstances** of the event.

Mary was a poor virgin – you know that from the details of her 'purification' ceremony.¹⁵

She was espoused to a husband who was a poor man.

Yet ... we have the genealogy of both. A list of ancestors. They were both of the royal family of David. Both, in some sense, were heirs to the throne.

The tabernacle of David had fallen, yet Amos had promised (800 years before) that when the tabernacle of David had fallen then God would raise it up. That's exactly what happened! (Amos 9:11)

God moved the Roman Emperor to require a census – each one was to return to the home of their ancestors. Mary and Joseph, set off for Bethlehem. Demonstrating the marvellous sovereignty of God, whereby although the Messiah was to be brought up in the *Land of Zebulun, Land of Naphtali, Galilee of the Gentiles*, He would be born in Bethlehem as predicted by the prophet.¹⁶

Think of it: no room at the inn; only a stable. At last God Himself manifest in the flesh – laid in a manger.

- The **concurrence** of events.

Several things may occur together. A man & woman marry. Each marries the other – concurrently.

15 She should have offered a lamb, but the law said that if you are too poor to offer that, then you could offer two turtle doves (pigeons). Mary could only offer those.

16 Micah 5:2

2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth are from of old,
From everlasting.”

In our case today, there were three concurrent events.

The first was **the return of the Spirit**, at the birth of Christ: the spirit of prophesy had ceased with Malachi, 400 years earlier. No visions or immediate revelation. Now it was granted again:

Zachariah had a vision of an angel; Mary does; Elizabeth bursts into divinely inspired song; Mary, Zachariah, and the shepherd also. Anna and Simeon have a 'revelation'. Also the 'wise men in the East' And ... Joseph's dreams. (Luke 1:5-2:20)

400 years of 'silence' had been broken! The return of the Spirit!

Secondly, **heaven and earth took note** of this event.

Heaven's is shown by the angel and angels: In Job we read that the angels sang together at Creation (Job 38:7). Here they are again: in the Greek language they are not said to be singing, but nonetheless they are shouting to one another in the skies, declaring the birth of Christ. Longing to look into the prophecies, says Peter. (1 Peter 1: 10-12). They had seen the prophecies being given – now they see the accomplishment that God has declared for so many centuries. Heaven bears witness to this event.

So does the earth: Elizabeth – before it takes place; Mary also; Even John the Baptist: before he's born 'leaps in his mother's womb'. Because he recognises Mary as the mother of his Lord, to whom he is to be the forerunner. And the witnesses in the Temple. *And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple. (Amos 3:1)*

The lowest of the Jews – shepherds. The highest of the gentiles – the 'wise men' from the East. Heaven and earth came to bear witness to the 'birth' of God

- Finally the **'sceptre' then departed from Judah.**

Back in Genesis 49:10 a promise had been given: *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah ... until Shiloh come ...*. A prediction of the Christ! So far it hadn't. The 10 tribes had revolted, but Judah remained; during the exile in Babylon the sceptre temporarily ceased; the Nation returned to Jerusalem under Persian rule – but they had restored political power under Jewish governors. The kingdom was restored under the Maccabees. Then the Romans came, but they allowed the Jews to rule themselves, with a king of their own. Herod the Great reigned for 40 years as a vassal of Rome – he gave little more than 'lip service' to Rome and had the power of life and death. Shortly after Christ was born, this Herod died and his successors in Judah were replaced by direct rule from Rome through Governors (such as Pilot) removing the power of the Jews over life and death. At this point the 'sceptre departed Judah' – no more Temple Jews ruling Judah. The sceptre passed to Christ and His Temple was the hearts of believers.

Christ is the ruler of His new people of Judah. God was and is manifest in the flesh. His flesh is now with God in heaven and He will return in the flesh.

So today we remember and celebrate:

*God was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.*

[1797]

Pray that this may be so for all the saints gathered here today! Amen.

God Glorified in the Raising of Lazarus – part 2

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) -

Last week we started to examine the 11th Chapter of John's Gospel.

Broadly the story was that in a small village (Bethany) just over the Mount of Olives lived a family that Jesus loved and visited often. The sisters Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus. Jesus at this time had removed Himself from Jerusalem and with His disciples was in the wilderness the 'other side of the Jordan' – some 2 days' travel away.

Lazarus fell ill and the sisters were sure he would die unless Jesus (and only Jesus) were to save him – like He had done for others. They sent a message to Jesus and then waited anxiously for Him to come.

Lazarus died. Was wrapped in funeral cloths – head and body – and sealed in a cave as his tomb. The sisters and many concerned people from Jerusalem waited and waited for 4 days¹⁷.

Meanwhile Jesus received the message, and knew that Lazarus had already died. He deliberately waited before setting off with His disciples, telling them that Lazarus wasn't finally dead, but the event was to further the purposes of God. He arrived at Bethany after 4 days and met the distressed sisters and the other mourners. He wept for their distress. However He called Lazarus from the tomb and the glory of God was displayed.

The story is familiar to us all. And of course like all the 'signs' performed by Jesus that John mentions it had a purpose greater than the physical miracle. The earthly miracle was a 'lesson' of a spiritual truth.

Firstly, that there was no situation which is beyond the Son of God. And more significantly, that the earthly and real death of Lazarus was a pattern of the transition of the believer from one existence to the next. Jesus had told the disciples before He waited the two days that although Lazarus had truly died that he was in a way sleeping. Just as sleep is a natural part of earthly life, so earthly death is a natural part of heavenly life for the believer.

Further Jesus demonstrated the process of resurrection – pointing to the fact that on the last Day every person who had died would have their bodies resurrected. Making the assertion that He in fact was the source and executor of resurrection, the source and executor of heavenly (eternal) life in yet another sovereign claim: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,* ²⁶*and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*

We then began to examine the effect this story had on four groups of people, beginning with the sisters:

¹⁷ It was the practice to entomb dead people as soon as possible after death – same day was preferred. However the tomb was 'watched' for 3 days to make absolutely certain that a pseudo-death had not occurred. Jesus timed it so that He came after four days!

- We found that Martha had tremendous faith. But it could be widened. She was convinced that Jesus could have saved Lazarus if He had been there in time. But she didn't dare hope that he could be brought back to life now that he had started to decompose and was irrevocably dead. Christ proved that even in this there were no limits to the power and purpose of God. Thus for us as well the future hope of resurrection and eternal life was being demonstrated.¹⁸

A believer although he experiences death, yet he lives again! ... *everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.* This doesn't mean that you won't have the experience of death, but that you will never die. The believer's experience of death is that temporarily, their soul (called 'persons' in the version of the Westminster Confession of Faith printed on the Order of Service last week)¹⁹ that spirit, lives on and the body is reunited with it at the last Day. After this transition the believer consciously, without their body, goes into the presence of their Saviour. No break in consciousness.

And the Saviour isn't a million miles away hidden behind the latest galaxy to be discovered. Our Saviour is here, because in God 'we live and move and have our being'. (Acts 17:28) The spiritual dimension, in feet and inches is not very far away! If we could but see we would find the throne of God to be in this very place (and everywhere, at once – God and His kingdom are not constrained by and contain in our 4 Dimensions of length, breadth, height and time.) In God's dimensions the seraphim are surrounding the Saviour and crying out. "Holy, Holy, Holy".²⁰ Death on earth is the portal for believers to go into that dimension and see the glory of God and the 'Lamb', seated together. There is no physical travel or elapsing of time. Absent from the body but present with the Lord.

This lesson is taught first to Martha. As he asks, "... *Do you believe this?*" (verse 26) And she can (verse 27). That's the great privilege of a believer. When you hear this teaching on what the death of a believer is like, like Martha, you say, "*Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.*" Martha learnt this.

But look at Mary: She's completely crushed by sorrow (note how Christ empathises with her sorrow - He wept). She is a believer. There was a time when the Lord was in her home and she just sat at Jesus' feet, enraptured at what He had to say (mentioned here at verse 2 as a way of identifying her – the event is described more fully at the beginning of the next chapter). Martha getting worked up about the meal being ready, while Mary was drinking in the words of Christ. She was and had been for some time a believer, but her brother's death had crushed her with sorrow, so much so that, even when she hears that Jesus is at last coming that she initially stays in the house while

¹⁸ It's important to note that the subsequent actions of the High Priest, Caiaphas, in unknowingly prophesying God's intention that: *Jesus would die for the nation,⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad,* was carried out by a person who being a Sadducee, had no belief in resurrection or of eternal life.

¹⁹ **The Intermediate State** WCF 32:1

After death people's bodies decompose, and experience decay. But their persons immediately return to God who gave them, since they possess immortal existence, neither dying nor sleeping.

²⁰ Isaiah 6:1-3 & Revelation 4:8-11

Martha rushes off to meet Jesus before He reaches the town. The bereavement has broken her.

Then she gets a message from her sister, whispered secretly in her ear. (verse 28) *"The Teacher is here and is calling for you."*²⁹ She realises, rising above her sorrow, that Jesus still has concern for her. *And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.* Because despite every thing He is still Master to her. When she arrives she doesn't bring any words of reproach. She just affirms, as Martha did the confidence and faith that Jesus would have been able to save her brother if He had been there in time. She falls at His feet and sheds her tears.

Believers can do that. Don't say that believers have no tears at times of bereavement. They do! Deep, bitter tears sometimes. But the difference between a believer and an unbeliever, is that the unbeliever has to shed his tears in a sense of wretched loneliness. While the believer can cast her tears, his tears, on a Saviour whom she knows, he knows, is still interested. That's how faith behaves in bereavement. It doesn't mean it goes dancing around with an arrogant step of confidence. Faith in bereavement often simply sheds its tears in the presence of Christ.

And Jesus weeps with her. Walks to the tomb with her. Visibly, deeply moved by her distress. She has fallen into the awful condition that she thinks that death has won the day. That death has won the battle. He sees at first hand that death does such awful things in the world to the humanity He loves. And in particular this great friend of His. He is deeply and visibly moved! But this is what He has come to destroy. The Devil and death. So now He is going to display to them and to us, that Death hasn't won the day. There is One who has power over death. Nevertheless her sorrows, our sorrows, are His sorrows. He doesn't look from afar and pity and judge. He is beside us, supporting us, weeping with us: as He works to bring sin and its results into submission through His perfect life and shed blood of sacrifice. And through the evidence of His subsequent resurrection His work is vindicated and victory is assured.

Great were her sorrows. Great may be our sorrows. Great are all the sorrows over the ages, before and since that day in Bethany. But far greater are His sorrows. Even greater than the sum total of all the sorrow of all time are His. Because he weeps for all. He sees it all and bears it all finally and completely on the Cross.

The sisters are again together with Him. *"Where have you laid him?"* He asks. *They said to him, "Lord, come and see."* (verse 34)
(verse 38) What they show Him is a cave with a hole in it covered by a stone.
³⁹ *Jesus said, "Take away the stone."*

Verse 39. "Don't Lord", she's almost saying, "Don't look at Him. It's not the Lazarus You knew. Can't you remember Lazarus as he was in life? Why go into a tomb and look at a corpse. Beside the corpse has been decomposing. Stench of death will fill the place. He's been dead four days. Why can't you remember him as he was?"

(verse 40) ⁴⁰ *Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"* Remember that's the divine logic that John has mentioned before. Unconverted people say, "I must see and then I will believe." Jesus says, "Haven't I told you, if you believe then you will see." Then there was that marvellous moment for the sisters, when they saw that Christ indeed has power over death. There was that prayer in verse 41 & 42, they saw humility in God as He prayed to God. They saw submission in God as He prayed to God. But then they saw the majesty and authority of the God-head as from the lips of Jesus Christ, came three words, "Lazarus, come out"²¹

Then the joy as their brother struggles with grave cloths to get out into the light and reunite the family. So what had the sisters learnt by the end of that day? That with Jesus of Nazareth there is a sympathy far greater than they could ever have imagined. An a power far greater than they could ever have imagined.

- What about the disciples?

What did they learn over those days?

First of all the same lessons the sisters learned: death is not a tragedy to the believer; Christ is individually concerned for His people; His sympathy is limitless; and His power is boundless.

But there were things the disciples learned that the sisters didn't.

(from verse 6) ⁶ *So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.* ⁷ *Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."* ⁸ *The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?"* ⁹ *Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.* ¹⁰ *But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."*

These words provide the first lesson for them (and us): Jesus out in the wilderness where He has gone because the Jews are threatening to kill Him, proposes to go back across the Jordan. Right back to near Jerusalem.

The disciples shrink with horror! "It's only a few days ago they were going to stone you to death, and Your planning to go back again to the very 'lion's den' ". To the disciples, danger was something to be avoided at all costs. They thought Christ's scheme was madness. Thomas (the twin) says, stoically, "If He's going to die, lets go and die with Him." (verse 16)

But Jesus teaches to His people in verses 9 & 10 a different attitude to danger: To each of His servants God gives one life. That life is like a day and has a predetermined conclusion. A sunset. The only time you've got to work in, is the day that God has given you. So work while you can! Enjoy the light. Work in the light. The 'clock' will not strike the 'end of day' until God says so. No danger will remove you from the scene until God says so. So in God's work, don't avoid dangers. Don't put off facing or evading dangers. Nor run away from them. Because if you do the 'clock will strike sundown' before you finish what God has

²¹ It has been said that if Jesus had addressed the family tomb with only, "come out", His sovereign authority and power would have been such that all the generations of dead there would have sprung to life. But He said "Lazarus..."

set for you to do. The life you will have left will have not been as fruitful as it could have been. The only opportunity you have to do what God requires is now.

Jesus is saying, "Do it now".

That's a lesson the disciples never forgot. We can see this clearly in the Acts of the Apostles. So also, a lesson to us.

[2207]

Pray Christ's teaching is followed by all the saints gathered here today.

Next week we complete consideration of the effect of the raising of Lazarus on groups of people then and now.