

# **Record of Sermons delivered during the month of July 2017**

(added progressively after each Sunday)

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(see following pages)

**Jesus Christ: who He is; why He has come** (part b)

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) - two eventful days.

In the two eventful days, as John relates them, two important truths are being displayed.

Firstly, the Person of Jesus Christ – who He is. The second, the work of the Lord Jesus Christ - why He has come. What He has done. John is describing the two eventful days and is underlining these two important truths. This is how Christ walks onto the pages of John's Gospel.

Let's make these truths very clear:

- The Person of the Lord Jesus Christ – who He is.  
Think back to the answer given by John the Baptist to the delegation from the authorities at Jerusalem.  
“Are you the Christ?” – “No”; “Are you Elijah?” – “No”; “Are you the Prophet?” – “No”. “Who are you?” – “The one who has come to announce the Christ!”  
Then John points to the Christ as He approaches on the second day: “That's Him!”

So the first thing we can say about the Lord Jesus Christ is that He is the One of whom the Old Testament Scriptures speak. That's who He is.

What else can we say? Look at verse 26 & 27. *“I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, <sup>27</sup> even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”* And then verse 30: *After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’*

The Person of the Lord Jesus Christ: who is He? The One of whom the Old Testament Scriptures speak; the One who preceded John (the Baptist); the One who ranks higher than John, because He was before John. Who announces that the Christ whom he preaches is not just the Christ of Old Testament prophecy, but the pre-existent One, who had His existence before coming into the world. Whose life did not start with His birth. His beginning was not at Bethlehem. Who was announced in the Old Testament Scriptures, because He existed in the Old Testament Scriptures. It was His Spirit which moved the prophets having also preceded the Old Testament Scriptures: **the pre-existent God**. Yet John pointed Him out as a man in the crowd. (verse 26: *...but among you stands one you do not know,...* )

In the crowd that day, they must have all looked round. Have you ever thought about it? Somebody in the crowd was next to Christ. Someone in the crowd may have turned to the One next to him and gazed into the eyes of the eternal God

who had become flesh. And he didn't know. He didn't know!

It's only in classic paintings of the middle and renaissance ages that Christ was represented with a halo above his head. In the crowd that day there was no halo, nothing to distinguish Him from anybody else to look at. He was God, but he was fully man. With a sinless human nature and still with the full nature of God. Two complete, distinguishable natures but one Person. The Second Person of the Godhead. Second in order but equal in essence with the Father and the Spirit. One God in power, righteousness and justice.

In that crowd, they didn't recognise Him. They were looking round for the promised Yahweh, the promised God, the expected Christ, the expected Deliverer (but not from political oppression but from sin). They looked around but didn't know.

Verse 30: <sup>30</sup> *This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a **man** who ranks before me, because he was before me.'* Jesus Christ is the One of whom the Old Testament speaks, who is pre-existent and yet is a man. Then in verse 34 He's announced again but in different terms: <sup>34</sup> *And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."*

The One who has the unique relationship with the Father, that can only be described in terms of a Father and a Son.

"That's the One", declared John. And that's the way Christ must always be announced:

The One of whom the Scriptures speak;  
who is the pre-existent One;  
who has become a man;  
who is the Son of God.

That is who Christ is! We say in the Larger Catechism: "The only Mediator of the covenant of grace is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal son of God, of one substance and equal with the Father. When the time had fully come He became man, and so was and continues to be God and man, in two entire distinct natures and one Person, for ever." This is clearly the Christ which John the Baptist announced. If you have faith in any other, or any less, what ever you may call Him, you do not have faith in Christ – the only redeemer of God's elect.

- The second important truth: The work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why He came.

When Moses wrote of that Prophet (verse 21)<sup>1</sup> who should appear, he was writing of the Messiah. Because the Messiah is a prophet! A prophet is someone who tells the will of God. Every prophet made something known of the will of God. Something of the mind of God, but only our Lord Jesus Christ has made God known perfectly. In the earlier part of John's Gospel (verse 18) we read: <sup>18</sup> *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he*

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<sup>1</sup> See also: <https://www.oneforisrael.org/bible-based-teaching-from-israel/21-ways-yeshua-is-a-prophet-like-moses/> where a description of 21 similarities (proofs) between Moses and Jesus (Yeshua) in a Jewish Christian site is detailed.

*has made him known.* If you want to know what God is like then look at Christ!

Do you want to know what the character of God is like, then look at Christ. He is the Prophet, who is the fulfilment of what Moses said.

So this passage says the the work of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be a prophet.

Verse 29: <sup>29</sup> *The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* They all knew what that meant. Years ago in Egypt they had had to kill a lamb and sprinkle its blood on the door posts, so that the 'angel of God' passed over them. That angel had plagued everybody else, who hadn't had blood on their door post. By the slaying of a lamb they had been saved, – passed over. Every day in the tabernacle and then in the temple, first in the morning and then in the evening a lamb was killed. Because it was recognised that a life must be layed down for a life to be spared. Through the Centuries since the Egyptian 'pass over' this principle had been enacted. Now it was becoming clear that all this had been pointing to the once for all true sacrifice of a life – of the Son of God – for the life of those God had given Him from eternity,

With great inspired insight, John the Baptist points out Jesus as the Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away death – the sin of the world.

But it doesn't say who will offer the Lamb. Who offered the lamb at 'pass over'? Every family. Who offered the lamb every morning and evening in the Temple? The priests. But who offered the Lamb of God? Himself! There it is being announced out there in the desert, that not only is Jesus a prophet, but He is a priest. Once at the end of the ages, the Scriptures tell us, He has taken away our sins by the sacrifice of Himself. <sup>25</sup> *Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own,* <sup>26</sup> *for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.* <sup>27</sup> *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgement,* <sup>28</sup> *so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.* (Hebrews 9:25-28)

Verse 33: <sup>33</sup> *I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'*

Baptism is initiation. What Jesus Christ does to every person whose sins He washes away, it that He initiates them into the spiritual realm. They enter into a spiritual world and they begin a spiritual life. This is all because He has power to change their natures, to give them spiritual natures. So that they gain spiritual eyes to see; spiritual ears to hear; spiritual minds to understand; and they join every other Christian in a spiritual body of which He is the Head. It's that experience of being ushered and initiated, transformed and changed and brought into the world of spiritual things that is the 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit'.

We learn from John 1:12-13, such a spiritual change can't come about because you want it badly, or somebody else wants it badly for you, or because your mum or your dad was a believer, but such a spiritual change only comes about because God does it! Jesus Christ is the baptiser in the Spirit. Nobody ever saw a spiritual thing [or wanted a spiritual thing badly] without first Christ working in their lives by His Spirit.

Nobody heard Christ speaking to them through the Scriptures, unless Christ Himself by His Spirit changed their hearts.  
Nobody understands what the Bible is really about, unless Christ by His Holy Spirit did the miracle of that 'new birth' in their minds.

It's a kingly act. Therefore we are bold to say that Jesus Christ is presented here in Chapter 1 of the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to the Apostle John, as not only as Prophet, not only as Priest, but also as King.

That's how the Lord Jesus Christ was announced to the world. That's how He should have been announced to the world, because that's who He is and what He does. We should all make that announcement!

However, if you have not received Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest and King you've not yet received Jesus Christ. If you have not received Jesus Christ you must still be one of those who is turning Him away.

Two weeks ago we sang the Hymn 192. Look again at the last verse:

*When heaven's arches shall ring, and her choirs shall sing,  
at Your coming in victory, when Your voice calls me home, saying, 'Yet  
there is room, there is room in eternity,'  
then my heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus, when You come down and call for  
me.*

**Jesus Christ: His first disciples & miracle** (part a)

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) - will be reviewed partly through the following

The book that has been described as the most profound book in the world.:

John is now an old man, the only Apostle, it appears, who didn't die by being murdered or executed. As an old man in Ephesus he remembers those 3 ½ years that he spent with Christ. He compares what Matthew, Mark and Luke had already written and realises that unless he writes certain things down (some things not included in their books) they will be forgotten for ever.

So he begins to tell us about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here we are thousands of kilometres from Ephesus and two thousand years later, we have his book and we can read it. To discover what such an insightful and inspired eye witness has to say.

In this fortnight's passage we read about two things: Today His first disciples, then next week His first miracle.

John 1:35 to the end of chapter 1. His first disciples:

As we begin, we will recognise that none of them were anybody of note in that society. Five are mentioned and a sixth is implied, but they were ordinary folk of the time. Many were fishermen.

At verse 35 we recognise the first mentioned is John – this is John the Baptist! We see him standing with two of his disciples: he looks to Jesus and gives these two disciples the gentle hint, that they should follow Christ and not him any longer. One we are told is Andrew, but the name of the other one isn't mentioned. It can only be John,<sup>2</sup> himself – who wrote this Gospel. So he, this great eye witness, was there right from the beginning of Christ's ministry,

As a disciple of John the Baptist he was pointed to the person of Christ. With Andrew he was the first of the followers of Christ.

[A little later (verse 41) we find that Andrew goes off and finds his own brother Simon (Peter) ). We read: <sup>41</sup> *He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).*

<sup>2</sup> Typically throughout this Gospel he doesn't mention himself by name. He does refer to himself but not by name.

Careful examination of the text (especially the original Greek) implies that those first two disciple (of which John was not explicitly named) each went and got their brother, with Andrew being the first (of two). It turns out, later, that the brother John brings is James.]

Well back to the first two, Andrew and John. They were fishermen, and subsequently we only hear a little about Andrew:<sup>3</sup> He came from a little lakeside town called Bethsaida (from verse 44). Andrew is a retiring (shy) 'behind the scenes' person.

Of course Andrew brings Simon: Verse 41 has told us Simon is Andrew's brother, also a fisherman; was married already – since he has a mother-in-law; he spoke with a strong northern (Galilean) accent – the serving girl at the 'denial' told us that; a warm hearty man, feeling deeply such that his feelings came first and his 'head' came second; acted on his feelings; stubborn and headstrong, acting on impulse. And yet, we are told in verse 42, that he's going to be changed into a 'rock'. Someone on whom you can build. A steady reliable character! But at this stage he's no 'headline person' either.

Then there is Philip. Mentioned in verse 43. We know almost nothing about him, except that (verse 44) he came from that little lakeside town on the west side of the sea of Galilee. (Bethsaida)

Then there is Nathanael (verse 46) he comes from Cana in Galilee. We're not told that here but we are later in the Gospel – almost at the end. He came from the very place where the miracle was going to be performed. Jesus looks on him and says, "An Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit."

Let's consider this further: John has opened his Gospel and told us that the eternal God has come to earth being made flesh. He has explained how John the Baptist has preached that the eternal God, will come amongst us as a man. He's explained that the eternal God, the Second Person of the Trinity, has come amongst us to be a sin bearer and a Spirit baptiser. Now we see the eternal Son of God – in human flesh – choosing His disciples, who are going to accompany Him through these 3 ½ years of ministry. And the people whom He chooses have been described as: Andrew the cautious; John the poet; Simon the elemental; Philip the shy; Nathanael the guileless; plus James. Jesus gathers these six men around Him and they become the people who are called into living union with God's Son. Here He sets a pattern for the whole of His future ministry and thus for the whole of the Christian church.

We read elsewhere in the New Testament: (1 Corinthians 1:26-30) <sup>26</sup> *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.* <sup>27</sup> *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;* <sup>28</sup> *God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring*

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<sup>3</sup> He is mentioned on 3 occasions in the New Testament, on each of these he is pointing someone to Christ: here he points his brother to Christ; later on he brings a lad with 'five loaves and two fish'; and then when 'some Greeks' want to see Christ, he and Philip, take them to Christ.

to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

So we are looking at the first disciples and we have seen who they were. No professors; no influential people; nobody of note; nobody famous. Just a handful of very ordinary people.

Now we consider how it was they became His disciples. Because our Lord is setting the pattern for the whole of the future – remember. Most Christians are that sort of person. Ordinary, non-headline types. But how do they become Christians?

Look back at verse 35 and look at John and Andrew: They were already disciples of John the Baptist.

- When this John said, “The One who comes, will be a 'sin bearer' and there He is.” They heard!
- When John the Baptist said, “When the One comes He will baptise with the Spirit.” meaning that He will usher in the whole realm of spiritual things, they heard!

Then the next day (v 35-36) while they are standing by John the Baptist, he fixes His eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ, who is 'walking about' ('about-treading' in the Greek).

There near the river Jordan is Jesus Christ walking about, and wherever He goes, John's eyes follow Him. And John says in the hearing of these two men, “Behold” – there's the one to fix your eyes on - “Behold the Lamb of God!” That was a 'gentle hint' if there ever was. For months – maybe a year or two – John the Baptist has been saying “I've come to prepare the way”, The day before yesterday, he had said, “The One I have come to prepare the way for is here!” Yesterday he had said, “There He is!”

And today he says it again. “Behold the Lamb of God!”

So as Jesus walks, these two men, John and Andrew, have been pointed to Him and they began to follow Him, in the road.

Have you had that experience? Someone follows you. Jesus turns. (v 38) Then we have the first **public words** of Christ recorded in the Bible.<sup>4 38</sup> *Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?”* What do you want? The question which Christ is asking anyone who looks in His direction. *And they said (a rather strange answer) to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?”* So, they are following him in the street, at John's recommendation. “What do you want”, He asks. “Where do you live?” they reply.

Perhaps they haven't really worked out what they want. They had been directed to Christ by another but they weren't really certain what they wanted. And when they said, “Where do you live?” What they really meant was, “Can't we come and talk it

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<sup>4</sup> We have words of Christ as a boy of 12 speaking to His **mum and dad**; we have words of Christ speaking to **John** the Baptist at His baptism; we have words of Christ spoken to the **Devil** in the wilderness. Now the first **public** words in His ministry.

over?” Like us they don't want to talk about something personal, while they're confused, and in the street. Jesus said to them, “Come and you will see” (In the Greek it is not a matter of fact comment it's a dogmatic declaration. (Your confusion will be removed!))

So into a private house they go with Christ and stay a while.<sup>5</sup> (.) Then there is an unrecorded private interview.

What condescension of the eternal Word of God! He's come down to this earth; He's lived for 30 years: first a boy; an adolescent; an adult; now works as a carpenter. Now those years have gone by He speaks to these two men. That's how they came to faith. Those moments were sacred. Not recorded. But then out of the house would come two Christian believers.

How did they come to Christ?

- Somebody pointed them to Christ, but
- they found out for themselves!

Now Simon: (verse 41) he came to Christ the same way. Someone pointed him to Christ, but he found out for himself. Out of that private house came two believers, John and Andrew. The first thing they said was, in effect, “Let's get our families saved.” So they ran, both of them to their brothers, and Andrew got to his first. <sup>41</sup> *He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means – in Greek – Christ).* So, by Andrew, this brother, Simon, is brought to Christ.

Look how Jesus describes, Simon: “*So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas*” (which means Peter). As Simon is brought to Jesus it's as though the Christ, says, “I know you, your father is John, you shall be called 'rock;.” That vacillating, headstrong man had the eyes of the Son of God looking down into his inmost soul, and from His lips came the promise that Simon would be changed to steady and dependable. Simon then came to Christ, because somebody pointed him, but he found out for himself.

Leaving Philip for the moment, look now at Nathanael. How did he come to Christ. He came the same way. Philip pointed Nathanael: (verse 45) <sup>45</sup> *Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*”<sup>6</sup>

Nathanael was a student of the Scriptures. He knew that the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem; he knew that Nazareth wasn't even mentioned directly in the Old Testament. He's filled with incredulity: “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*” And Philip's perfect answer: “*Come and see.*”

A good answer! Use it!

So Nathanael approaches Christ and finds out for himself! Verse 47: As he approaches Jesus, Jesus starts to talk about the man who is approaching: “*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!*”

<sup>5</sup> 'the tenth hour' is 4pm by Jewish reckoning, or 10 am by Roman

<sup>6</sup> Legally though not factually.

Now if you were approaching somebody and you heard them talking about you – imagine it – and they said, “Behold look at that person who is coming. He's free of deceit and crookedness.” You'd say, “I'm not like that at all.” You would brush it aside. “He doesn't know me, we've never even met!” But Nathanael is so guileless, so open and so transparent, that instead of saying, “That's not true of me.” Being so naive (in the correct sense) he actually says: *“How do you know me?”*

So Jesus says to Him, in effect: “Nathanael, when you were speaking to Philip earlier, I wasn't there, but before Philip came to you, I saw you. I had my eyes on you. There you were, sitting under a fig tree.” So it seems that from what Jesus had to say to him, that Nathanael, in the heat of the day, was sitting under the fig tree, thinking about the things of God. He was probably thinking about Jacob and the ladder that angels were ascending to and descending from God. While he was thinking upon that Scriptural passage, along comes Philip! Before Philip got to Nathanael Jesus says He saw him. Nathanael, then realises that though he had thought he was on his own, with his own thoughts, all the time there had been another who had been with him and reading his thoughts. Another who was not apparently present! Like God always is!

So now he is aware, having come into the presence of Jesus of Nazareth, that He is in the presence of God! Flashing on to his mind comes the revelation of the identity of Christ. Verse 49: <sup>49</sup> *Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! (that's Christ's Person) You are the King of Israel (that's Christ's Office)!”*

He recognised the identity of Christ!

Our Lord was obviously delighted with this expression of faith. “It's just because I saw you under the fig tree, that you believe. You will see greater things than these.” : You've been thinking about Jacob and the communion he had with heaven. The special favour that he had with God. But I am the Son of God, however the title I use of myself is 'the Son of Man'.

This would have excited the mind of Nathanael, who knew his Old Testament: It's a title from the book of Daniel<sup>7</sup>, when speaking of someone who has a kingdom which never ends.

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”* (Verse 51) Imagine it: angels going up to heaven with His errands and coming back with the reply. “You will see I have a unique relationship with heaven. That heaven is open to me. That I am in favour with heaven. You will see it!”

Then, after the Resurrection and the Ascension, Christ's Spirit, takes messages to Christ in Glory where as Mediator – and the One True Sacrifice – discharges another of Christ's Offices: Priest who lives for ever.

How did Nathanael come to Christ?

- Somebody pointed him to Christ, but
- he found out for himself through an encounter with Christ.

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel 7:13-14

Finally Philip: he was different! (Verse 43) All the others came by somebody pointing them, then they came and found out for themselves. Most people come that same way, but not Philip. A few like Philip had Jesus find him. Having decided to go into Galilee, Jesus looked for a Galilean and found Philip who was from Bethsaida. A direct encounter! With or without someone pointing to Christ, it is always Christ who takes the initiative. He Choose us; not we choosing Him.

<sup>43</sup> The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

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**Pray this is so for all the saints gathered here today.**

**Jesus Christ: His first disciples & miracle** (part b)

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) -

Last week we were told by John, through his delving into his memory of his 3 ½ years of 'eye witness' experience with the Lord Jesus Christ, about how the first disciples became believers. Like most Christian believers, through the ages since, the majority of those first six disciples were pointed to Jesus by someone else and then came to find out about Him for themselves: John and Andrew by John the Baptist; Simon (Peter) by Andrew; James by John (later revealed in the Gospel); and Nathanael by Philip. However in the case of Philip he was approached directly by Christ – as happens only rarely with believers since then. But it happens!

But in general, none came to Christ without His first preparing (drawing) them to Himself. **Christ always takes the initiative in conversion!**<sup>8</sup> A case in point was that of Nathanael: As he was 'pointed' to Christ, he was openly sceptical. *"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"* (V 46) Yet Christ, through the Spirit, had already been conditioning Nathanael – ready for their first meeting. Nathanael studied the Scriptures, and under the shade of a fig tree, in the heat of the day, had been led to ponder the vision of Jacob. When Jesus reminds him of this by saying that He "saw" him under that tree, Nathanael 'joins the dots' and confesses: *"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"* (V 49) To which Jesus answers, *"Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree', do you believe? You will see greater things than these."*<sup>51</sup> And he said to him, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."* (Verse 50,51)

So these were the first disciples: There are a few further things we should take to heart:

- right at the beginning of this Gospel we are being told about the supreme value of personal work (outreach). In the New Testament – the whole Bible, in fact – the word, 'evangelism' can't be found! There wasn't a separate activity, that people did. They didn't say, "Now I will do some evangelising." What actually happened was that they came to Christ; found out who He was; and couldn't keep it to themselves. They had to tell some body else! Remember that's the way most people come to Jesus. That's the way most of us came. Someone 'pointed' us to Him. Because they knew the truth and they were excited by it. Wanting us not just to know about that truth but to find out for themselves and be joined to Christ, There's a supreme value in personal work.
- Also we should notice, that when those disciples came to Christ they didn't come hearing the same truth. Simon's truth: Verse 41, *"We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ)*. Nathanael's truth: Verse 45 *We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*" Which exactly matched his study and love of the Scriptures. Andrew and John's truth: Verse 36 *"Behold, the Lamb of God!"*

<sup>8</sup> This is pointed out in the opening lines of Hymn 97 (from REJOICE!): My Lord, I did not choose You for that could never be; my heart would still refuse You had You not chosen me.

All of them came by hearing the truth about Christ, but it wasn't always the same truth, but it was truth which they heard.

That's how people come to Christ. They come to Christ because they hear the truth about Him. Some of us came to Christ because a particular truth about the Saviour burned itself into our conscience and mind. While others came because another truth burned itself into their conscience and mind. All came by the truth, but not the same truth.

Some come because they hear that,

Christ is the great judge of men and angels – the Messiah. Most of us came, initially, by fear rather than love. We may have been filled with a tremendous feeling of sin and failure and came because we heard that He was a merciful God. The emphasis we heard was His mercy. Like Simon. Or we heard that,

Christ was the fulfilment of God's revelation throughout the Scriptures. Like Nathanael. Or that,

Christ's atoning sacrifice had satisfied the wrath of God through the vindication of Christ's resurrection. Like Andrew and John.

All sorts of different truths, but they were truths none the less. Truths about Christ, because all such truths are believing truths. If you can sow one truth, into someone's mind, then, thank God! Such truth is self generating and leads to more and more truths about the Lord Jesus Christ. All of God's truth leads people at last to Christ.

And we are reminded that none of those disciples followed Christ without a personal meeting. Why is this important?

- In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, an error (a heresy) was promoted that was called Sandemanianism.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately this error is still with us. Countless thousands are affected – principally within the charismatic movement. Their mantra is “believe the truth”; give assent to knowledge of Christ and His works; simply believe and be saved. This notion called “easy assent” (also called, “non-Lordship salvation”, or “easy believism” or “cheap grace”) which concentrates on intellectual assent of the truths of Christ, is divorced from the spiritual connection of 'knowing' Christ, instilled by the Spirit on all those 'chosen for Christ before the world began'<sup>10</sup> – the elect. It therefore has two serious deficiencies:

it leads to antinomianism – where belief in Christ is not accompanied by the works of Christ, generated in the believer by an indwelling Holy Spirit; and

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<sup>9</sup> This website has an article that gives a view of Sandemanianism:

<http://www.christiandocctrine.com/christian-doctrine/heresy-and-error/1337-sandemanianism>

Among other things it likens this heresy to the underlying error of arminianism – that faith is a merit for salvation.

<sup>10</sup> John 17:24 <sup>24</sup> Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

promotes faith as a continuing 'work -in-progress' (earning 'brownie points') rather than a gift of God at the time of the regeneration of the true believer at conversion by the Spirit of Christ.

The importance then is this:

Nobody became a disciple of Christ without a personal meeting.

But many many people, especially today, believe the truth: Ask them who Christ is and they are able to say, "The only Mediator of the covenant of grace is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, of one substance and equal with the Father. When the time had fully come He became man, and so was and continues to be God and man, in two entire distinct natures and one Person, for ever," (Larger Catechism 36) They've got it like that! Have they met Him? ... No.

Ask them about His Cross: they will tell you how He died as a sacrifice, and a propitiation for His people.

Ask them about His resurrection: they've got it right! "He's alive for evermore in the power of an endless life, a merciful and faithful high priest."

But ask them, have they met Him. They have to say, "no."

There is such a thing as meeting Christ. Coming to the Christ of whom you've heard. Hearing what others have told you and then finding Him for yourself. Nobody is a Christian believer, without a personal meeting.

The account of the first disciples (verse 35 to the end of Chapter 1) has a connection with and moves into the first miracle from the beginning of Chapter 2.

It would have taken two days for Jesus and His followers to go from the place of the events just described to Cana in Galilee. So at verse 1, chapter two something took place: *<sup>1</sup>On the third day there was a wedding ...*

Here is the little village of Cana, out in the Hills. This is the home town of Nathanael. (Christ remember, asked Philip, another Galilean, to seek out such a person – knowing it would be Nathanael.) Think of Nathanael 'coming home' as a Christian disciple!

In that 'out of the way' spot, something was witnessed that hadn't been seen for centuries. A divine miracle! It was the first one that the Eternal Word performed. The occasion? A wedding. Mary, the mother of Christ, was either a relative or a close friend of whoever was being married. She had been invited, together with Jesus and His new disciples.

In such times there was great prestige for the hosts derived from the number of guests and the success of the arrangements. But horrors! The wine ran out. Shame and embarrassment. Here then is the Son of God at a wedding.

His mother makes an approach to Him. (Verse 3) Think back. Mary has kept to herself for 30 years many things:

- The angel Gabriel had said to her, *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.* (Luke 1:35) She knew Christ's identity!
- The man to whom she was engaged had had a dream. He was told the birth of Mary's Child would be the fulfilment of a prophesy: <sup>23</sup> *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”* (which means, **God with us**). (Matthew 1:23) She knew Christ's identity!
- When Christ had been born, though she had not had intimate relations with a man, His birth was by the conception of the Holy Spirit. At the birth, shepherds arrived, saying the archangel had appeared to them, who had said that the baby was Christ ... the Lord! (Luke 2: 11)

Mary pondered those things and kept them in her heart. At the time of her purification she went up to Jerusalem and there was old Simeon. He called the infant – Christ: God's salvation; a light for revelation to the gentiles; for glory to Your people Israel. (Luke 2: 30,32)<sup>11</sup>

Then the prophetess, Anna came and spoke to all those there (who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem) about the child as she offered thanks to God. (Luke 2:38)

Then when the boy was a toddler, 'wise men from the East' had come with, gold, frankincense and myrrh. They had said He was the King of the Jews. That His birth had been heralded by a star.

For 30 years, then, she had watched the boy grow up; go to school; learn a trade; become a carpenter; support the family (Joseph had died); and now He had left home and had commenced His public preaching. She knew in her heart, all those long years, exactly who He was. While nobody else appeared to know. What a strain that would have been on her. She was a mother as well as a believer, and a godly woman, so everything inside her yearned that people would recognise who her son was.

So when they ran out of wine, she comes to Him and says, *“They have no wine.”* (verse 3) In other words, “Do something. At last display who You are. Prove Your identity.” Jesus said to her, *“Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”* (verse 4) In the way this comes across in the English language it sounds abrupt and impersonal. The word “woman”! But it was spoken in the most tender terms originally. What he was saying was, “Mother, you don't see things the way I see things. My hour, the time for my identity to be fully disclosed has not yet come.” Christ's identity wasn't displayed to the 'world' by His miracles. It was displayed by His cross; burial; and resurrection.

Jesus gently rebuked His mother, not because He wasn't going to do any thing. He

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<sup>11</sup> Simeon was very old, in fact he was holding death at bay for just such a meeting with the infant, Christ. Thus in verse 29 he says, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;” which makes sense of the first verse of Christmas Carol, Hymn 185 in REJOICE! Which begins “Lord bid Your servant go in Peace, Your Word is now fulfilled. These eyes have seen salvation's sown, this child so long foretold.”

was! But to show her that this wasn't going to reveal His identity to the world. She wasn't offended. Look at verse 5. She knew with her mother's intuition that He was going to do something. So she says to the servants, *“Do whatever he tells you.”*

Here is the key which unlocks the meaning of this miracle: Standing there was a group of six large jars holding a total of up to 800 litres. These were used to convey water for purification rituals by Jewish people. They were currently empty. Jesus says, *“Fill the jars with water.”* This being done He says, *“Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.”*

When the master of ceremonies tastes the wine which the water has become, not knowing where and how it had come, he was astounded: *“Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.”* Normally, second rate wine is served as the night wears on – when the guests are less discerning.

The MC is amazed not because of the miracle – he didn't know about that. He was amazed at the quality of the wine.

However the glory of Christ was to be seen by those who had eyes to see it. Perhaps that was only the chosen ones, the first disciples. Who saw His glory and believed in Him. (verse 11)

No miracle was done by Jesus just for its own sake. John tells us, *there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification.* This was a 'picture' lesson, a parable. It was the association with the water used in the old rites of the Jewish form of religion that was to be changed. Those rites and rituals could never satisfy the real spiritual needs of men and women. Jesus didn't come to bring new or more or revived ceremonies. But something completely new. Something of great and totally amazing quality. So in His own time He brings what is needed to satisfy the crying need of men and women. The new wine of His blood shed for the redemption of sinners.

The MC, as he tasted the wine, knew nothing of this, nor do a majority of men and women then and now. All he saw was the the pleasure of the moment.

Those that had eyes to see, would know that the old provision of ritual, while it in its deeper – and generally overlooked – meaning foreshadowed Christ, was unable to be compared with Christ's new Wine. The New Covenant in Christ's blood.

So John continues to reveal the Person of Christ. Do you believe on Him as he is portrayed in the passage? Have you had a personal meeting?

[2388]

**Pray this is so for all the saints gathered here today.**

**A Sign & Three Things Which Follow** (part a)

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) -

We continue to study, John's Gospel, which has been described as the most profound book ever written.

We are reminded that as he writes, the Apostle John is an old man; he reflects back over his long life. He remembers the 3 ½ years he spent with the Lord Jesus Christ. So in Ephesus he takes up his pen, begins to write and now 2000 years later, we have what he wrote in our hands. We have what is written about those 3 ½ years, by someone who saw it, heard it and lived it. That's what makes John's Gospel so marvellous. Luke, when he wrote his Gospel spoke to eye-witnesses; Mark got his from Peter, an eye-witness. But both Matthew and John, when they wrote their Gospels, they were writing about what they themselves had seen and heard.

This fortnight we come to Chapter 2 verse 13 right through to chapter 3 verse 21. Here we find a sign and then three things that follow.

The sign: (verse 13) The first sign (or miracle), a sign of power, was the changing of water into wine – signifying the fulfilment of the ancient Jewish rites of water purification (the use to which the empty water jars were reserved) into the ultimate removal of sin by the life, death and resurrection of the Messiah, which was soon to follow. This occurred in the far northern area of Palestine in a small village called Cana. Then the scene changes to the West to the Sea of Galilee, where we have been told Jesus spent a few days. (verse 12)

Now because the Passover is approaching He makes His way to Jerusalem. More specifically to the Temple! The very centre of the religious life of the Jewish nation. Our Lord has been there at least two times previously.

When He was a little baby: His mother had carried into the Temple and were greeted by an old man who was ready to die, who had been told that he wouldn't die until he had seen the Lord Christ! He had picked the baby, Christ, up and said. "God's salvation; a light for revelation to the gentiles; for glory to Your people Israel." (Luke 2:30,32)

At the same time an old lady, Anna came and also recognised the holy Child as the promised Saviour. Speaking about Him for the benefit of all those who had come to the Temple seeking redemption. (Luke 2:38)

That was His first visit to the Temple.

He again came to the Temple when He was 12. when He was being made a "Son of the Law"<sup>12</sup>. When Joseph and Mary started going back to Nazareth, He was left

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<sup>12</sup> **Making a Jewish Boy a Son of the Law:**The following description refers to ceremonies now practised: — "A few days ago I

behind. They came back. They searched for Him anxiously and it was in the Temple where they found Him. Talking to the Doctors of Theology, who were staggered by the questions He was asking and answering. He was taking part of the discussion.

Mary said that His father and she had been looking for Him everywhere! Jesus said, *"Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in **my** Father's house?"* (Luke 2:49) Joseph wasn't His father.

Here He is in the Temple again. (verse 14) Here the 'sign' is going to take place. And what Jesus says conveys particular importance.

Two different words in the New Testament can be used for the one word in English: Temple. Herod's refurbishment of the second Temple – together with Solomon's original Temple had some inner sanctuaries. Then around that the Court of the Women; and beyond that the Court of the Gentiles. One word is used for the whole precinct and a different word for the central sanctuary. The word used in verse 14 describes the whole precinct.

At this stage then, Our Lord didn't go into the inner sanctuary. He went into the outer courts. To the Court of the Gentiles. This is significant!

There were many Synagogues, all over the known world, where the Bible was read out, with preaching and praying. If a Synagogue were knocked down, another could be erected in another place. There was no significance about the place. However the Temple was the only place in the world which was devoted to the 'true God'. The only place. Israel worshipped there and it was part of the task of Israel to try and teach the truth about the true God not only to their fellow Jews, but to the Gentiles. In the Old Testament they were told again and again, that it was their task to bring the truth to everybody. That's why there was a court for the Gentiles. The people who weren't Jews weren't allowed into the central sanctuary – nor were Jewish women. The women could come further than the Gentiles. The Gentiles could come through the entrance into the outer part of the precinct, signifying that God non the less had a place for Gentiles. Every Jew who read his Old Testament, knew, that one day Christ would come and He would be as much a blessing to the Gentiles as was to the Jews.

But instead the Jews of that day didn't have a thought for the Gentiles. All they had was a thought about their own comfort in their religion.

Gentiles? What do Gentiles matter?

Consequently they were using the Court of the Gentiles for something else. It was

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attended a very interesting service in a Jewish synagogue. A boy just twelve years old was brought by his father to be admitted as a member of the synagogue; there were present the parents of the boy, his brothers and sisters, his friends, and some few strangers. After several ceremonies had been performed, the priests read a portion of the law in Hebrew; the boy then stepped forward to the desk or platform, near the centre of the building, and read from a roll of parchment, in a clear distinct voice, a short psalm. A pause ensued, and then the old man addressed the boy in a few brief sentences, telling him that he had attained to years of discretion, and knew the difference between right and wrong, great responsibility rested on him; that it was his duty to follow the good and shun the evil; that it became him to show that the instruction he had received had not been given in vain; that he must diligently practise that which he knew to be right; be obedient to his parents, kind and affectionate to his brothers and sisters, charitable to those who needed his help, and faithful to the religion he had been instructed in. Then, placing his hand on the boy's head, he prayed earnestly that the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, would bless the lad, would preserve him from danger and from sin, and make him a wise and good man, if he should be spared to enjoy length of days; or, if his life should be short, that he might be admitted to the presence of God in heaven."

[http://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/known/making\\_a\\_jewish\\_boy\\_a\\_son\\_of\\_the\\_law.htm](http://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/known/making_a_jewish_boy_a_son_of_the_law.htm)

intended that anybody – whether they came from Britain or anywhere in the world – could come into the Court of the Gentiles and lift up their heart to God. At a place devoted to His worship.

Instead, the Jews of that day were using it for something else. After all money was needed for the Temple collections. But if you take a coin from your pocket, it would have a picture of a person on it – Caesar. Pictures of persons couldn't be accepted in God's Temple. (Since they interpreted the Commandment against graven images in this way.) So they had special Temple money that could only be used in the Temple – but not in the shops. If you entered with 'ordinary' money you had to have it changed into Temple money. So there were money changers. “Where can we put them?” “In the Court of the Gentiles. That will do. Gentiles? What are Gentiles?”

Of course there were sacrifices going on. Not in the Synagogues. Only in the Temple! What was to be sacrificed? Lambs. The idea was that a man should go to his flock and select his very best lamb. A male without blemish. Bring it to the Temple as a sacrifice. But times had changed. People didn't have their own lambs. Those that had lambs available that were acceptable to the priests for sacrifice could provide them. Where would they do this. Why set up your stall in .... the Court of the Gentiles. Sell the lambs there and if the worshippers can't afford them: then here is a choice of turtle doves. Sell them as well.

The place had become a market. If a Gentle wanted to lift his heart to God, he had to put up with the racket of beasts and the arguments about money. Any Gentile who wanted to get alone with the 'true God' would find this totally impossible to do!

What do we see Christ doing? (verse 15) There are small pieces of cord on the ground – from the 'packaging' of the produce; or to lead the lambs and tie up the crates of birds. Here we see the Messiah; the Baptiser in the Spirit; Son of God; Son of man. Christ. Plaiting together these pieces of cord making a whip!

Now we see Him advancing all on His own. There's light flashing from His eyes. A look of anger on His face. Anger in His heart. Yet a great sense of majesty as this solitary figure advances into the outer courts of the Temple. An august appearance. A sense of royalty on His brow as he approaches. Now we see him driving them out. The animals are being driven away by this solitary person. Now He is scattering the money off the tables. Now actually turning over the tables. Now He is saying, (verse 16) *“Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.”*

Now the scene is one of entire devastation. Men and women, boys and girls have run in every direction. No animals to be found only heard in the distance. Piles of money and overturned tables. Havoc! There standing solitary, alone, is the Lord Jesus Christ. The disciples remember it has been written: *“Zeal for your house will consume me.”* He will not have it thought that Gentiles don't matter! He will not have it thought that His Father's House can be used as they please.

He comes into His Father's House with all the authority of the Son of the House. A display of invincible authority! Of majesty! Of Kingship! Zeal and ownership. An unique display.

It's not very different from when the crowd at Nazareth, incensed and furious by what He had said, took Him to the top of a precipice in order to throw Him over. Only to find that at the last moment He simply turned. The crowd drew back and He walked unharmed through the middle<sup>13</sup>.

It's not unlike the occasion much later in this Gospel, when a crowd armed with sticks and staves, carrying lanterns, burst into the Garden of Gethsemane to club Him and arrest Him. Approaching them He said, “Whom do you seek?” They said, “Jesus of Nazareth!” and He said, “I AM” As those words fell from His lips they fell, overcome with a sense of majesty, to the ground.<sup>14</sup>

It is similar here in the Court of the Gentiles. The unholy traffic has been swept out of the Temple by Him alone! An innate, unarguable authority demonstrated for all to see and feel. The authority of the Son of God as He advances in His splendid anger. No body dare resist Him. All flee because there is a royalty and a power about Him which can not be conquered.

That was the second sign!

These signs are to demonstrate His identity. From this sign three things follow:

Verse 18 -22. <sup>18</sup> *So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?”* The Temple authorities had recognised that the actions of Jesus had directly challenged them and their authority. Indignantly they challenge Him to give a sign to show His authority to do what He had just done. But they already had the sign. The quiet command after the devastation – like the calming of the raging sea – was ever

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<sup>13</sup> Luke 4:29-30. <sup>29</sup> *And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.* <sup>30</sup> *But passing through their midst, he went away.*

<sup>14</sup> John 18:4-6: <sup>4</sup> *Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?”* <sup>5</sup> *They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.”* Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. <sup>6</sup> *When Jesus said to them, “I am he”, they drew back and fell to the ground.*

so apparent. But they wanted yet another sign.

How typical of the 'unbeliever': Often when the Bible is being preached, men and women who may listen get more and more uneasy. They find their heart is being searched. Conscience being pricked wounded and stabbed. They find that secrets about their life are known, it appears, to the preacher. (It's not known to the preacher at all, but only appears that way from what God directs to be preached.) The searching power in the Bible demonstrates an authority and truth that they can't explain, but because they don't want to submit to God's Word through the Bible, they come to the preacher and ask for proof the Bible is true. All the while their own conscience screams: "It's true!"

At the Temple the unbelievers have **seen** a great display of authority, yet they ask for a sign to show that authority. And the profound answer in verse 19: <sup>19</sup> *Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* But it's a different word for temple. It's not the word used for the whole precinct. It's the word used for the central sanctuary (the 'body' of the Temple as it were!) If you or I had been there would we have understood Christ's reply? No! The Jews didn't, the disciples didn't. So before we start mocking the Jews or the disciples, remember none of us would have understood that reply.

In years to come, in retrospect, hind-sight, when the disciples looked back they understood. He was speaking not about the stone temple, but the Temple of his body. The very sanctuary in which the God-head was living right then! As He stood amongst us. God manifest in the flesh.

John puts it this way (verse 21/22) <sup>21</sup> *But he was speaking about the temple of his body.* <sup>22</sup> *When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.*

Nonetheless the Jews snorted, <sup>20</sup> ... *"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"* They laughed and mocked and scorned Him as unbelievers still today do.

Jesus was saying that the ultimate sign that would show His identity would be His Cross; burial; and resurrection. The absolute sign of Christ's divine identity was when after 3 days dead he came to life again. As this was demonstrated on the first Easter Sunday, the Disciples were changed and so was and is every believer since. (Romans 1:4) *And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:* Says Paul.

In the context of John's narrative so far, we see that Christ, even from the beginning of His Ministry, was firmly set on His purpose of salvation, through His life, His death, His burial, His resurrection. This keeps being noted in John's Gospel.

What a brave display of authority in the Temple, that day. But one day there was to be a greater! As He hung on the cross He was going to dismiss His own Spirit. They would take Him down on the Friday – first day by Jewish reckoning; lay in the grave all day Saturday – second day; coming on the Sunday – third day – they would find He was not there. But He was alive and would present himself so, by many infallible proofs. The authority which drove people from the Temple was the same authority

which dismissed His Spirit and yet be able to take up His life again after 3 days.

The first of the things that followed that 'sign' in the Temple was the answer to the question of the Jews, "By what sign do you do these things." Unbelievers always mock the answer. Believers live by it.

[2460]

**Pray this is so for all the saints gathered here today.**

Next week the two other things that follow the 'sign' in the Court of the Gentiles.

**Delivered Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> July 2017**

John 2:13 – 3:21

## **A Sign & Three Things Which Follow** (part b)

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) -

Let us now consider the second issue which stems from the 'sign' in the Temple – verses 23 to the end of the chapter. **Jesus Knows What Is in Man.**

Beside that magnificent sign which is recorded, there were other signs that occurred at this time that were not recorded (by John). This is implied in verse 23. Doubtless they were all signs of 'authority'. In the Gospels, we hear of the deaf – hearing. Jesus simply spoke to a deaf man – his hearing returned! That was authority.

The blind couldn't see. Jesus often spoke or touched them – then they saw! That was authority.

And the dead were raised by a word! That was authority.

That's what was going on in Jerusalem at this stage. People saw His authority again and again. He spoke: and it was done! He commanded and it happened!

Jerusalem had never seen anything like that. Certainly nothing like the cleansing of the Temple. Just consider: Every Jewish man was supposed to come to Jerusalem 3 times a year. He didn't -- but was supposed to. But as many as could did come at 'Passover'. As they came into the Temple they were used to fighting their way through the crowds. Past the sheep and the oxen and doves. Past the money changers – most of them had to visit. Eventually, with a sigh of relief, they would get through that crowd, to the Court of the Women and finally into the Sanctuary.

But this year when they arrived at the Court of the Gentiles: empty and silent!

Every single Jew in the world must have known, that One man with His own authority had cleansed it! (Mind you, in about three years it had all crept back again, and our Lord had to cleanse it yet again.)

But every Jew must have known: and then when they saw these other miracles, we

read in verse 23 – *many believed in his name*. How many? Many!

But here is a surprising thing: <sup>24</sup> *But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people* <sup>25</sup> *and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man*.

People were believing in Christ! But we read that it was a belief to which He would not commit Himself. What does this mean?

It means this: Their belief was based on 'wonder'. It was shallow. They believed in Christ in a certain way, such that He would not commit Himself to them. They looked at the spectacular thing that He had done and the spectacular things He was still doing. They were thrilled. They admired Him. They came to conclusions about Him and His identity. True conclusions! But He didn't open Himself up to them and He didn't make Himself 'known' to them, like He had already done with the genuine disciples we have discussed in previous weeks. He could see through these shallow ones. What they were really like. He could see it was a regard based on mere admiration. It wasn't a trust that could save. It was not a 'saving' faith they had.

They were content to stand apart from the Lord Jesus Christ and admire Him.

But not one, came to Him in a personal way! Which is the essence of Christian Discipleship, as those true Disciples demonstrated.

They came to conclusions about His identity. But there was no following of Christ. And especially: no obeying of Christ. Admired Him and thought great thoughts about Him. But never 'came' to Him. Christ didn't commit Himself to such people.

The same sort of people still exist today!

They see Christ. Believe He is the Son of God. But that doesn't make them a Christian.

They believe He is the Messiah; the One of whom the Old Testament speaks; the One who brings eternal life; believe when it is said that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary; believe He lived sinlessly; believe He died and rose again; is alive now in heaven and is coming again. Hearts filled with big thoughts about Christ. But that's not 'saving faith'!

Saving Faith is when people know that truth about Christ AND come to that Christ to 'rest' upon Him. Trust themselves to Him. Open their hearts to Him. And are received by Him as they enter into union with Him – through and by the Holy Spirit alone.

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Now the third thing which followed Christ's second sign of power – miracle.

Chapter 3:1-21 follows directly from the great 'sign' we have been discussing, as well as those 'other signs' that were not detailed in our current passage.

Now there were people who admired Christ but never came to Him. But one was different! To this one, the Lord Jesus did open His heart. Drew near to and received.

Look how he is described in verse 1 of Chapter 3. <sup>3:1</sup>*Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.*

He saw the 'sign' and he saw the other signs. He saw a Person who on the strength of His own authority, cleansed the Temple. He knew that could not have happened except God was with Him. He was there when Jesus healed the sick; cast out the demons; made the blind see; and made the lame to dance. He knew that none of this could happen except God was with Him.

So he sought out the Lord Jesus Christ at the only time he could guarantee that the Saviour would be free from the crowds. Some like to label Nicodemus as a coward who didn't want people to know that he visited Jesus. Yet we learn that later Nicodemus stood up for Christ before the Council. And then when all the 'loud shouters' had run away, it was Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea – two so called secret disciples – who took Christ's body and buried it. There can be more quality in quiet faith than one which shouts!

Nicodemus, knowing that the things done by Jesus showed God was with Him, did what the others that day did not. He sought Jesus out alone. Then he made a statement and waited for the Lord to answer: (verse 2) *“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”* Nicodemus: this top teacher amongst the Jews knew that God had been 'silent' for 400 years. No prophet had come. John the Baptist had come and pointed to Christ. And now here was Christ doing these great signs. **God was speaking again!** Then Nicodemus having made this declaration waits for a further Word from God.

Jesus simply added: (verse 3) *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

You can't see a spiritual thing to be true unless you have a spiritual birth. Nicodemus could see something that others couldn't. Perhaps he thought this was to his credit! Jesus throws that to the ground. “No credit to you that you see things that others can't. If anyone sees the Kingdom of God it is because they have been born from above.”

Verse 4: <sup>4</sup>*Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?”*

Rather than contradicting Jesus, Nicodemus just can't understand what Jesus is getting at. So Jesus tells him, as He is telling us as well: Verse 5. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*

<sup>6</sup>*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

<sup>7</sup>*Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’*

The Scriptures and Jewish practice demonstrated that water was symbolically used to wash (purify) the spirit of a man and a nation of men. “Unless you have a spiritual cleansing and a spiritual birth you can't enter into a spiritual Kingdom. Don't confuse flesh and spirit. How do you come into this physical world? Physical birth. Likewise,

how do you come into the spiritual world? Spiritual birth – birth from above. Don't be surprised then that I say, 'you must be born again' “

It's hard to understand, but says Jesus: <sup>8</sup> *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*”

“The wind is a mystery, you can't predict it, but because you don't understand it, don't say it doesn't exist.”

That's the way it is with the 'new birth'. It's very hard – impossible – to understand what a spiritual birth is that changes a person's character. And then they see things that they couldn't see before. That they understand things that they didn't understand before. That they can enjoy things that they hated before. Seek things that they despised before. So hard to understand that radical change of character which is the 'new birth'. But the fact that you don't understand it doesn't mean that it isn't so!

Jesus says this and even more as he raises the stakes. This birth is a Sovereign act of God the Spirit! Lots of people saw the sign of power and authority. But only one came seeking Christ having seen what others couldn't. The Spirit was at work in Nicodemus. Only the Spirit. Not any discernment or cleverness of Nicodemus despite his being at the top of his religious profession. God was at work, changing his mind and nature and perception of spiritual things. All this change, such that he was new. This is the new birth.

Can you say with that once wretched sinner, John Newton:

I once was lost, but now am found,  
was blind but now I see.

Amazing Grace!

Nicodemus' last comment (verse 9) *“How can these things be?”*

Not doubting, but rather asking how it comes about. Perhaps he still wants to be given a way that he can make it happen. Don't we all! All those man made cults and religions.

“How does the new birth happen?” Or perhaps, “How can I make it happen?”

“What!, exclaims Christ, “You are the teacher of Israel, and you don't understand how the new birth comes about, here on earth, then how will you understand when I tell you about heaven?”

To Nicodemus' question: as to how the new birth comes about, Jesus in effect is saying: “Your job isn't to understand the new birth – it's a Sovereign act of God. It's not your responsibility. Human responsibility is in another area. The area of believing – of faith. Jesus has finished with the 'new birth', He now turns His attention to faith.

If He hadn't done this we could imagine that congregations everywhere this minute would be sitting waiting for a new birth to happen. To a man (or a woman) they would just sit and sit until it happens. So Jesus passes on to speak about faith.

“Remember in the wilderness when people were bitten by serpents; that there was no cure; except the cure that God provided. A serpent on a pole!. When they just looked at what God had done they were cured. In the same way I'll be taken and when I am lifted up, when people look to me they will have everlasting life and not perish.” That's his answer, first to Nicodemus now to us.

“God loves this world. The proof is that His only begotten Son, is given to the world and whoever has faith in Him should not perish, but will have everlasting life.”

Verse 17: “Nicodemus, the purpose of my coming into the world: Not to condemn. The purpose is salvation. When a man has faith in me he is not condemned.” But if he doesn't come to Christ with a personal faith – trust, reliance – he's condemned already. Because the only way to be free from everlasting punishment is faith in the dear Son of God.

Verse 19: “The condemnation of the world is that light has come into the world. But when it came into the world the people preferred their darkness. Because their deeds were evil.” And this is why they still stay away today.

Verse 21: “But sometimes there are people who do come to the light.” They come to Christ and the light reveals what and who they are, but rather than flee to the dark to hide their sinfulness, like the others do, they believe that Christ is receiving them, by His grace and love. And they rest in Him.

Why do they do what is unnatural to human nature. Why don't they hide from the truth about themselves and the truth of God's love. **Because they have been changed.** A divine change has taken place in their life – *so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.*” That's the last time Jesus mentions the new birth. In this way he shows to the world that the evidence that one has experienced the 'new birth' is that they come to Christ.

Should you wish to display that you have the 'new birth', the only evidence that God recognises is that you come to Jesus; asking of Him everlasting life; believing that He was lifted up in your place; and is now alive as your Saviour.

Final reminders:

- The 'new birth' is never commanded in the Bible. But faith is. You're not commanded to have the 'new birth': that's God's work. However God commands all men everywhere to repent; turn to Christ – look to the One who died on the cross in agony and shame; to look to the only appointed means to their salvation – He directs their eyes to that Saviour. When a person so comes to the Saviour it is proof that they have the 'new birth'.

- Nobody will ever believe without the 'new birth'. So we should not dare to preach the Gospel unless at the same time we should pray for God's blessing on Gospel speaking and preaching. People cannot see what we see; cannot understand what we understand; they cannot know what we know with such certainty. Unless their characters are transformed! So for our families and friends and colleagues let us pray, that God will blow upon them, by the wind of His Spirit, and make them new creatures in Christ.

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**Pray this is so for all the saints gathered here today.**