

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
September 2017

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

A Tale of Two Towns

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) -

Today's passage, which starts at John 4:43 to the end of the chapter, a Tale of Two Towns. These towns were in the same country, Palestine, and where in the same Province, Galilee. They were Cana and Capernaum.

We shall consider 3 locations in turn: Province (Galilee); Cana; and Capernaum.

Galilee: This Province was in the North of Palestine, in the middle was Samaria, and in the South Judea (with the Capital City, Jerusalem).

Galilee was hilly with the land running down to the most prominent feature, a fresh water lake, which the Jordan river flowed through on its journey from its headwaters further North still. This lake was named Kinereth: or simply the 'Sea' of Galilee.

Our Lord had been in Judea. At the beginning of Chapter 4 (John's Gospel) we had been told that Jesus left Judea, but not by the normal – avoidance – route, having deliberately 'decided to pass' through Samaria on the way to Galilee. (By this means His pre-destined meeting with the woman and subsequent conversions in the little town of Sychar, had occurred. He had stayed with them for two days)¹ But His broader intention was to get to Galilee. So in verse 43 he arrives.

Verse 44/45: ⁴⁴ *(For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honour in his own home town.)* ⁴⁵ *So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.*

Jesus was born in Judea, of the tribe of Judah. He was a Judean by birth (Bethlehem) and ancestry (a descendant of David). The earlier exile of the Kingdom of Judah to Babylon had ended with many of the people returning to the same traditional territory. By and large the people of Judah traced their heritage to the tribe of Judah and also to the smaller tribe of Benjamin – which together formed Judea. Our Lord was definitely a Judean!

The reception He had received in Judea was not of the sort that pleased Him. Remember Chapter 2 verses 23-25. ²³ *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.* ²⁴ *But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people* ²⁵ *and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was*

¹ In Samaria, marvellous things had happened. Our Lord had met a solitary woman. She had come to receive Him as the Saviour of the World. Not only had she come to realise this but a large number of Samaritans, in the small town of Sychar also. They had had Him to themselves for two whole days.

One of the things that's going to be marvellous about heaven is that lots of things that are just 'mentioned' in the Word of God, will become known in more detail. What did they speak to our Lord about in those two days. No Pharisees, no critics, getting in the way! Just two whole days with the Lord of Glory. Sitting in a Samaritan town while people spoke to Him and He to them. We will find at last. But one thing is clear: Before He left they knew Him as Saviour. Do you? And they knew that He is the Saviour not only of Jews. But the Saviour of all peoples of the world. (Not every individual person, but all the types of persons. EVEN Samaritans!)

in man.

Back there, in Judea, the reception which Jesus Christ had received had been exceedingly shallow. A faith based on 'wonder'. Everybody admired Jesus of Nazareth; scores of people were 'thrilled' by Jesus of Nazareth. But it was not a 'saving' trust (faith). Not an obedient trust. There was no 'cross bearing' or 'following', of Christ. They admired Him and were thrilled by the miracles He performed. But they did not come to Him as 'Saviour' as the Samaritans did. Nor as obedient disciples like the Disciples who are mentioned did. Jesus could see into their hearts: *for he himself knew what was in man.* He wasn't deceived by their wonderment and their being thrilled.

It's significant that of the 12 Apostles named – not one is from Judea! They come from the northern parts which the Judeans despised.

So He left Judea, also for the reason mentioned in 4:1 That He could see by staying there a conflict with the Pharisees at that place was inevitable. So He left (abandoned it). He sometimes went back but only rarely.

So He arrives at Galilee (V 45) where He is welcomed with 'open arms'.

Why was there a welcome in Galilee (where He was brought up – Nazareth was in Galilee.)

The Galileans were not Judeans, but they were Jews. (unlike the mixed-race Samaritans) Therefore, like the rest of the Jews they went up to Jerusalem as often as they could for the major feasts, especially Passover. Thousands of Galileans had been in Jerusalem when our Lord had performed the miracles previously mentioned. This news had got back to Galilee before Jesus arrived. But this popularity was also based on wonder. At first they gave our Lord a hearty reception, but they also turned against Him and contributed to the call for His crucifixion several years later. But at first they gave Him a warm welcome to the Province of Galilee. Where our two towns were situated.

Cana in Galilee:

(Verse 46) ⁴⁶ *So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine.*

It was a little village in the uplands probably south west of the North Western corner of the Sea of Galilee. Probably about 20 miles from the town, on that lakeside, of Capernaum. Mary had friends there and so Jesus was also known there. Nathanael, as we mentioned earlier, came from there. So this is where Jesus goes (It's also quite close to Nazareth where he was brought up (perhaps only 4 miles – of mountainous terrain – away.)

So the news of what Jesus has done in Jerusalem as well as that he is back in Galilee – specifically Cana – has spread.

Capernaum:

Verses 46 – 47: So up from Capernaum, walking throughout the day, comes an official of the King of Galilee². He's coming urgently – with his heart in agony – because his son is dying of a common and usually fatal 'fever' and he has heard of the miracles of Jesus, whom he believes can magically heal at a touch. He arrives at 7 in the evening. Finding Jesus he begs³ Him to come with him down to Capernaum to heal his son, who otherwise will surely die.

Verse 48: Jesus, with the foresight of the God-head, always intended to heal that boy. That He did heal him shows this. God does not do what he does on the basis of what we do first. He doesn't change His mind depending on what might happen in the future. In this case Christ's first response is to deal with the father and then, as He always intended, to deal with the needs of the boy. This explains the apparent hesitation and the seemingly harsh response, said to the 'official' – but intended for all the Galileans⁴ (and everyone since): ⁴⁸ *So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.”* Here is the same problem of 'what's in a man'. Man, in general, has no 'saving' trust (faith) in Christ only a thrilling fascination with miracles, 'signs'. So Christ, as before: *did not entrust himself to them*, (John 2:24). Jesus does not give that man, despite his further entreaties (verse 49), the magical remedy of going with him to Capernaum to 'touch' his son, as a mystic healer might, and then go on his way never to be considered again. Christ does not require recognition because of what He does, and therefore what we can **get** out of Him, but because of **who** He is.

Verse 50: With that obvious authority of God (in human flesh), that has been chronicled, throughout the Gospel so far, and beyond, Jesus commands: *“Go; your son will live.”* Face to face with the Son of God, would you deny Him? Would you not believe Him? In who He is! Jesus is giving that man the chance to 'believe' based on the Word of who Christ is – not a 'sign' or miracle. The 'sign' did follow the 'belief'. There are two philosophies in stark contrast here: Initially the man displays: show me a 'sign' and I will believe. Jesus' response is the reverse: believe and you shall see (the 'sign')⁵.

The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. Such an encounter with God is a life changing experience. It occurs in different ways to all people whom He converts. It is at God's initiative. It is God's Sovereign will. What follows in the 'new life', is confirmation of what God has willed from before 'time began',

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- 2 When Herod the Great died the Romans arranged for his vassal Kingdom to be divided 4 ways. Herod the Tetrarch (meaning a 4 way split) a son of Herod TG acquired Galilee. Philip (the Tetrarch) governed the territory east of the Jordan - in the north. One of the 4 areas, the largest, was returned to direct Roman oversight when the other son was removed, and that overseer was Pilate.
 - 3 The rather matter of fact use of 'asked' in verse 47 where the Greek is *ἠρώτα* (erota) would be better translated as entreat, beg, beseech – especially because the conjunction of other words provide a grammatical construction that implies an emphatic sense of the verb used. In this case like the KJV.
 - 4 The subject of Jesus comment in this verse 48 is obscured by the modern English use of 'you', which can be applied as singular or plural. You: the man; you: all those present. In earlier usage in English and still in many other languages, there are different words for these different audiences. 'Thou' (singular): where referring to an individual. And 'ye' when referring to a group (plural). The KJV uses 'ye' in both instances of verse 48. Meaning that the implied censure is to the people present not specifically to the official.
 - 5 That is the great difference between those who love the spectacular and those of true faith. The world is filled with people whose approach is: “Let me see something – and then I'll believe. Jesus says to such people, “A 'sign' I will not give you. But I will give you a Word.” “Believe the Word and then you will see the evidence that the Word is true.” Believe the Word on the simple basis that He said it. That's what faith is. Abraham believed the seemingly impossible promise God made, simply because it was God's Word. He “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Galatians 3:6).

eternity, and has chosen to put into effect at the very time of His choosing. Just at the 'right time'.

And so it happens with this official. The rest of the passage is for the benefit of his servants, family and associates. And, because it has been recorded in God's Word, it is for our benefit also.

The official **heard** the Word from Christ (*your son will live*); in His (new) heart he **believed** it; and he **acted** on it (he went on his way). That's the way all who come to faith do so. Hear ... believe ... obey. Only then, afterwards, the truth of it is demonstrated powerfully to ones own understanding. Christ does 'give Himself' to that sort of faith.

Very early the next morning, the official started on his way down that 20 miles plus, back to Capernaum.

Eventually, he sees, in the distance, His servants coming to meet him, hurrying as fast as they could. What a test of his faith. Still too far away for any communication. What news? Perhaps they are coming to tell him that his son is already dead!

But no. Verse 51: ⁵¹ *As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering.* Here the understanding of the faith in that man's 'new heart' is being shown.

And even more: (verse 52) ⁵² *So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him."* He asks them when did *he begin to get better*. Just a little faith. No not – begin to get better – the *fever left him*. The common course of this well known, usually fatal, fever was a long period of convalescence, in those rare cases where the patient survives. But here full recovery. More faith.

⁵³ *The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live."* ... Here now is his full realisation and understanding of the faith that was given by the Sovereign grace of God at that earlier instant, when Jesus gave His authoritative Word: *Go; your son will live.*

Here he has the evidence of faith. At the very instant that Jesus gave His Word, the son, over 20 miles away, recovered. Who is this Jesus the world may ask? This man knows!

On that journey back to Capernaum, rejoicing with his servants, it has become clear to him that there is One who can speak and it is done; who can declare and it happens; has authority in His mere Word; His Word is a fact – it is not required that He be bodily present; no 'touch', no eye to eye contact; no sensation that He is near is necessary. He speaks and it occurs. So he now recognises and understands why he believed this preacher from Nazareth's Word. He is the Son of God.

And he himself believed, and all his household.

Imagine the home-coming of that man! He had left his son at the point of death. But now he emerges from the house perfectly fit. No necessity for convalescence. Completely cured in a moment by an absent Jesus. Imagine how the father describes his encounter with Christ and how he could not deny the authority of Christ's Word. The very words of Christ were repeated when he was met by the servants: "He lives!" How it occurred at the very same instant as it was spoken by Christ.

So very clear to Him that Jesus Christ is Divine. To accept His Word is to accept the Word of God.

Such a marvellous change in that whole household and who knows how many others then and since. The day before the official had travelled urgently to find the prophet that everyone was speaking about in the hope that something could be done for his son. He found instead the Son of God who could, through His divine Word, bring faith to a family and so many others. He got more than he bargained for. Nothing from then on would be the same. Yes his son was restored to full health. But so much greater, he and his, had met and were chosen by God the Saviour.

[2072]

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

The Healing at Bethesda

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) -

Jesus has been in Galilee at Cana, in the hills, 20 – 30 miles south west of Capernaum which is on the North West coast of the Sea of Galilee. His second miracle performed at Cana (the third 'sign' described by John) saw the son of a royal official cured of an usually fatal fever. But despite the general acclaim that usually attended His 'acts of power' in the general population – that of wonderment, but no faith, the official and his family had 'received' Christ. Having 'experienced' the Person of God through His healing power.

It's another festival time (possibly Passover) and probably a year after Christ's previous visit. Therefore Christ and His disciples are back in Jerusalem.

For us the pool at Bethesda, with its distinctive 5 porticoes, had been 'lost' for centuries, but was 'unearthed' in the late 19th Century, but only finally identified as this named pool some 100 years later.

At the time John was writing about it was common for disabled people to come to this pool, since it had a tradition of curative properties when the waters were disturbed⁶. It was assumed that the first to enter the water on such a time would be cured. For 38 years the particular man had attended the pool area but with no one to aid him, he had never been able to reach the water in time. When Jesus saw him, and was aware that he had been in this state for such a long time, He asked him, if he wanted to get better? The man with such a history of failure had given up hope. With no one to help him, he was always beaten to the water.

Jesus' response was two-fold. (And had nothing to do with the possible properties of the water.) Two commands of authority: "Get up!" and "Pick up your mat and walk". And the man did. Both. ... It was the Sabbath.

Imagine that you lived near that pool. Everyday you passed it as you went to school. Then you got a job, but your path to work was still past that pool. What was your enduring memory for 38 years – half your lifespan almost? This same unfortunate man. Always there!

Then on that day as you're coming to the pool there he is walking towards you with his mat over his shoulder. Is it him? Yes. You know him well – 38 years well! Would you say anything? Would you be happy for Him? It would have to be an act of God! Would you rejoice with him for that?

The Jews (the authorities) didn't. They said that the Law forbids him to carry his mat on the Sabbath.

⁶ One might notice that some modern translations omit a verse 4 in Chapter 5 (ESV & NIV). The footnote in the NIV has a suggested verse 4 (which describes the random stirring up of the waters and the subsequent intention to be the first to then enter the water for a cure to be effected. The translators, explain their reason for relegating the verse to a footnote on the grounds of its origin being from "some less important manuscripts".

“But,” the man, replied, “He who cured me told me to.”

They wanted to know who would have given such an order. But the man did not know – until he met Christ later at the Temple.

At this later meeting, Christ remarking that the man was now well, made the seemingly harsh comment that he must stop sinning or something worse would happen to him.

What could be worse than what this man had already endured for 38 years?

Imagine the worst life; the worst illness; the worst torture or mental anguish that anyone in this life could experience. Christ could say: “Stop sinning or something worse will happen.” Is this being insensitive? What could be worse?

Jesus is concerned about physical suffering, but of more importance is the suffering under God's eternal judgement that falls on those who retain, harbour and feed their sin. This man was physically healed, but the deeper problem still existed. He still had to come to be reconciled to his Maker. He represents us all at some time (in the past thank God). Physically healthy but spiritually ... fatally ill. Our first lesson for today.

As usual there are many valuable lessons in John the Apostle's narrative and commentaries.

Most significant at this point is that we are learning why the Jewish authorities hated Jesus so much. What He did (and we read on to hear) what He said, resulted in their implacable desire to have Him killed.

So far, what He had done, was to *cure* the man AND to *instruct* him to carry his mat. On the Sabbath! Both, in the narrow, self-indulgent, false, interpretation of the legalistic, uncaring religious authorities, were deemed religiously prohibited *work*.⁷ Verse 16: ¹⁶ *And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.* At least to begin with.

Verse 17 is the pivot on which the chapter turns. Here Jesus gives all authorities, who seek to instruct Him, the ultimate answer.

¹⁷ *But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”*

It's the Sabbath. Yet God is still working. The event in question – the curing of a man – 38 years a cripple – was clearly a work of God. True, after 6 days of working at Creation, God rested from Creation – it was after all – very good! But the work of Providence continues. My Father is at work. “And (therefore) so am I.” says Jesus. It is for God to decide what is done and not done on the Sabbath. Here Jesus associates Himself equally with God in this matter. God is still at work and (therefore) so is Jesus. The 4 signs, so far, of authority – the authority of God. The evidences of God at work. All declare that Christ is God in the same way (His work) as God the Father. But while Christ is God in the same way that the Father is God, Christ is not the Father. One God in two distinct Persons (so far).

⁷ Jesus had to deal with this same error at other times, and included acts of kindness as valid activities on the Sabbath. This is taken up in WCF 21:8

Many, particularly those who refuse to acknowledge Christ as fully God (as well as fully man), will say that verse 17 has been misunderstood. (They will no doubt want to say the whole of the message of John's Gospel has been misunderstood!)

But look at who were the targets of Christ's answer. The top religious experts of the day! Did they pass over and ignore the meaning of Christ's words. Did they fail to recognise that he was claiming equality, but independent identity (Person), with God the Father? Did they fail to see that Jesus was claiming 'His' father in such a special, personal and unique way, that no one else could possibly do?

They had no doubts: ¹⁸ *This was why the Jews were seeking **all the more** to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, **making himself equal with God.***

Yet there was more to come.

Already the Jewish authorities that heard Jesus at first-hand had no doubt of who He claimed to be. But many in the past 2000 years, particularly aberrant leaders and their duped followers, have failed to get this and the even stronger message which now follows:

Even today, should anyone be genuinely interested in knowing who Jesus Christ is, then they cannot afford to ignore John 5: 19-47.

There are three sections to this passage.

- Verses 19-29, where Jesus underlines His great claims so readily and adamantly recognised by the Jews: that He and the Father are separate Persons, both equally the one God.
- Verses 30-40, where Jesus introduces the two main witnesses in support of His claims, and
- Verses 41-47, where Jesus condemns His hearers – then and now – who fail to accept this truth He is telling them.

Verses 19-22. He underlines the stupendous claim that the Father and Himself are two separate Persons, but He is as much God as the Father. Not two gods, but two Persons, both of whom are (is) God. Again there are 3 sections:

- ¹⁹ *So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.*

The separate Persons, Son and Father are clear but so is their function. They both do what only God does.

- ²⁴ *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life.*

There is the Father and here am I the Son. The Father has sent me. To hear my words is to believe on Him! If you do you will be freed from sin and have passed into eternal life. Note the present tense: 'have passed'. This is no 'pie in the sky, bye and bye.' Salvation is not only in the future, but is already a present reality for the believer.

Again the Father and the Son are distinct Persons. Jesus explains that they have a unique complementary relationship and each One is as evidently God as the other.

- Verse 26 brings us again to the 'mystery' of the Eternal Generation of the Son. This verse is a 'stand out' verse in a 'stand out' (profound) Gospel. No human mind can comprehend how it can be so. We have nothing even remotely comparable in earthly experience. But this does not change the fact that we can state it with confidence since it comes from Christ Himself.

²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of Man.

We each owe our life to another – our parents. The first human received life from God. (Genesis 2:7). But from whom did God receive life? ***In Himself.*** (WCF 2:2) And so, by grant of the Father, so does the Son have this divine property of ***life in Himself.*** And to emphasise even more strongly this unique property of God, there has never been a time when the Son has not had *life in Himself.* (There was a time when the pre-existent Son acquired, in addition, the body and Nature of a man – at the incarnation.) In addition further confirmation of the Son being in all ways God, He, because of His added Human Nature, has the (God only) authority to execute judgement on those He can so readily represent.

Because Christ, the Son, has the properties of God, such as *life in himself*, He is able to be described as Jesus did in verse 25: ²⁵ *“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.* That is: Christ is already raising people to spiritual life. (John has already started that list – the Disciples mentioned; a woman at the well and so on) – and this saving work continues to the present time on the authority of the Son through the agency of the Spirit. (As promised to the Disciples as Jesus was near the end of His earthly Ministry.)

Over and above this, verse 28 reveals that the same Person of God, the Son, gives physical life. ²⁸ *Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement.*

Note that this verse not only underlines the separate Persons of the Trinity, who each is as much God as each other, but also confirms the resurrection of those who die (in this Christ was supporting the view of the Pharisee against that of the Sadducee of His day.) For those today, who deny the presence and eternal duration of hell the message continues to be strongly stated. While we rejoice in

the continued promise of eternal life with Christ.

The claim that He is as much God as the Father is, yet He is not the Father but the eternally generated Son from the Father, is our emphasis.

Finally today, we return to verses 21-23:²¹ *For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.* ²² *The Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the Son,* ²³ *that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father. Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him.*

A summary of the Son's equality with God; His special status as Judge and a severe message to 'door knockers', who are coy about giving Christ equal honour with the Father.

When pressed, such people may try to hide behind the assertion that they 'honour the Son but worship the Father'. This (as usual) is a gross distortion of the Word of God. The context and meaning of verse 23 taken in the context of everything John has to say in his whole Gospel and particularly here in Chapter 5 is that the **same** honour that is to be given to the Father is to be given to the Son. No distinctions. No splitting hairs. No fancy use of one word against another. Otherwise no honour will be accorded the Father. It is the Son, representing the Father, who is the One to whom all must account on the day of Judgement. All false witnesses – beware!!

[2298].

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

Next week John 5: 30 - 47

The Healing at Bethesda – sequel

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) -

Jesus has returned to Jerusalem for a Festival, probably towards the end of the first year of His Ministry. He passes the Pool of Bethesda, which is just inside the Sheep Gate entry to the city. A cripple has been present at this poolside for the past 38 years, hoping for healing. He has all but given up.

Jesus once again reveals His divine power and authority, with two commands, which carry the force of Divine Authority: “Get up” and “Carry your bed!” (Bed, mattress or mat).

Is this the principal story? No, only the opportunity. Much more follows.

Firstly Jesus' two commands are not heralded with acclamation – though they are clearly 'Acts of God' – , by the religious leaders. Nor is there any joy in the healing of the well known cripple, by the population at large.

Only condemnation for 'working' on the Sabbath – for the healing and then the the command to carry the mat.

So strong was this condemnation, to the exclusion of all other considerations, that they resolved, then and there, to kill Jesus.

Then Jesus spoke. Did He resolve their misunderstandings and placate them? No! He revealed, in no uncertain terms, that the laws of the Sabbath were God's Laws and not theirs. And that He and God His Father were One.

Perhaps what Jesus said has been misunderstood. Did he really say that God was His Father in a special way which was not the case for anyone else? Did He really say that He was not the Father, but yet He was in all ways God just as the Father is (and later also the Spirit)?

The religious experts of the day were in no doubt. Saying: ¹⁸ *This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, **making himself equal with God.***

Now today's, 'armchair critics' in their 'watchtowers' can pause and ponder what the words recorded really mean. Explore this and that interpretation. This shade of meaning. That use of a particular Greek word or sentence structure. But what was John the writer telling us? What was the whole of His eye-witness account of the Lord Jesus Christ telling us? And most important of all what did those who were there and were being addressed by Jesus understand from what He said to them? They didn't have to be 2000-year-distant students of ancient, virtually-forgotten, language and idiomatic use of that language. They were there. It was their everyday language.

They understood completely. Jesus, *was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*

Jesus then goes on (verses 19 to 29) to define the scope and origins of His authority: Follow these verses as we summarise:

The Authority of the Son

- While the Son only does what He knows the father does, yet it is clear that whatever the Father does so He does.
- The Father loves the Son and shows Him everything He is doing and further even greater works so that we marvel.
- The Father raises the dead and gives them life – so also the Son gives life to whom He will.
- The Father has given His right to and purpose in all judgement to the Son. So that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. In fact if one does not so honour the Son, one fails to honour the Father who sent Him. ('Door-knockers' BEWARE)
- Whoever believes the Son's Word and therefore believes in the Father has eternal life – receives no judgement, but passes from (through) death to life.
- Conversion: Even the dead (in sin) will hear and live. The Son creates spiritual life – new birth.
- Eternal Generation of the Son: Just as God only, has life in Himself, so is the Son continually granted life in Himself by the Father.
- Resurrection of the body: The Son's authority to judge is facilitated by His Dual Nature. Not only is He the eternally generated (begotten) Son from the Father but also the incarnate, Son of Man. Therefore all will rise (to physical existence) from their tombs at His command: to go to the resurrection of life; or to the resurrection of judgement. Both eternal in duration

Now we come to verses 30 -47:

Jesus calls on the 'witnesses' that prove the authority He has just claimed and goes on to condemn those who fail to believe Him.

He starts by saying that He might have simply been His own witness. Since in fact God (in Christ) is the ultimate witness. When God in the Old Testament calls on people to witness on oath, He can but call only Himself.

But there are others to do it. John (the Baptist)? Yes but while he is a burning and shining light He is nevertheless a mere man. It needs more than this to convince those in Jerusalem and today.

The first of these special witnesses is His Works. This is all that they should need.

But the second witness is God the Father Himself. Jesus accuses the Jews of neither seeing nor hearing Him. As demonstrated by the fact that: “While He sent me, you don't believe me.” But further, God has sent the Scriptures. ⁹ *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,* ⁴⁰ *yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life*

So here we have it.

Our lord says there are two witnesses whom He can call on to bear witness to the truth that He is saying.

- “The first is My Works”. When people saw Jesus say to a man paralysed, for 38 years, “Stand up, pick up your mattress and walk.” While the man didn't even know who it was that was speaking to Him, the mere authority of His Word, works the miracle. That was all the evidence that they needed that Jesus Christ was really God.
- But also in their hands, all those years, they had the Scriptures. If they had read these with understanding they would have read that: someone would be born in Bethlehem; as a child would be taken to Egypt; would be a Nazarene; would preach in Galilee. They would have seen all sorts of marvellous predictions, fulfilled in the life of Jesus. These Scriptures made it clear that He is who He says He is.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who is as much God as the Father. His works prove it. The ultimate Work being His Resurrection.

And His Word proves it.

It is not the witness of men that can convict and convince an unrepentant sinner. Nor the plea of any preacher. The only thing that will convince the 'lost' is serious attention to the Works and Word of Christ, which God the Father has given to the world. By looking at those Works and that Word, honestly seeking the truth, one, with the aid of the Spirit, will come to see that the claims of Christ, so clearly described in this passage, are true.

Finally, in this chapter, Jesus condemns those who, despite the witness of the Works of Christ and the Word of God, will not accept His claim.

From verse 41, it is hard to ignore the stirring of the anger of the Son of God.

In effect He makes plain:

“Don't think that I am getting 'worked up' because you didn't praise me for what I did at the pool. Praise from men means nothing to me. I can see right through you. You don't love God. (If they had loved God they would have been thrilled that He had cured that man. If they had loved God they would have welcomed Christ.) When someone truly comes from God you don't want to know. But when any 'Tom, Dick or Harry'

stands up without any authority and merely makes boastful claims, you welcome him with 'open arms' and you believe everything he says about himself.”

(That's the history of the world to this very present day.) All the cults that have been, and the ones which still hoodwink, so many!

Yet into the world, working miracles, born of a virgin, fulfilling the Old Testament Scriptures, speaking with unique authority and at last rising from the dead comes, *Immanuel (which means, God with us)*⁸. With all this our Lord stands in the world, with perfect credentials. But the world will not accept that He is whom He says He is.

“How can you believe when all you can think about is what others say and how they regard (glorify) you rather than you seek the regard (the glory) that comes from God. You worry about what others think but not what God thinks.” (here we have just 'put our finger' on the cause of all spiritual blindness.)

⁴⁴ *How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?*

But now and then a man or a woman will say, that it doesn't matter what others will say or believe. And they will seek the truth through those two great witnesses to the truth of Jesus Christ. **His Works and the Word of God.** “Only the God of the Scriptures will define what I believe and not others around me”, they will say.

What was the last word from Jesus to those Jews then and all of us since.

“I don't need to accuse you to the Father. You orthodox Jews – you religious people – you have great regard for Moses. You set your hope by attending to his words. It is he who accuses you, because he wrote specifically of me. The very religious observance that you set so much store in cries out about me, but since you do not believe even this, that you claim is so close to your heart, then it is no wonder that you will not believe my words. You're all fake.

You're guilty because you won't accept my claims. But at the judgement bar, it won't be me who has to accuse you. Your guilt will be proved by Moses.”

So we learn in Chapter 5, that He who with great power saying “Rise, walk carry your bed” also made great claims that He is the Son of the Father and they are both God. And yet the Son is not the Father.

Those claims the Jews rejected. They were filled with hate for Christ and wanted to get rid of Him as soon as they possibly could.

Christ's Works were sufficient to support His claims, but they refused to accept them. The Scriptures which they studied every day, were enough to prove His claims. But they refused to see it.

They were as guilty as could be. God's Son was amongst them. The only one who could save them. They wouldn't come to Him that they might have eternal life. What a waste. How it must sorrow the loving heart of God.

There are people like that still today. Guilty. The Word of God reminds them of the solemn truth of verse 28: ²⁸ *Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice* ²⁹ *and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement.*

Are we a source of joy to the loving heart of God?

[1959]

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

A Day in Christ's School

Per S Olyott

(Review of last week) -

There is an old legend. It's not real of course, but like any legend, it has a point.

It is said that when Jesus ascended to heaven He was asked by the archangel Michael, how His work had gone. "My work is finished! I revealed who I AM; gave marvellous teaching about everlasting life; told everything that needs to be known about salvation; and, in fact accomplished that salvation." How many followers? "In general some 500; 70 disciples; and 13 Apostles." But that's not very many, you want the Gospel to fill the whole world! "These followers will spread the Gospel to all places in all ages." And if they fail what is plan B? "There is no plan B."

To this end Jesus taught His Disciples to equip them to be able to get on with the work of spreading the Gospel. His method was:

- spend much time with them,
- have them with Him as He did His work,
- put questions to them, that He didn't answer until later.
-

They accompanied, watched, heard, and followed His example.

In chapter 6 of John's Gospel we find them receiving 3 principal lessons to keep them in good stead for their work once He ascends to heaven. In reviewing these lessons we will:

- Examine what's in the passage,
- see how the lessons were delivered, and
- apply them to us.

The passage is composed of 2 miracles, whose main purpose was to teach the Disciples the principle of Divine Service.

Verses 1-14 Feeding of 5000 and verses 15 – 21 Walking on the water.

The feeding.

The festival of Passover was a national holiday in Palestine, including there in Galilee. Jesus is there and has attracted great crowds, who follow Him wherever He goes. His humanity is stretched. He needs a break. (Other Gospels say that He had no time to rest or eat. Mark 6:31)

So He goes, with His disciples, by boat, from the Capernaum area across the northern end of the Lake (called the Sea of Tiberias here) towards Bethsaida, to a hillside. The crowds anticipate this and skirt around the lake by land and meet Him there. (Other Gospels say that he spent the rest of the day teaching them.) In any event as the day draws to a close many of them are becoming faint. Jesus has compassion for their physical condition. He knows what He is going to do, but here is where the first lesson for the disciples begins. To test him, Jesus asks Philip a question – Verse 5: "Where do we buy bread ... ?" Philip doesn't answer this question. Perhaps he thinks beyond it. "Even if there were somewhere to buy bread, if I worked for six months and spent

all I earned at once on buying bread there would still only be a tiny bit for each in this crowd.”

Andrew, somewhat apologetically, says that there is this little lad with 5 tiny barley loaves and two minnows. How silly amongst such a crowd!

Elsewhere (Mark 6:39, 40) in the New Testament, the crowds are sat down on green grass, in 100s and 50s; Jesus presumably uses the disciples to distribute the food after He blesses it. As they divide and distribute it – it multiplies. Then the fish. A two course meal. Not just a taste. They are filled, they can have *as much as they wanted!*

The disciples are asked to gather the scraps. 12 baskets full!

The affect on the crowd is tremendous (verse 14) *“This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”* “The Prophet” was code for the Messiah, the same as was denied by John the Baptist earlier. They could not avoid the comparison with manna, feeding the multitude in the wilderness, but that fell from heaven at the time of Moses. Here they saw it happening direct from the hands of God on earth, topping His previous healings. “Is there anything He can't do?”

They want what He can give them in the materialistic sense. (They are like the consumers, who occupy the congregations of fake Christian gatherings. Honour Jesus because of what they can get from Him in the way that suits them!) Make Him the King – be fed without working; get rid of their current life under the Romans. If He can feed 5000 men (plus women and children) there's nothing He can't put right.

(verse 15) There's no crowning! By some act of authority, Jesus sends them home and withdraws on His own, to pray. The disciples return to the boat to return to Capernaum.

The walking on the water.

It's now dark as they set off. But, as often happens in this rift valley, between high hills on either side, a strong wind springs up. The usual procedure is to turn the boat and 'run with the wind'. A difficult manoeuvre, but these men have local experience, some are fishermen. But they don't do this. They are supposed to go back to Capernaum. Against the wind. They row. For nearly 4 miles. Not easy – and their master is not with them.

But then, head bowed against the wind and moving faster than they can row, they see a figure overtaking them. This is impossible! Who can this spectre be? What can it be? Keep rowing. But a comforting voice comes across the waves, “It is I⁹; do not be afraid.”

Perhaps we remember another 'appearance' in Daniel 10:5-7 and another (almost word for word) at Rev 1:13-15. To these can be added the Theophanies ('appearances' of God) throughout the Bible.

However the disciples are pleased to have Jesus back with them in the boat. So much

9 In the Greek: **Ἐγώ εἰμι** (Ego eimi) I AM(he) as with the Name of God given to Abraham at the burning bush

so that it is almost inconsequential that they are then immediately in the safety of the harbour of their destination.

Now to the three lessons: which are summarised by the words used by Jesus on three other occasions.

- All power is given unto me,
- My Kingdom is not of this World,
- Lo I AM with you always.

Lesson 1.

Philip and Andrew, representing the disciples could see that something needed to be done for the crowd, but they couldn't do it. They had failed Christ's test. Philip had said they didn't have the needed resources, while Andrew acknowledged some resources, but they weren't enough.

Neither said, "We can't but you can!" The first lesson: **All power is given unto me.**

Stay with Philip for a little while: Jesus passes a portion of a small barley roll to him. Philip takes it to the first person in his group of 50. But what's this? He's given it away, but he's still got as much, perhaps even more, in his hand to give. And to the next and the next. Then the fish! And later he collects a basket full of left overs.

Something had to be done. It was beyond him ... but Christ can do it. What a powerful lesson.

Lesson 2

Stay with Philip for a further moment: He collects his basket of left overs. As he passes through his portion of the crowd, he hears the excited talk of the people. They are talking about his Master they seem to have realised His true identity. At last Jesus is getting recognition. After a year of virtual obscurity. It's happening at last – a popular movement seeking to crown Jesus as King. He can fill stomachs without labour – "We must make Him King!"

But Jesus dismisses the crowd and leaves Philip and the others. Sending them back to the boat – to Capernaum.

What a let down. It was all happening – but now nothing.

The disciples were receiving a harsh lesson. Jesus is teaching them that He's not interested in popular acclaim – political power; a worldly Kingship; worldly influence. He's not interested in people who are only interested in Him because of what they can get out of Him. A hard lesson, but a necessary one: **My kingdom is not of this world.**

A great mind change for the Disciples. But had they forgotten from a year earlier: ¹³ "... the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴... the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." (Matt 7:13-14) And also: ²³ And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (Luke 9:23)

So now they have this lesson: not an earthly Kingdom, but He will reveal that His Kingdom – a spiritual Kingdom – will be reached through Gospel Preaching and the lessons of that special day were to prepare them for spreading this Gospel.

Lesson 3

Back in the boat. It's dark. They're dejected. Disappointed even. Rowing is hard.

The wind is threatening. Everything is against them. Sick at heart.

Of course they did have many times like this in the future, especially after Jesus ascended to heaven. But this miracle would stay utmost in their minds to carry them through all the disappointments, fears and difficulties in the future. The Gospel rides on a chariot of tears. But Christ is not absent! Miraculously, supernaturally, He is there.

So they learn: great difficulties arise like a sudden rising of the wind, but Christ does not desert, He comes in ways that are humanly impossible. **Lo I AM with you always.**

The disciples were instantly safe in the the harbour of their destination. Because Christ was with them again. He turned the crowds away but not them. He rejected earthly kingship but not the faith of believers.

What about you and I?

When in the situation: Something must be done, but we think we can't do anything about it: Christ will have put something (however small and apparently insignificant) in our hand. If we give out (dive away) what Christ has put in our hand, we will see the increase. We will experience that “All power has been given to Me

Start with even a little. Give as much as you have and you will still have more to give. Give it away and it will multiply.

Lesson 1. The principle of Divine Service. But remember: Perhaps God has not given you more, because you haven't given away what you already have.

Once we might have considered Australia a “Christian” country. Our laws were fashioned on Christian principles. People at large admired Christian people and Christian good works. Films and TV actively censored their content to be consistent with Christian mores and to avoid blasphemy. Church attendance was high, especially during the 1st and 2nd world wars.

But was this just a worldly/political – albeit Christian tolerant – Kingdom. Were the true believers any more than a remnant? As they always have been. Was this past age any different from the type of Kingdom Jesus rejected in John Chapter 6. Certainly as we look back we, like the disciples, may regret that those times have past. So we too must learn the **second lesson**. “My Kingdom is not of this world”. Christ is building up those 'saints' that were given to Him by the Father and not one will be lost! He is there preparing a place for us in His Kingdom. Where there are many rooms. We have glimpses of His Kingdom, here and now. His good works are still found in this present

age. But the full glory of His Kingdom is still to be consummated when He comes again.

Right now we have still a job to do. There is no plan B. If we do not proclaim the Gospel, no one else will.

But like the disciples we have to experience the difficulties. It's hard and lonely at times. Disappointing and unrewarding. We will often be sick at heart. But that's why there is the **third lesson**: “Lo I AM with you always”

He sees and he knows and He sends His Spirit for strength and comfort.

Matthew in Chapter 28:18-20 records Christ's summary of these three important lessons:

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

[2101]

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

(See the signs of renewal in the Presbyterian Church of Australia (since its doldrums leading up to 1977) in the attached: which takes encouragement from the recent analysis of the current PCA – particularly in NSW – in the book “*Burning or Bushed*”)

Encouragement can be derived from the recent history of the Presbyterian Church of Australia (1901)

This Australia wide Church was 'United' from the separate State and Colony Presbyterian Churches in the same year as the Australian Commonwealth.

Up to the middle of the 20th Century this Church settled into a 'comfortable' existence as a mainstream Australian Denomination. Part of the cultural landscape. Tolerated, regarded, often-attended, but stagnant.

Like most Western Churches it was sliding into complacency, with a growing decline into what has come to be called 'liberalism'. This error of doctrine began in the previous Century in German theological Universities and found favour with the average comfortable church attenders. It demanded little spiritual rigour and removed reliance on and acceptance of the Word of God. Miracles were 'explained away'; Christ was reduced to a legendary figure of ancient History, who was a good example to follow, but not the only Saviour from our sin. Mention of sin was to avoided at all costs – especially as a subject of preaching. People were assumed to be basically good at heart and just needed encouragement to 'do good and be good'.

By the 1950s the slide was accentuated, by the influx, into most of the theological training colleges, of overseas Professors of extreme liberal persuasion.

The main aim of the principal Non-Conformist Denominations was to strengthen their appeal to potential new members from Australian society through displaying unity of organisation. This led to the establishment in 1977 of the Uniting Church.

Of the three Denominations that were said to be Uniting, Presbyterian congregations were given the option to

elect to 'continue' under the 1901 legislation and remain as the Presbyterian Church of Australia. About one third Australia wide (and one half in NSW) Elected to do this. (In fact the criterion for the departure of a particular Congregation was a 2/3 majority. e.g. In a congregation of 61 'Communicant' members if 40 voted to leave the PCA and 21 voted to stay the result would be that the Congregation would continue as Presbyterian – by one vote).

The encouragement, mentioned above is this:

The greatly refined (continuing) Presbyterian Church of Australia had the motivation and opportunity to renew this Church in Australia. This was made possible because amongst the many forces at work, which caused there to be any continuing Church, one was the important remnant, composed of those who recognised the need to reverse the formerly invading liberalism and anti-Bible influence. They also had a means by which to do this. Return to Bible based Christianity as summarised in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

This Confession had been the official subordinate standard to which all those who were ordained, nominally gave ascent but was by and large honoured more in its avoidance than its adoption. This processes has been effective, though it is still proceeding. The Church is now truer to the Bible than at any time in the last 100 years. And where the quantity may be low, in some places, its quality is generally high. Those who regularly support their Reformed, Evangelical local church represent a more honest demonstration of the true Christian members of an otherwise pagan society. Probably no fewer than an accurate assessment of the genuine believers who occupied larger proportion of church attenders in past generations.

Although the vast majority of serving ministers in each of the churches had trained together under 'liberal' teachers, there was among them a small minority of those who were committed to the traditional 'evangelical' position – i.e. those who held a high view of, *inter alia* (among other things):

- *the verbal inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures;*
- *the divinity as well as the humanity of Christ as the Second Person of the Trinity and 'the Word made flesh';*
- *the atoning death of Christ as the substitute for sinners and therefore as the only Saviour for mankind; and*
- *the historical accuracy of the Bible's accounts of miracles, especially the Virgin Birth and the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus.*

This same evangelical commitment was also reflected in the pews throughout the three denominations, sometimes under preaching that supported it and sometimes in spite of a pulpit ministry that had its source in the 'liberal' theological position.

With reference to the development within Presbyterian Social Services.

Page 171 (NSW Presbyterian Social Services – Paul F Cooper)

The 1988 report to the GANSW recorded the ... and the recommendation of the appointment of Colin Llewellyn. (as CEO) With this appointment a ... more overtly 'spiritual' tone entered the PSS reports to the Assembly. They stated that

the heart of man's problem is that without Him, lives have a void that cannot and will not be filled by anything this world can offer as a viable alternative. God has the answer because God is the answer.

Following the Bible-based revision of a former fleeting acceptance of female ordained ministers, the following was included in the NSW Presbyterianism 2001 -2016, Page 224. 'The hand of God and Judgement of Time' – Mark Hutchinson)

The Church received continuous sniping from an increasingly politicized (sic) media, for whom the wider debate about the equality of women was the stalking horse for generalized (sic) social change. This push required continuous and steady leadership in the denomination, as political lobbying from the hard secular left drove public policy into positions not only not discussed with the Church, but sometimes so far beyond the spiritual and biblical obedience of local ministers that some felt conscience-bound to resist. Flash points included the steady exclusion of special religious education classes from schools, the showing of films such as 'Gaybe Baby' during school hours, and the push for alternative sexuality training through a federally-funded 'Safe Schools' program. (sic) ...

Comments included in Overseas: Mission: Page 245, Crisis and opportunity – Kevin Murray.

Prior to 1977 the PCA was, in many ways, theologically adrift. There was uncertainty about the authority of the Bible, the nature of sin, the work of Christ and the solution for the ills in our lives. Liberalism was taking its toll and overseas mission was not exempt. In any church where the need for salvation from personal sin is not clearly appreciated, the work of mission at home and overseas is blunted. This meant that in the pre-union Presbyterian Church, there was confusion about the purpose of mission, especially in a post-colonial age. For that reason the church increasingly sought to meet the needs of its overseas partners through activities such as education, the alleviation of poverty, and a ministry which offered 'life, hope and justice'. The proclamation of the saving work of the Lord, Jesus Christ, wasn't a priority because a liberal view of the Bible and sin, had stripped away the urgency of the

proclamation of the gospel.

Extract from View from the Pew – Donald Geddes.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, faithful Christians prayed for God to bring change. Young people discovered the early contributions to the Banner of Truth publications. Page 260/1.

Banner of Truth had a huge impact in the 1960s and brought about a real revival of Biblical teaching and Reformed (Calvinistic) doctrine. For years Theological Colleges had been producing ministers steeped in Liberal Theology which rubbished the Bible and taught Arminian Doctrine which elevated the place of man in salvation. Reformed teaching stressed the Sovereignty of God and the fact that our salvation was all of God which meant it was perfect and lasting so we could have full assurance we had eternal life.