

"THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED"

Scripture reading: John 14:15-27, emphasizing verses 21, 23.

Texts: John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20.

Intro: This morning we are turning from a great Old Testament book which we have just completed, the book of Genesis, to a great New Testament book which we want to begin: the book of John, or as it is called in our Bibles, the Gospel according to John.

It might be well to reaffirm our position as a Church with regard to the Word of God. It has been stated by the Apostle Paul in the last book of Scripture which he wrote: 2 Timothy.

After describing "the last days," he exhorts Timothy with regard to his ministry and the place that the Scriptures were to have in that ministry. (Read 2 Tim. 3:14-4:5.)

Paul is not charging Timothy to preach what is popular, or to give men what they seem to want, but to give them what they need: the Word. "Preach the word"!

In view of what John calls the Lord Jesus Christ, this charge by Paul has a twofold meaning:

- 1) It means that our preaching is to be the exposition of that which God has given us in His Word -- in holy Scripture.
- 2) But it also means that our preaching of the written Word must be done in such a way that it is the showing forth of the glories, the perfections, of Him who is the living Word -- our Lord Jesus Christ!

This is where John excels.

While Christ is the theme of every book of the Bible, in no book is that fact more apparent than in the Gospel of John.

John is one of the greatest doctrinal teachers in Scripture. That is interesting to see because the preaching of Christ is often set in contrast with the preaching of doctrine. According to John, the two must be blended together. You really cannot have one without the other.

In beginning the Gospel of John, therefore, I want to take some time for us to look at the writer -- the Apostle John. And in doing so, it is good to have a reminder like the one which A. W. Tozer gives us in his book, The Divine Conquest. I copied it many years ago. Dr. Tozer was speaking about his own spiritual needs when he said,

"I take my help where I find it and set my heart to graze where the pastures are greenest. Only one stipulation do

I make: my teacher must know God, as Carlyle said, 'otherwise than by hearsay,' and Christ must be all in all to him. If a man have only correct doctrine to offer me I am sure to slip out at the first intermission to seek the company of someone who has seen for himself how lovely is the face of Him who is the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys. Such a man can help me, and no one else can." (From The Divine Conquest, pp. 13, 14.)

The revelation of Christ through the Word is totally a divine work. It was that way when it was written, and it has to be that way every time it is preached.

Therefore, I am going to ask you to do two things as we go through this Gospel:

- 1) I am going to ask you to pray for me -- that the messages I bring will be full of Christ.
- 2) I am going to ask you to pray for yourself and for all who either gather here on Sunday morning, or who join us by radio on Sunday night -- that all of our hearts will be opened by the Spirit of God to see Christ, and to know Christ and to love Christ, and to live for Christ! Only the Lord can do this for us.

And along with this I want you to be reading this Gospel -- over and over and over again!!! Pray as you read, and pray as you come to listen -- that the glories of our Lord and Saviour will be set before us by the Holy Spirit through the Word.

BUT, BEFORE WE ACTUALLY BEGIN, LET ME RAISE AND ANSWER THIS QUESTION: IS THE APOSTLE JOHN (who has written this Gospel) THE KIND OF A PERSON WHO CAN LEAD US TO SUCH A KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST, TO SUCH A FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST? Did he really know the Lord the way we would like to know the Lord, or was it, as Dr. Tozer said, just "'hearsay'"? Is there the possibility that we might read just a chapter -- and then turn away in disappointment?

Let me seek to answer that question this morning by directing your attention to the way in which John describes himself -- the expression, "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

John never uses his own name in the 21 chapters of this Gospel. He uses the name, John, 19 times, but always to refer to John the Baptist -- never to himself.

In this he was like his former teacher (because the Apostle John was a disciple of John the Baptist before he became a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ). When John the Baptist was asked, "Who art thou . . . ?", you will remember that he said, "I am the voice . . ." (John 1:23). There was a real hesitation in the hearts of both of these men to speak of themselves when

speaking of the Lord!

Think of these words: "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

John does not claim this exclusively for himself because he tells us:

- 1) In John 3:16 that "God so loved the world . . ."
- 2) In John 11:5, "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."
- 3) In John 13:1, " . . . having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end."

So it was not just for himself, but it was also for him -- specifically, personally, and eternally -- "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

John never could get over that!

He uses it five times (and he is the only one who uses it). See John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20. (Read them.)

What can we learn from these five words which describe the Apostle John?

First of all let us look at it from the standpoint of:

I. WHAT IT TELLS US ABOUT JOHN.

- A. It was a title which he had originated.

It was his personal testimony. It told the story of his salvation. It indicated how he came to know the Lord -- not his love for the Lord, but the Lord's love for him.

Cf. 1 John 4:10 -- "Herein is love, not that we . . ."

- B. It was true -- the Lord did love him.

Its use in this Gospel is an indication that the Holy Spirit was confirming that this was a true title for the Apostle John.

- C. It was most proper for him to refer to himself in this way.

This is where the emphasis should be -- starting with God. This is the basis of our peace. This is the way we can hold out hope to others.

- D. It was an expression of John's humility.

It might not seem like a humble thing to say, but a

little thought will indicate that it was an indication of the lowly place John had taken before the Lord. This is even the basis for his worship in Rev. 1:5. And this was the way in which John appealed for us to love each other (1 John 4:11), just as the Lord had taught in John 13:34, 35!

John does not want us to have great thoughts about him, but great thoughts about the Lord.

George Whitefield reflected the same thought about himself in Nov. of 1739 when he wrote to a lady who was very impressed with Mr. Whitefield and his ministry. This is what he wrote:

"I only fear that you have my person too much in admiration. If you look to the instrument less, and to God more, it will be better. By the grace of God alone, I am what I am. If any good hath been done to you or others, it was not I, but the grace of God that was in me. Oh, not unto me, not unto me, but unto God's name be all the glory."
(From Whitefield's letters, p. 118.)

This is exactly how John felt.

But let us look a little more closely at this express -- to see
. . .

II. WHAT IT TELLS US ABOUT THE LORD.

John seems to be speaking about a special kind of love -- actually a love that the Lord had for John because John was a disciple. He was "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

About the last we see of John in the Gospel is view of him "following" the Lord and Peter. Cf. John 21:20.

And this also takes us to our Scripture reading this morning -- John 14:21 and 23.

This tells us that what drew special love from the heart of the Lord Jesus toward John was John's love for the Word and his obedience to the Word!

And this is still true for us today! Are you interested? Does this strike a responsive chord in your heart? Then give yourself more and more to the Lord through His Word -- and it will lead to all kinds of blessings!

Let us see what some of them were in John's case.

III. THE BLESSINGS WHICH FOLLOWED.

I have time to mention only three.

Spurgeon has a good word here:

"We believe in the doctrine of election, but the principle of election goes to be carried farther than some suppose. There is an election in the midst of the election, and another within that. The wider circle contains the inner, and a still more select circlet forms the innermost ring of all. The Lord had a people around him who were his disciples. Within them he had twelve. Within the twelve he had three. Within the three he had one disciple who he loved." (Spurgeon's Sermons, Vol. 34, p. 614.)

It is interesting to contemplate that John was probably the youngest of all the apostles, and yet walked with the Lord more closely than any.

What did it lead to?

A. A most intimate fellowship.

Even Peter felt that John had privileges with the Lord that he did not have. That is why he asked John to ask the Lord, "Lord, who is it?" See John 13:25.

This is the whole point of John 14:21, 23.

B. An honored service. Cf. John 19:26, 27.

What greater place of ministry could our Lord have given to John?

And notice where this places John -- in the earthly family of our Lord --- actually taking the Lord's place!

C. A special insight. Cf. John 21:7 -- which Spurgeon says are the only words recorded that John spoke on his own: "It is the Lord." (He does speak in the Revelation.)

And how characteristic this is of John's whole ministry -- identifying the Lord and telling us of Him.

Concl: Can such a person as John tell us what we need to know and what we want to know about the Lord? Surely he can! Nor can we find anyone even in Scripture who would be better qualified to tell us of the Lord. Let us read and listen eagerly trusting that we may not only learn what John would teach us, but that we may walk also as John walked in a life of precious fellowship of Him who will love us even as He loved John.

CHRIST, THE WORD, AND CHRIST, THE LIGHT
John 1:1-14

Intro: The opening words of this Gospel record are startling, to say the least.

We come immediately to the theme -- not to the writer!

We are inclined to ask first, not -- who wrote this?, but who is he writing about?

And then we ask, or need to ask, what is the writer saying about him?

And finally -- why? Is it really important?

Probably none of these questions can be answered as completely as they need to be without reading the Gospel from start to finish, but we can see, as we examine these verses, that John, the writer, has given us a very adequate introduction in these verses to all of the wonderful truth that is going to follow.

And so I would like to direct our thinking this morning, under the direction of the Spirit of God, to answering these three questions:

- 1) Who is John writing about?
- 2) What is John saying about Him?
- 3) Why?

And -- lest any might tend to be frightened away by the language we find here, let me remind you of two things:

- 1) These are the words of a man who began his life as a professional fisherman! He was not what we would call an educated man in the sense that he had a lot of formal training. He is now writing as an old man, but the training he had was training he had received from the Lord, and from the Holy Spirit in the years that he (John) had lived after the Lord Jesus went back to heaven.
- 2) We can expect that the Holy Spirit will do for us what He did for John -- perhaps not to the same extent, but certainly in a way that will be sufficient, so that we will be able to understand what John has written.

Let us then turn to the first part of the first chapter. (Have you been reading it?)

I. WHO IS JOHN WRITING ABOUT?

John does not mention the One he is writing about, using the name that is familiar to us, until we get to v. 17 -- "Jesus Christ."

It is very apparent that John is eager to get to his theme,

and -- that he is indicating to us that we will not understand his reason for writing if we do not have some understanding of the One he is writing about!

How important it is for us to get this principle in mind, and to come back to it all of the time!

But . . .

II. WHAT IS JOHN SAYING ABOUT HIM?

A. First of all, we notice some strange names, or titles, that are used to identify Him -- such as, "the Word . . . life . . . light . . ."

B. And then we notice some specific things which John would have us understand about Him:

1. His eternal existence -- that He was without a beginning. The way this Gospel begins reminds us of the way the Bible begins in Gen. 1:1. Cf. John 1:1.
2. His separate, individual personality: "with God."
3. His Deity: "and the Word was God."
4. His work as Creator (v. 3). And therefore it follows that v. 4 must be true -- but it is a verse which no one can fully understand!

And then when we move on down to v. 14 we see that . . .

5. The eternal One became incarnate -- and that in His human state He continued to be all that He had been even prior to creation: the Word!

More than that -- in His incarnate state He was a full, a complete, revelation of His Father. So He is . . .

6. The revelation of God. This is why He is "the Word." And finally, that . . .
7. He is the only such Son that God has -- "the only begotten of the Father" (v. 14).

John does not argue these things. He does not seek to prove them. He simply states them as absolute facts, truths about which there is not the slightest question or doubt. This is the truth! Your acceptance of the rest of this Gospel, and your profit from this Gospel, are dependent upon your agreement with John on these points!

This brings us to our third question:

III. WHY HAS JOHN WRITTEN THESE THINGS ABOUT "JESUS CHRIST"?

These introductory verses clearly indicate the answer: It is because:

- 1) Man is in darkness -- meaning blinded, ignorant.
 - 2) Man is dead -- meaning without life.
- And so man needs "light" and "life." And Jesus Christ is

both! See v. 4.

To state it another way: Man needs illumination, and
man needs regeneration.

But there is a tremendous problem here.

John makes it very clear that:

- 1) The world did not know Him.
- 2) The world cannot know Him.
- 3) The world wills not to know Him.

That is, if you leave men to themselves, this is what you will always find. Even if the Gospel is placed in the hands of those who have become the people of God to give to those who are still in "darkness," this is not enough. Salvation is not a human work, nor is it the result of men working with men, but salvation is a work in which every person who is going to be saved must have direct, personal dealings with God Himself.

How can you get people to receive Christ when they do not know Him, and cannot know Him, and do not want Him? Obviously, there is only one answer. It is a work which only God can do!

Notice John 1:11-13.

Read these verses carefully and you will see that the initial movements in the heart of man toward God come from God, not from man! It is "not of blood,
"nor of the will of the flesh,
"nor of the will of man,
"BUT OF GOD."

Man will receive Christ only when God has done a work in his heart. Faith does not come from us; it comes from God -- through His Word. Our Lord is "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). Cf. Rom. 10:17.

The result of God's work in our hearts is that He gives us the authority to become His children -- which means that we have His life -- eternal life.

This is why John has written this Gospel. Cf. Jn. 20:30, 31.

Concl: Christian, will you pray that your reading of John's God, and our consideration of it together, will be directed by the Spirit of God so that you may enter more fully into the glorious truth of salvation more than you ever have?

If you do not know the Lord, may He be pleased to move upon

your heart with His regenerating power -- and enabling you to see that salvation is from Him. He alone can save. Our bondage to sin and even to ourselves is hopeless. Only Christ can set us free.

Oh, may God be pleased to bring us back to preaching a salvation that is all of God's grace, that we may once again see a mighty moving of His Spirit in bringing men to the Saviour!

JOHN, THE WITNESS

John 1:15-42

Intro: The opening verses of the Gospel of John are an introduction to the Lord Jesus Christ -- we are introduced to Him as a Person, and we are told what He was doing when He came into the world.

The men who tell us these things are two men by the name of John (which means gift of God):

- 1) The Apostle John.
- 2) John, the Baptist.

In the opening verses (which we considered last Sunday) have to do with what the Apostle John said about the Lord -- that He was (and is) the Word, and the Light.

We also had a brief introduction to the Gospel in verses 11-13. (Review.)

Now we want to look at the witness of the other John -- John, the Baptist.

If there is any question that he came as a witness, see vv. 7, 8, 15, 19, 32, 34.

His witness was vocal. It was determined. (See the first two verbs in 1:15.) And it was very effective.

Let us consider his witness this morning.

But in doing so let us look first at what the Apostle John had to say about him, and then the witness that John the Baptist gave, first, of himself, and then, concerning the Lord.

So these will be the three points to consider:

- 1) What the Apostle John said about John the Baptist.
- 2) What John the Baptist said about himself.
- 3) What John the Baptist said about the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. WHAT THE APOSTLE JOHN SAID ABOUT JOHN THE BAPTIST.

See John 1:6-8.

Three things are said in these verses:

- 1) John the Baptist was "a man sent from God." See v. 23 which confirms this.
- 2) He came as "a witness, to bear witness of the Light."
- 3) "He was not that Light." We must be very certain about this -- and about every other person who has every come to speak to us about the Saviour. We are not to try to eclipse the Light, but to see that it shines more brightly!

It would have been easy for the Apostle John to have felt that John the Baptist was something more, because John the Baptist was the Apostle John's first teacher -- but it is to the credit of John the Baptist that he got this truth across to the Apostle John: "He was not that Light"!

Let us remember this about every servant of the Lord today!

DR. MITCHELL, DR. MCGEE, CHUCK SWINDOLL, JOHN McARTHUR, JOHN CALVIN, MARTIN LUTHER -- NOT THE LIGHT.

II. WHAT JOHN THE BAPTIST SAID ABOUT HIMSELF.

This comes out in vv. 19-24 where we have that very delicate investigation of John the Baptist by the Pharisees. (For their identity see vv. 19, 24.)

After several questions, we come to the crucial question in v. 22, and its answer in v. 23! (Read.)

Who did he say that he was?

Listen! The King James translators have made it stronger than it is in the Greek, because he did not say, "I am the voice," but, I am A voice -- one among many.

And by this expression he meant to convey that his message was far more important than he was. The Pharisees had come to find out who John the Baptist was; they should have come, John says, to find out what he was saying!

What an example for every servant of the Lord, for every child of God, for every church! What an example for us! And, if you want to know one of the reasons for John's effectiveness -- here it is: He was only a voice, and he knew it, and he was content to leave it that way! He did not even say, "My name is John."

But let us go on to our third point -- the most important:

III. WHAT JOHN THE BAPTIST SAID ABOUT THE LORD.

His message can really be divided under two headings:

- 1) The Lord's Person -- where John tells us Who He was (and is).
- 2) The Lord's mission -- or, why He came.

A. The Lord's Person. I see at least 7 things here:

1. The Lord is greater than John the Baptist (vv. 15, 27, 30).
2. He is greater than John because He is eternal and He has always been pre-eminent (the same verses).
3. He is the Messiah -- a true human being (v. 17).

4. He is the final, the complete revelation of God (v. 18).
5. He is the Lord -- speaking of His Deity (v. 23).
6. He is the Lamb of God -- with all of the rich meaning that has (vv. 29, 36).
7. He is the Son of God (v. 34).

All of this will become clearer as we go on through the Gospel, but keep these before you, think about them, and pray that the Lord will show you what they mean. Let it not be said of us as it was said of the world in in that day,

"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not."

Obviously it was John the Baptist's burden, and the Apostle John's burden, that we would know Him. Cf. John 20:30, 31.

But now let us look at what John the Baptist had to say about . . .

B. Our Lord's mission.

1. The place He came to -- this world.

Note how John speaks of the world, using the words of Isaiah in v. 23: "the wilderness" (and the article, "the," belongs here). This could be translated desert -- a lonely, abandoned place. It is the kind of a place where no one would really choose to live -- actually where no one can live!

Do you know this? Do you believe it? The Lord has left it this way so that we will come to understand what David understood and expressed in Psa. 63:1, 2,

"O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee IN A DRY AND THIRSTY LAND, WHERE NO WATER IS, To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary."

It is one of the greatest discoveries a person can make when he comes to realize that this world is a desert which can never satisfy.

2. The reasons for His coming.

Basically there were two -- and both are mentioned in our text:

- a. To show us God (v. 18).

b. To take away "the sin" (singular) "of the world."

Both of these are good news -- at least for those whose hearts the Lord has touched.

But how did John the Baptist specify the details of this Gospel. Let us look for a moment at

3. The message he preached.

You have John the Baptist's words in vv. 15-18, 23, 26, 27, 29-34.

As a digest of all of these we can come up with the following points. Note them carefully.

- a. Man is a sinner -- and this applies to every generation throughout the world.
- b. Man needs to have his sin taken away.
- c. Man cannot do this for himself.
- d. Jesus Christ came for this purpose -- and He is the only One Who can do it.
- e. Jesus Christ is the complete Saviour -- nothing is needed beyond Him.
- f. Jesus Christ deals with us by grace, "grace for grace," or grace upon grace -- an endless supply.
- g. Salvation is a gift to be received (vv. 12, 16); it cannot be earned.

One other thing. By the references to the Old Testament and to Old Testament characters (Moses, Elijah, Isaiah) John the Baptist makes it very clear that . . .

4. Salvation in the OT is the same as in the NT -- by faith in Christ!

Concl. and Application: The Apostle John is going to enlarge upon these truths in the chapters which follow, but it is really all here. You need go no farther if you desire to be saved. There is only one Saviour -- and He is Christ. The greatness of your sin is no obstacle. The question is, Have you received Him?

"If you from sin are longing to be free,
Look to the Lamb of God,
He, to redeem you, died on Calvary,
Look to the Lamb of God.

Look to the Lamb of God, look to the Lamb of God,
For He alone is able to save you,
Look to the Lamb of God."

SEEKING AND FINDING

John 1:35-51

Intro: We come this morning to the last verses of John 1.

In this chapter we have had two things in the beginning of John's Gospel:

- 1) What the Apostle John has to say about the Lord Jesus Christ -- that He is the Word, the Creator, the Light, and the Revelation of God -- the One Who came in order that men might be "born of God" and thus become the children of God!
- 2) What John the Baptist has to say about the Lord Jesus Christ -- that he is not the important one, but the Lord is! He points to the Lord as the Lord, as the Messiah, as the Lamb of God, as the Son of God.

Now in the latter part of the chapter we get acquainted with five other men -- men chosen by the Lord to become a part of His ministry on the earth:

- 1) Andrew.
- 2) The Apostle John himself.
- 3) Peter.
- 4) Philip.
- 5) Nathanael.

But as we read vv. 35-51 we are impressed, first of all, with the same fact that has impressed us from v. 1:

- I. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS CLEARLY THE PRE-EMINENT, THE CENTRAL, THE MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL THE MEN WHO ARE MENTIONED.

Everyone mentioned is only important because of their relationship to Him. If it had not been for the Lord, we would never have heard of any of them.

Let us keep this in mind as we go through this book.

And let us remember this as far as our own lives are concerned. There is no one like the Lord Jesus, and no one can begin to compare with Him in any way. He is the greatest of all -- the most important of all!

- II. SECONDLY, WE CANNOT HELP BUT BE IMPRESSED WITH THE DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH THE LORD BROUGHT THESE MEN TO HIMSELF.

Andrew and the Apostle John came through the preaching of John the Baptist.

Andrew went and got Peter, his brother.

The Lord Himself went to get Philip.

And it was Philip who found Nathanael.

One of the greatest mistakes we can make in serving the Lord is to think that everyone is going to come to Christ the same way, or (that which might be an even greater danger) -- that everyone who comes to Christ is going to come the same way we did!

The important thing is that men come to Christ, but God has an infinite number of ways in which this may be done.

But let us look at these verses a little more in detail.

We actually have four incidents involving the five men -- and there is an overlapping of some of the accounts which John gives us here:

- 1) The first has to do with Andrew and John, but especially with Andrew as to the consequences (vv. 35-42a).
- 2) The second has to do with Peter (vv. 40-42).
- 3) The third, with Philip (vv. 43-46).
- 4) Finally, Nathanael (vv. 45-51).

III. THE FIVE MEN.

A. Andrew and John (vv. 35-42a).

There are at least five things here that are important for us to see.

1. The message that turned them to Christ -- of Christ, of Christ as the Saviour from sin.

Consider some of the things it was not! It was not for a better life, nor to solve their family problems, nor because of what the Lord saw in them, nor because of how the Lord wanted to use them.

The starting point for them was salvation from sin.

This is where it must always be!

2. The proof of their faith: "and they followed Jesus" (v. 37b).

It is not said that John told them to go, but this is what they did. If there is true salvation, we will not need even to tell people to do things which often we are guilty of pleading for them to do.

3. The receptiveness of the Lord.

He knew they were following Him. He "turned." And then He asked them, "What seek ye?"

When you read your Bible and pray and seek to do the

will of God, do you ever wonder if the Lord cares, if He notices what is going on in your heart and in your life?

This ought to encourage you. He does know, and He does care!

But, if you are following the Lord, how would you answer the question that the Lord asked John and Andrew: "What seekest thou?" What do you want from the Lord?

How did they answer the question?

4. The desire of John and Andrew (v. 38).

Our first answer might be, "They just wanted to see where the Lord was living."

But is that right?

There seems to be another reason. They were asking where He lived because they wanted to spend some time with Him, and the reason that they wanted to spend time with Him is brought out in the title they used in speaking to Him: "Rabbi." And John wants to make sure that every Gentile as well as every Jew understands what this means, and so he adds, "which is to say, being interpreted, Master," or even better, TEACHER!

They wanted to be taught!

Do you? Is this why you are following the Lord -- if you are? Or, do you have other reasons? Is this why you come to church? Or, do you want to be entertained? Have you come here to learn -- to learn of Christ?

What did they learn during that time with the Lord?

It is evident in what Andrew had to say to his brother, Simon: "We have found the Messiah"!

Is this what you have learned, or want to learn?

But notice one more thing before we go on to Peter:

5. The result of their learning: Andrew "first" found Peter, told him about the Lord, "and he brought him to Jesus."

Don't you love that? What does it mean? It means

that if the Lord is teaching you, and if you are learning of Him, you are not going to be able to keep it to yourself -- and that those you will want to seek "first" are those who are your own flesh and blood!

This is how we can get the church witnessing!

But we must go on. Let us look for a minute at what we are told about:

B. Peter (vv. 40-42).

If we are acquainted with the NT, we know that when we are introduced to Peter that we are meeting one who is to have a major part in the work of the Lord in the coming days.

How did the Lord greet him? Did he tell him what a great person he was, how much he was needed, etc., etc.?

NO, HE DID NOT! And we had better not get off on this present-day self-love kick that is polluting the Church and the Gospel. People love it, but it is not true!

What did the Lord say?

Well, first, He knew Peter.

Secondly, He knew what a nobody he was.

Thirdly, He knew how great his need was.

Fourthly, He promised to make him a "Cephas" (Aramaic for a rock -- like "Peter" in Greek)!

What a lot there was for the Lord to do, but He did it! And let us remember that that is what we need -- to have the Lord make us into the people He wants us to be -- ROCKS!

But let us go on to . . .

C. Philip (vv. 43-46). Note three things:

1. Where he came from: Bethsaida -- not only the city of Peter and Andrew, but a wicked city, a city that was singled out by the Lord for special judgment. Cf. Matt. 11:21, 22.

What evidence of God's grace! Do not be surprised to see the Lord claiming His own out of the worst possible places!

2. How he came to the Lord.

The Lord found him. This is the emphasis that we should make.

Why did the Lord not use Andrew or Peter? Because He wanted to show us His power.

Do you believe that Lord can work like this today -- without using people? How many of you were saved without some other person being directly involved at the time?

Let's be careful about making a soul winner an indispensable part of the work of God! Remember how Paul was saved!

3. What the Lord said to Philip: "Follow me."

What simple words, but how important. Do not run ahead of Him. Do not try to make your own way. Do not just come to Him when you need Him. Make it the rule of your life that you are going to "follow" Him -- to do His will, to learn His Word, to seek His glory, to do His work, to become like He is!

But we have one more:

- D. Nathanael (vv. 45-51).

Philip found him. But notice:

1. The imperfect testimony in v. 45. Calvin says that Philip was wrong on two counts:

- 1) Our Lord was born in Bethlehem, not Nazareth.
- 2) He was not "the son of Joseph"!

But the Lord graciously overruled.

2. The omniscience of the Lord -- and His omnipresence.

This profoundly affected David, too. See Psa. 139. It affected the woman at the well in John 4.

Let me ask you two questions:

- 1) Do you think that the Lord knew your name, your address, your every move, before you were saved?
- 2) Do you think that the Lord knows now who is going to be saved, and where they are, and everything about them?

What an encouragement in evangelism, and what a tool as well!

3. Nathanael's confession (v. 49).

It is amazing to see how the Lord uses his word. But here the Lord brings Nathanael to the acknowledgment of Christ as the Son of God and as the Messiah, "the King of Israel."

Finally . . .

4. Our Lord's promise for the future (vv. 50, 51).

Note why He gave the promise -- to show His delight over the simplicity of Nathanael's faith. Contrast Nathanael with Thomas who needed a lot of proof!

The Lord gives Nathanael the first of 25 verily, verily's, found in the Gospel of John -- "putting the matter beyond all doubt and controversy" (Hutcheson, George, p. 31).

Did it happen? Yes! When? We do not know. But we can be certain that the Lord confirmed not only His Deity to Nathanael (perhaps many times), but also His humanity: "the Son of man."

As we believe, too, the Lord gives added light concerning Himself from His Word.

Concl. and Application:

How the Lord is going to reach the unreached and how He is going to teach the untaught, we cannot say. He has many ways of doing both.

But one thing is certain: He is always going to use His Word!

Will you notice once again v. 45? What does it indicate? It teaches us that there were men waiting for the Messiah, and while they were waiting, they were searching the Scriptures, learning of Him.

Do you know the Lord? Then I should not have to encourage you to be reading the Word, meditating on it, praying through it, learning about the Lord.

If you do not know the Lord, perhaps you have realized that the Lord is drawing you to Himself this morning. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," and you will be saved. If you still are not clear about the Gospel, then read the Word. Ask the Lord to show you how Christ can meet your need. Your very interest can be a good indication that the Lord at this very moment is seeking you, that you might be saved.

THE FIRST SIGN

John 2:1-11

Intro: (Re-read John 1:11.)

"This beginning of miracles," or signs.

The word is prominent throughout the Gospel of John.

Cf. 2:11, 18, 23;	9:16;	
3:2;	10:41;	
4:48, 54;	11:47;	17 X
6:2, 14, 26, 30;	12:18, 37;	
7:31;	20:30.	

It is the Greek word, τὸ σημεῖον.

It is used basically in two ways in the NT -- but both of these meanings apply in the passages where they are signs, or miracles, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- 1) It means a miracle -- an unusual occurrence, something which goes beyond the normal state of things in nature.
- 2) It means that which distinguishes a person from other persons; that which identifies him; that by which a person is known. Cf. Thayer, pp. 573, 574.

Now you can have one without the other.

Think of the ways in which you try to describe a person to someone else -- by their sex, by facial characteristics, by height, by age, by the color of hair, or skin, by the way the person dresses, and in other ways.

But there is nothing unusual about these things, nothing miraculous. We all have height, age, color of hair, etc.

We may have other special markings which identify us. Illus: The scar on my upper lip and down under my chin -- a mark of identification.

Teeth are often used to identify a person who has been killed and is beyond identification in any other way.

But these are not the things that were important about the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not really know what the Lord looked like. We know that He was a man, but we do not know His height, nor the color of His hair, nor His facial characteristics. In fact, Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:16b,

" . . . ; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more."

So -- when we talk about the marks of identification of the Lord

Lord Jesus Christ, these are not the things we are concerned about. Instead, we are concerned about His character, His nature, His attributes -- those things which made Him different from everybody else -- in a word, we are concerned about "his glory"!

But the Lord fits the other part of the definition of a sign. That has to do with miracles. His miracles were identifying acts about Him. See John 3:2. John's Gospel is written around these. Cf. John 20:20, 31.

Thus, what we have here is not the complete manifestation of what He was and who He was -- it was only the "beginning."

. . . truth is being revealed by outward acts, by miracles.

. . . the miracle was pointing to something greater than the miracle itself.

. . . the miracles were signs, identifying marks, showing the divine attributes of our Lord.

John is seeking to take us along as much as possible into his own experience which he mentioned in John 1:14 and 18. Cf. also 2 Pet. 1:16,

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

Now let us notice the details of the miracle, this beginning of signs. John tells us:

- 1) Where it was performed.
- 2) When it was performed.
- 3) Why it was performed.

In these three divisions you have my outline.

I. WHERE IT WAS PERFORMED (John 2:1, 2).

It wasn't at Jerusalem. It wasn't before a particularly large crowd. It was not in an influential place (the people were probably poor).

It was in Cana (the exact location of the city is in doubt) and at a marriage!

Think of what this tells you about the Lord Jesus Christ!
Cf. John 15:11.

Have you ever realized that:

- the OT begins with a marriage, and that
- the NT ends with a marriage?

How significant in many ways that it was at a marriage that the Lord began to show others who He was!

This is a good place to say some things about marriage. Bishop Ryle, a contemporary of Spurgeon, says two things in his commentary on John:

- 1) "Society is never in a healthy condition, and true religion never flourishes in that land where the marriage tie is lightly esteemed."
- 2) "Christ's blessing and presence are essential to a happy marriage. The marriage at which there is no place for Christ and His disciples, is not one that can justly be expected to prosper."

Both are on p. 90 of Ryle's Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, John, Vol. 1. They were written about 100 years ago.

The Lord was pointing out the importance of marriage by performing His first miracle there! Let us not miss this point.

II. WHEN IT WAS PERFORMED (John 2:3, 4).

This is a most important part of the account. Was it something that just happened as a result of poor planning, or of more guests coming than were originally expected?

Or was this sovereignly arranged by Almighty God as the very place and time and circumstances where the Lord would begin to display His glory, to manifest Himself?

Let me state it another way . . .

Was this manifestation of the glory of Christ dictated by:

- 1) The need, or
- 2) The request of His mother?

IT WAS NEITHER! Our Lord's words give us the real issue here: "Mine hour is not yet come."

The Lord was not being directed by the need of the people, or by the request of His mother, but by the will of the Father in heaven!

Amazingly, it was not even His own choice. See John 6:38, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will but the will of him that sent me."

Earlier our Lord had indicated this to Joseph and Mary when they had to return to Jerusalem and found Him in the temple when He was 12 years old. He said to them, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49).

John has even indicated this about salvation in John 1:11-13! It is "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor ^{of} the

will of man, BUT OF GOD." We are not saved when we will to be saved, but when God does!

We will never understand the earthly ministry of the Lord, nor His heavenly ministry, until we understand this. He meets human needs, but that is not the primary factor in His work. He is doing the will of the Father!

May that be true of us, too!

III. WHY IT WAS PERFORMED (John 2:5-11).

The main, the primary, the greatest reason was to manifest forth His glory!

In doing so, He met a human need. Our Lord's miracles were never meaningless, nor even just to show what He could do. They met needs -- but that was not the main thing.

Keep in mind that all of this has to be related to the Father's purpose in sending His Son into the world -- and that purpose was for salvation!

Note three things, and relate these two salvation:

- A. The Person of Christ. Here we see Him as the One whom John describes in John 1:3 and 10 as THE CREATOR.

No miracle in Scripture was performed just like this -- with the simplicity and the ease. The Lord just said for them to fill the waterpots, and then pour out the wine. How simple for Him!

Salvation is completely beyond man because it calls for the creative power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17.

We can't do it, but He can!

- B. The provision. Note how even the wine pictures salvation. I can see three ways:

1. It was a miraculous provision.
2. It was an abundant provision.
3. It was a better provision.

But then notice this last thing which could easily escape our notice if we were only reading these 11 verses. The point comes from v. 6 -- "after the manner of the purifying of the Jews."

C. The purification.

The Jews were greatly concerned about this -- and they should have been. But by this time in Israel it really had become the Jews' manner of purifying, not God's!

See how it runs through these opening chapters:

- 1) In John's baptism in ch. 1 where he points ahead to the baptism of the Spirit.
- 2) This reference in John 2.
- 3) Also in John 2, the Lord purifying the Temple.
- 4) And finally in John 3, v. 25.

Salvation is a purification -- but how does it take place?

There are four answers in these four passages:

- 1) It is by the Spirit.
- 2) It is not in man's way, by partaking of Him. Cf. Jn. 6:53.
- 3) It is not by human works.
- 4) It is only through Christ.

Concl. and Appl.: Have you realized Who Jesus Christ is?

Have you understood why He came?

Do you know what your real need is?

Do you know that Jesus Christ is the only One who can meet that need?

Oh, there is so much more to come in the Gospel of John, but this is where you must begin -- with the One who made us, and Who came to make us over as the children of God by taking away our sins.

A THREEFOLD AUTHORITY
or
EVIDENCES OF DIVINE SONSHIP
John 2:12-25

Intro: The Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem,
-- grew up and lived most of His life in
Nazareth,
-- performed His first miracle in Cana,
-- moved to Capernaum as He began His public
ministry,
-- and soon after, at Passover time, went
down to Jerusalem where He performed
many of His first miracles.

It is with these last two places, and especially Jerusalem, that we are concerned this morning.

We must keep before us John's purpose in writing this book. Cf. John 20:30, 31.

This has been evident from the very beginning of the book to this point -- that we see "the glory" of our Lord Jesus Christ!

John plainly tells us that he had seen it. See John 1:14.

He has shown us that Jesus Christ is the Word,
the Light,
the Son of God,
the Lamb of God,
the Messiah,
the Lord.

And to begin to prove this, John has told us about our Lord's first miracle.

Now -- in the latter part of chapter 2 -- he tells us three things about our Lord's early ministry which are not included in any of the other three Gospels -- and they all have to do with the first Passover our Lord attended in Jerusalem after He began His public ministry when He was 30 years of age. Basically there are three things here in John 2:12-25 -- with a fourth to come in chapter 3, verses 1-21. The three in chapter 2 are:

- 1) The cleansing of the temple -- where we see the zeal of the Lord (vv. 12-17). (V. 12 forms a transition.)
- 2) The explanation of His actions -- where we see the power of the Lord, given in the form of a prophecy (vv. 18-22).
- 3) The results of the Lord's ministry and His reaction to the results -- where we see the knowledge and the restraint of the Lord (vv. 23-25).

I. THE ZEAL OF THE LORD (John 2:12-17).

John simply gives us the historical information that as the

Lord left Cana to go to Jerusalem for the Passover, He spent a few days in Capernaum. Matthew tells us that He moved there to live, as Isaiah had predicted that He would. See Matt. 4:12-16.

Notice four things:

- 1) The commercialization of the Lord's work (v. 14).
- 2) The surprising action taken by the Lord (v. 15). He did this again at the end of His ministry, which shows that there had been no change!
- 3) What the Lord said -- His claim to divine Sonship -- saying that the Temple was "my Father's house" (v. 16).
- 4) The Scripture which the disciples remembered: Psa. 69:9 -- just as though it had been written specifically and exclusively about Christ.

What are we to learn from these things?

Let me mention two things:

- 1) The Lord is always grieved with the commercialization of His work.

The fact that we have two such incidents in the life of our Lord -- one at the beginning of His ministry, and the other at the end -- is evidence that this is a problem that will continue through all times! We will always have those among us who will be serving for their own personal gain.

And the Lord was grieved with this because:

- (1) It introduces a wrong motive in service -- man's profit instead of God's glory.
- (2) It always means that the Word of God is being violated. See Matt. 10:8, "Freely ye have received, freely give."
- (3) It contaminates the truth of the Gospel.

There is no question but that servants of the Lord are to be supported by the Lord's people, but it is contrary to all Scripture for the servants of the Lord to charge for their services. It grieved the Lord then, and it grieves the Lord today!

- 2) Notice v. 17 -- the quotation from Psa. 69:9. It was certainly of the Lord that the disciples should remember this verse at this particular time.

To be zealous is to be jealous.

There is a bad kind of jealousy as well as a good kind of jealousy. A husband or a wife can be suspiciously

jealous when there is no reason to be. This speaks of a lack of love, a lack of confidence, a selfish and self-centered desire to keep others away -- looking on others as an enemy. But what kind of a husband would he be who stands idly by while some other man does everything possible to take away his wife from him? Solomon in the Proverbs speaks of this.

This is where the Lord was. He could not stand by and see people turned away from the Father. This consumed Him! God is a jealous God -- jealous for the affections of His people. And He will not tolerate anything that comes between us and Himself. Remember the first commandment.

Does this kind of zeal consume you, or can you see this going on and excuse it by saying that everybody is doing it today? Does it bother you that so much of the world and the world's ways can be seen in the church today?

But let us go on to point #2.

II. THE POWER OF THE LORD (John 2:18-22).

It is very much to be expected that the Jews would ask, What right do you have to do this? It is actually surprising that they did not try to kill Him!

But look at His answer. It is not what you would expect.

He tells them what to do. Then He tells them what He would do -- and when! BUT THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT.

Their commercialism showed their spiritual blindness, and so did their response to what the Lord said.

Note: There was to be a change in temples -- in fact, there already was a change!

"NO SIGN BUT..."

What did the temple represent?

(Mt. 12:28-41)

- 1) The dwelling place of God.
- 2) The place where God met with His people, and where they worshipped Him.

But John gives us the true meaning in vv. 21, 22!

What authority did our Lord have to do this? His authority was in His Sonship -- and His Sonship would be confirmed not only by His resurrection, but in the fact also that He would raise Himself from the dead. Cf. John 10:17, 18.
ONLY ONE WHO IS GOD COULD DO THIS!

There is one more point:

III. THE KNOWLEDGE AND RESTRAINT OF THE LORD (John 2:23-25).

Here we see the response: "many believed in his name"!

How impressed we would have been! But not so with the Lord! John is speaking of these believers when he writes, "But Jesus did not commit himself unto them." "Commit" is the word believe.

So this is what we have: Many believed in Him, but He did not believe in any of them. They could trust Him, but He could not, and would not, trust them!

Why couldn't he?

Because He knew what was in them.

What was in them -- even though they "believed in his name"?

Their old nature -- SIN -- which meant the ability to be wrong, the ability to sin, the ability even to rebel against God and His Word.

This was the very mistake that the Jewish people of our Lord's day had made. It is the mistake that every generation of believers has made. Our generation is making it. Vv. 23-25 take us back to vv. 14-17. The men who were selling the animals in the temple were only able to do so because the people were willing to buy. If the people had not bought it would have put an end to the whole mess.

Why did they buy? Because they trusted their leaders too far, and because they were ignorant (or ignoring) the Word of God.

Illus: Martin Luther's comments on this in his commentary on John, Vol. I, pp. 253-257.

God has given us spiritual leaders, BUT NOT A ONE OF THEM IS INFALLIBLE. You will never hear any speaker who is always 100% right. You will never read any book but the Bible where you can accept everything you read as being true.

In these days we are inclined to be worshippers of men. But it is wrong. It is sinful! Follow any man who follows the Lord, but do not follow him in anything else.

Luther once wrote: "You must not go only to St. Bernard and St. Ambrose, but it is imperative that you take them with you to Christ and see whether they agree with His teaching" (John, I, 255).

Concl: This is why I keep after you about reading your Bibles.
The only way you can bring what men say to Christ is by
evaluating the teachings of men in the light of the Word of God!

What has John done in this part of chapter 2?

- 1) He has warned us against making a business out of the work of the Lord.
- 2) He has sought to point us to Christ -- and to show us that He must always be at the center of things.
- 3) He has warned us against putting our trust in men except where their teaching is true to our Lord and to His Word.

May God give us the zeal to stand for Him in these days, and to stand against all that is contrary to His Word!

THE NEW BIRTH

John 3:1-13

Intro: In the first three chapters of John we have the three things of major importance about our Lord that are emphasized in Scripture:

- 1) John 1 -- His Person.
- 2) John 2 -- His works.
- 3) John 3 -- His teachings. In John 3 we have the very heart of His teachings, the foundational truth of all that He taught. This is the starting-point. If a person does not understand about the new birth, about being born again, then he will proceed no farther in spiritual truth. This is the doorway into all of the rest of Scripture.

Beware about the use of this word today which has become so popular! The Lord is not talking about human reformation alone, but about spiritual regeneration -- a work of God, not a work of man!

There are imitations around, and we need to beware of this.

I. THE COMING OF NICODEMUS (John 3:1, 2).

A. Who was he?

" . . . a man of the Pharisees . . . a ruler of the Jews . . ."

He is only mentioned in John's Gospel: here; in 7:50-52; and in 19:39-42.

What a wonderful lesson this is in evangelism -- in what it means to bring people to the Lord for salvation!

B. What did his coming mean?

Several things:

- 1) That religion alone does not satisfy -- using religion to mean the ceremonies and rituals in which men get involved, hoping to gain merit with God and peace for their own hearts.
- 2) That religious leaders can be, and often are, unregenerate.
- 3) That, if a man like Nicodemus needed salvation, then all men do.
- 4) That a person can know must about Scripture without knowing the truth.

C. Why did he come at night?

Probably there are two reasons: pride and fear. The

latter is mentioned in the third passage where John refers to Nicodemus: John 19:38.

It is not easy for a teacher to admit that he needs to be taught!

D. Why did he come to the Lord?

1. The first answer is John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth to me shall come unto me . . ." This was a work of God.
2. Because of the miracles. Notice the "we," but he was the only one who came!
3. Not to see more miracles, but to hear teaching from the Miracle-Worker!

II. THE TEACHING OF CHRIST (John 3:3-8).

A. The heart of the Lord's teaching (v. 3).

Notice each detail.

- 1) The way He attracted Nicodemus' attention: "Verily, verily."
- 2) The assurance that this beginning contained. It could be translated, "most assuredly" (Thayer, 32). See it again in vv. 5, 11.
- 3) The assurance is increased with, "I say unto you" = to an OT, "Thus saith the Lord." This becomes increasingly important in the last division of our text: vv. 9-13.
- 4) The emphasis: a second birth -- with also the idea that this comes from above.
- 5) The relationship between the birth and the seeing. Which comes first? Obviously, the birth. This means that there is a work of God in the heart before a person can "see the kingdom of God."
- 6) Seeing "the kingdom of God" does not mean going to heaven (although ultimately it includes that), but it means to be saved.

All of this indicates that the first birth is not sufficient, nor is the first birth the basis for the second! The second is completely independent of the first.

B. The trouble that Nicodemus has with the teaching of our Lord (v. 4).

His response indicates that he thought this impossible. The Gospel is "foolishness" to men. See 1 Cor. 1. It is contrary to all human ideas about religion, or about problems.

- C. The teaching repeated -- with elaboration and illustration (vv. 5-8).

The point is this: V. 5 means what v. 3 means. Vv. 6-8 are given to further enlighten Nicodemus.

Vv. 3 and 5 begin the same way.

To be "born again" is the same as being "born of water and of the Spirit."

And then to "see the kingdom of God" is = to entering "the kingdom of God."

Then the Lord does three things by what He says:

- 1) He shows that the things of the flesh and the things of the spirit remain separate and distinct -- and that the one can never become the other.
Both "flesh" and "spirit" are used in two different ways here.
- 2) He indicates that such a miraculous thing should not amaze him. Had he not seen the Lord's miracles (as he said in v. 2). And is not physical birth itself something that man cannot fully comprehend? If you believe in God, how can you say anything is impossible to Him?
- 3) He uses an illustration: "the wind" -- which in the original Greek is the same word which is translated, "spirit."

And it is important to know that the word "listeth" is the Greek word, willeth. Salvation, then, does not depend basically upon the will of man, but on the will of God!

But let us go back to what it means to be "born of water and of the Spirit."

"The Spirit" presents no problem. That refers to the Holy Spirit, and indicates that salvation is a divine work, a work of God.

"Water" has been interpreted in various ways:

- 1) Of physical birth -- but that does not fit because it would break the parallel between vv. 3 and 5, plus contradicting v. 6.
- 2) Of baptism -- but that would introduce a human work, when the Bible teaches that salvation is of God, all of God!
- 3) Of the Holy Spirit -- but this would be a needless repetition. Water is used of the Holy Spirit in John 7:38, 39.
- 4) Of the Word of God -- YES! This is the right answer.

Cf. 1 Pet. 1:23, "Being born again, not . . ."

See also Eph. 5:26, "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."

Could this not also be the reason that the Lord says 3x in this passage, "Verily, verily, I say unto you"?

/ SO -- to be "born" a second time, to be "born" from
 / above, is a work of God which is accomplished by the
 / Spirit of God using the Word of God in fulfillment of
 / the will of God!

But Nicodemus is still bothered. How important it is to answer people's questions, but notice the unusual way in which our Lord continued with Nicodemus.

III. THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST (John 3:9-13).

- A. Nicodemus' question -- like v. 4 (v. 9).
- B. The Lord's answer -- which actually goes down through v. 21 (vv. 10-13).

The problem was one of authority. Nicodemus was not accepting the authority of Christ even though he had said in v. 2, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles that thou doest unless God be with him."

That should have settled it all -- and Nicodemus should have accepted what the Lord said just because the Lord said it, and even though he, Nicodemus, could not fully understand it!

The same is true for us having come through chapter 1 and chapter 2 into chapter 3 -- having seen His Person in chapter 1 and His miracle in chapter 2.

How did the Lord help Nicodemus? In four ways:

1. Our Lord's teaching was supported by the OT (v. 10).
2. Our Lord's claim -- evidently speaking of Himself as a prophet with the former prophets (v. 11).
3. Our Lord's teaching illustrated and confirmed by nature (v. 12). The "earthly things" (birth, flesh, and wind) had not phased Nicodemus, even though all are not fully understandable to man. If Nicodemus did not accept the incomprehensible in these, what point would there be in talking to him of "heavenly things"?

4. Our Lord's claim to be unique among men (v. 13).

"Which is in heaven" is not found in the earlier manuscripts, but it certainly fits what the Lord is saying.

Concl: How many of us have been like Nicodemus?

How many Nicodemuses are there here this morning -- who have set themselves up as authorities over the Lord Himself, forgetting Who He is, forgetting what He did not only when He was here on earth, but what He did as the Creator of all things?

This is the Son of God Who is saying these things. And so this is the Word of God that we are dealing with -- not just the words of some well-meaning but ignorant man. These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And did this approach work? Did the Lord reach the heart of Nicodemus? Very evidently we must answer that with a YES!

Let us quit apologizing for the Word of God, trying to prove to men that what the Lord has said is true. Let us preach it and teach it and believe it. The Holy Spirit will use it even in the hearts of men who continue to say, "How can these things be?"

May He use it in some of your hearts today!

And even if some of the aspects of the Gospel sound strange to those of us who believe, let us remember that God is always true. The only safe ground to take is to believe what the Word says, trusting the Lord to make it clear to us as He sees fit.

THE AMAZING LOVE OF GOD
John 3:14-21

Intro: This passage continues and completes the Lord's message to Nicodemus -- all in answer to his question in v. 9, "How can these things be?"

All that the Lord says up to v. 14 can be summed up in the words of v. 7, "Ye must be born again." That is our Lord's first divine imperative!

The second divine imperative is in v. 14: " . . . even so must the Son of man be lifted up."

In other words, answering the question, "How can these things be?" the Lord indicates that the first in v. 7 never can be apart from the second in v. 14. And at this point the Lord points to Himself not merely as the Saviour, or as a Saviour, but as the only Saviour!

The Lord stresses too the absolute necessity of faith!

In vv. 16, 17 our Lord shows that "God" is the source of our salvation, and that it can all be attributed to God's love for the world, not to anything deserving or inherently good in men.

And in these same two verses we have the purpose of God in sending His Son -- stated two different ways in the two verses, to clarify for Nicodemus what His meaning was.

Again notice the emphasis on faith! You see it in v. 16.

Christ did not come to condemn, but to keep men from perishing. To do this He gave to those who believe the gift of "everlasting life"; they were "saved."

But let us remember that it was never God's purpose to save all "the world." Nor was His purpose in coming an indefinite purpose, depending upon man's desire to believe, or not to believe! John 1:11-13 taught us that men are not born again by the exercise of their own wills, but in accordance with the sovereign will of God. And so we have the important statement in John 13:1 that our Lord "having loved his own which were in the world, loved them unto the end." In John 17:9 our Lord prayed these words: " . . . I pray not for the world, but for them whom thou hast given me; for they are thine."

These things will become clearer as we go through this Gospel of John. But to have the whole picture in mind it is important that we be reading and re-reading the whole Gospel of John.

To stress the importance of faith, our Lord re-states the heart

of the matter in v. 18. If any person does not believe in Christ, he stands condemned before God. If a man does believe, he is not condemned -- and notice the present aspect of this statement.

BUT . . . lest anyone think that, since salvation is of God, man is not responsible, note v. 19. Man is not lost because the light did not come, but because they "loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil"!

And so you have two classes of men in the world -- which our Lord identifies in vv. 20, 21:

- 1) Those who do evil, and who stay away from the light.
- 2) Those who do the truth, and who come to the light.

Perhaps the Lord is using this last statement to describe Nicodemus!

Notice in v. 21 the phrase, "wrought in God." This probably would be clearer if it were translated, wrought BY God, the instrumental use of the preposition ἐν. This is another confirmation that when a person comes to the light, you can see that there is evidence that God is at work because no man left to himself would ever come to the light -- i.e., to the Lord, or to His Word!

But now let us go back over the passage and see the reasons why we can give this passage the title, THE AMAZING LOVE OF GOD. The Lord told Nicodemus that he should not be amazed that he was being told, "Ye must be born again." But Nicodemus had many reasons to be amazed at God's love.

Let me mention 7 in this passage.

I. THE LOVE OF GOD IS AMAZING BECAUSE IT EXISTS AT ALL.

This is not the idea that men have of God if they are left to themselves. It probably was not the chief idea that Nicodemus had in his mind about God. The Pharisees sought to control the Jews with ideas of fear, not of love.

If Nicodemus had really understood the love of God, he would not have had to come to Jesus "by night."

II. THE LOVE OF GOD IS AMAZING BECAUSE OF THOSE WHO ARE THE OBJECTS OF HIS LOVE: "For God so loved the world . . ."

Do you not have difficulty believing that God loves men, any man, knowing what you do about your own heart? And isn't it even more amazing when you remember that God knows a lot of things about you that you don't even know about yourself -- and yet He still loves you?

We hear a lot about self-love today. Do you really love yourself for what you are? When you look into your own heart, do you like what you see? Would you not acknowledge that the love of God is the greatest wonder in the world -- and that the reason for God's love is not to be found in any man, but in the heart of God Himself?

In the Seven Star Diary: "Self-love is the greatest form of self-deceit."

Read over these words at the beginning of John 3:16 until your heart is overwhelmed with the statement that "God so loved the world" -- and then pray that you will never get over being amazed at it. Nothing is more amazing than that after all of these years of sin and sinning, this is still in the Bible, and that it is still true!

III. THE LOVE OF GOD IS AMAZING BECAUSE OF THE WAY IN WHICH GOD EXPRESS IT: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son . . ."

Just think for a moment of the One He "gave" -- "His only begotten Son." God has no more sons like the Lord Jesus. He is His "only" One!

And then think of that verb, "gave." Let it direct your thoughts not just to the incarnation (as amazing as that still it), nor to the fact that the Lord lived among sinning men on the earth -- hated and despised by so many, but let that word "gave" take you right to the cross -- and there you will see the love of God as you can see it in no other place!

Cf. Rom. 5:8.

Cf. 1 John 4:10, "Herein is love . . ."

IV. THE LOVE OF GOD IS AMAZING BECAUSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT TYPE WHICH THE LORD HIMSELF USED.

See v. 14. This adds not only to the picture of man's unworthiness, but it also helps us to understand that the death of our Lord was not an ordinary death. Why should He be represented by a serpent? The answer is in Gal. 3:13, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law . . ."

Note that story in Num. 21:4-9.

V. THE LOVE OF GOD IS AMAZING BECAUSE OF THE RESULTS OUR LORD ACHIEVED THROUGH HIS DEATH.

It was both negative and positive.

Negatively -- so that men would not perish,
so that they would not be condemned.

Positively -- so that men might have everlasting life,
so that they might be saved.

And these are without any distinction among those who are saved -- and the results are eternal. It is even important to see that the results are guaranteed NOW!

What a Saviour!

- VI. THE LOVE OF GOD IS AMAZING BECAUSE IT INDICATES THAT GOD HAS TAKEN THE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR SALVATION UPON HIMSELF.

See v. 21 -- "wrought in (or, by) God."

But, you say, "What about our faith?"

My answer to that is, Where does your faith come from? Does it come from you? Never. Even it comes from the Lord! Cf. Heb. 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus . . ." Also Rom. 10:17, "So then faith cometh . . ." My wife was reading to me the other day from 1 Peter and called my attention to the words, "to them that have obtained like precious faith" -- "obtained" -- which the NASB translates, "received."

Even our faith comes from God -- so that we have nothing to glory in!

- VII. THE LOVE OF GOD IS ALL THE MORE AMAZING BECAUSE IT WOULD BE REJECTED BY ANYONE!

Are you not amazed to read what our Lord said in vv. 19, 20? Is this not undeniable evidence of the depravity of the human heart?

And let me say this morning that that is just where you and I would be apart from the grace of God -- because there is no difference between the natural condition of the hearts of those who believe as compared with the hearts of those who do not believe.

Will you praise Him today that He has chosen you and that He has done a marvelous work of grace in your heart -- or you would still be in your sins?

Concl. and Appl.: These are the facts of the Gospel. These are the only alternatives. Either you believe and are saved, or you do not believe and are condemned forever. Let me urge you this morning to look away from yourself and your helplessness to "the Son of man . . . lifted up." He will save you right now for all eternity!

WHAT JOHN BELIEVED ABOUT CHRIST

John 3:22-36

Intro: The first part of John 3 (down to verse 21) gives us what the Lord said to Nicodemus about Himself and about the Gospel. The latter part of John 3 gives us the last major message of John the Baptist to his disciples about the Lord Jesus Christ. See especially verses 27-36.

Note the situation which had developed: John 3:22-26.

John's disciples were extremely loyal to him, and were jealous to maintain the popularity which he had enjoyed up to the present time. But now it seemed that "all men" were going to be baptized by the disciples of our Lord. Note John 4:2.

Their zeal for their Teacher had blinded them to what was really going on because later in the passage John says about the testimony of the Lord that "no man receiveth his witness" (v. 32).

But all of this led to a controversy initiated by John's disciples "with a Jew" (sing.) "about purifying." It was very similar to the situation which had developed in the Corinthian church when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians -- baptism had become the all-important theme, and especially WHO had done the baptizing!

Finally, in their desperation, John's disciples turn to him for help. And this is what led to John's words to them in vv. 27-36.

Before we consider John's words, let us note certain warnings which are evident in the opening part of this passage:

- 1) How jealousy for a human leader can become more important to us than jealousy for the glory of Christ!
- 2) How quickly ceremonies can shift our emphasis from the message!
- 3) How evident it is that the people have not heard what their pastor has been saying! See v. 26.
- 4) Also -- How easily the people of God forget what they have heard! See v. 28.
- 5) How blinded we can be as to the true results that are taking place! John's disciples felt that "all men" were turning to Christ; John tells them that, comparatively speaking, "no man" was accepting his testimony!

How did John seek to correct all of this? What is the answer even today for all of the mistaken ideas you find among those who profess to be the people of God?

There is just one answer: the preaching of Christ! John spoke to His disciples again, as he had often spoken before, about Christ, and about God, and about the Holy Spirit. His disciples were bound to the earth, and to the actions of men; John wanted

them to turn their thoughts heaven-ward, and to start thinking the right thoughts about the Lord.

THE MAIN POINT IN ALL THAT HE HAS TO SAY IS THAT THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS INFINITELY SUPERIOR TO HIM, AND TO EVERY OTHER MAN. It is impossible to compare Christ with anyone else because He is "above all." John had sought to tell them that he was not even worthy to take off the Lord's sandals!

Note the expressions that John uses about our Lord:

- 1) The Lord is "the Christ," the Messiah.
- 2) The Lord is "the bridegroom."
- 3) The Lord "must increase."
- 4) The Lord "cometh from above." These, 2x, in v. 31.
- 5) The Lord "is above all."
- 6) The Lord is the One "whom God hath sent."
- 7) The Lord "speaketh the words of God."
- 8) The Lord has received "the Spirit" without "measure."
- 9) The Lord is loved by "the Father."
- 10) The Lord has had "all things" "given" "into his hand" by the Father.
- 11) The Lord is the One men must believe in if they are to have "eternal life."
- 12) If men obstinately refuse to obey the Lord, "the wrath of God abideth on" them.

The key verse in all that John has to say is v. 30!

Now let us look at the 8 ways in which the Lord is superior to John the Baptist, and to everyone else:

I. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST WAS SUPERIOR IN HIS MINISTRY (John 3:27).

Just who John is referring to in this verse has been argued back and forth -- to himself, or to the Lord. Actually it refers to both.

All that John had done he had done because that was the ministry that had been "given him from heaven."

And now if it was the case (and it was), that the Lord Jesus was increasing in His influence while John was decreasing, this, too, was because it was "given" to the Lord "from heaven"!

What a lot of anxiety and jealousy it would save us if we just kept this in mind! The ministry of men, even of the Lord Himself, is and was being directed from heaven.

Cf. Psa. 75:6, 7, "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the

south. But God is the judge; he putteth down one, and setteth up another."

Paul says something very similar in 1 Cor. 4:7,

"For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"

What John's disciples were seeing was "the Lord's doing," and it should have been "marvelous" in their eyes (Psa. 118:23).

II. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST WAS SUPERIOR IN HIS OFFICE (John 3:28).

He was the Messiah; John was His forerunner.

John is prominent because a couple of OT passages speak of him and of his ministry, but ALL of the OT speaks of Christ. Isaiah and Malachi speak of John, but only to let us know that when John comes we would know that the Messiah is not far behind.

Moses wrote of Christ, not of John. The Lord went through all of the OT to show His disciples how the Scriptures spoke of Him, not of John.

III. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST WAS SUPERIOR AS THE BRIDEGROOM (John 3:29).

John, to be sure, was prominent because he was "the friend of the bridegroom" -- like the best man in our weddings today.

But there is a lot of difference between "the bridegroom" as compared with "the friend of the bridegroom"!

Listen to this comment:

"According to the marriage customs of the Jews, there were certain persons called the bridegroom's friends, who were the means of communication between him and the bride before the marriage. Their duty was simply to set forward and promote the bridegroom's interests, and to remove all obstacles, as far as possible, to a speedy union of the parties. To accomplish this end and promote a thoroughly good understanding between the bride and the bridegroom, was their sole office. If they saw the bridegroom's suit prospering, and at last saw him received favourably and gladly by the bride, their end was accomplished and their work was done" (Ryle, J. C., John, p. 181).

Thus John in speaking this way indicates that he knows that

his work is finished, and that he must get out of the picture!

IV. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST WAS SUPERIOR IN HIS PERSON (John 3:31).

There could be no more significant distinction made between the Lord Jesus Christ and John than that:

- 1) The Lord was "from above."
- 2) John was "of the earth."

Or, to state it another way:

- 1) The Lord was Deity.
- 2) John was a mere man, a sinner saved by grace, a creature made from dust and destined to return to dust.

How important it is for us to remember this about every servant of the Lord, and for every servant of the Lord to remember about himself!

Note how majestically the Apostle John begins his Gospel, speaking of the Lord, and then goes on to speak of "a man sent from God whose name was John."

V. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST WAS SUPERIOR IN HIS WITNESS (John 3:32-34a).

Others, including John, spoke "the words of God," but no one ever spoke them like the Lord Jesus did!

Men continually marvelled at His teaching. They had never heard things like He said. Men wondered how He could teach like He did since He had not been trained in the schools -- and yet they did not stop to realize that even the teachers were not teaching like the Lord Jesus did!

Compare the Lord Jesus with any other teacher in Scripture or out of Scripture, and you will soon come to the conclusion that there is no comparison.

VI. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST WAS SUPERIOR IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SPIRIT (John 3:34)

This is one place where the NASB could be improved. "Unto him," speaking of Christ is not in the original text, but all leading commentators from Augustine on down to the present agree that this statement refers to Christ -- and only to Christ.

We have the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. But only in the Lord Jesus Christ do you see the work of the Spirit without "measure" -- that is, without limitation, unrestricted,

fully and completely! His miracles were greater. His teachings are unsurpassed. The Holy Spirit even was evident in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

And so, even in this, John and the Lord Jesus were different.

VII. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST WAS SUPERIOR IN THE LOVE OF THE FATHER (John 3:35).

Who would even pretend that he could expound on this verse -- the love of the Father for His Son.

At least twice while our Lord was here on earth, the Father spoke from heaven, identifying the Lord Jesus as HIS "Son." And at His baptism the Father called Him, "my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Cf. Matt. 3:17.

Have you noticed in our Lord's prayer in John 17 the words in v. 24? Here they are:

" . . . for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

And so what has the Father done as evidence of His love for His Son? " . . . and hath given all things into his hands" -- not into John's hands, not into our hands, but "into his hands," the Lord's hands!

The Lord said about His sheep, i.e., His people, in John 10:28,

"And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand."

This is our security!

VIII. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST WAS SUPERIOR IN THE SALVATION OF MEN (John 3:36).

John preached, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," but John could not take them away!

Believing in John will not save -- nor will believing in Abraham, nor Moses, nor David, nor Peter, nor Paul! Paul even asked those Corinthians,

" . . . was Paul crucified for you, or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1:13b).

What did John the Baptist say?

"He that believeth on HIM (CHRIST, not John, or anyone else) hath (as a present possession) eternal life."

But that is not the end of the verse. Let me give you the remainder of it in the ASV to show that our Lord changes the

verb for believe in the latter part of the verse:

" . . . but he that obeyeth not (meaning obstinate rebellion to the divine will, Thayer, p. 55) the Son (not John) shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

What do you have to do to be lost forever, and to remain under the judgment of God? NOTHING! That is where you are!

But if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will have eternal life now and forever!

Have you believed in Him? Are you trusting Him as your Saviour? If not, will you trust HIM now? Let me urge you to do so. There is no hope for your salvation in any other except in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Concl and Appl: What do we get from all that John has said?

It is this: We can never say too much about the Lord Jesus Christ. We can never worship Him too much. We can never trust Him too much. We can never place too much responsibility on Him.

The Father loves Him.

John the Baptist steps aside for Him.

You find Him all through the Word.

Angels worship Him.

The saints owe everything to Him. Without Him we have nothing. We like all others remain under the wrath of God. Oh, that we might learn of Him, love Him, trust Him, and proclaim Him.

The Lord has a lot of wonderful people -- and John the Baptist was right at the top of the list -- BUT NONE CAN BEGIN TO COMPARE WITH CHRIST! He is greater than all!