

GOD'S HAND IN PILATE'S DECISION

John 19:1-16

Intro: God has many ways of teaching us what He wants us to know. There are three ways which seem to be most prominent:

- 1) By the didactic method, or instruction that we receive when someone teaches us.
This is what we have received in our homes, at church, and at school. This is what the Lord was doing in John 14-16. The prophets of the OT taught their people, and the apostles in the NT were constantly involved in this kind of a ministry.
- 2) A second way is through our own experience. We say, Experience is a great teacher. This is often a very hard way to learn, but experience teaches us in a way that we never forget.
- 3) Thirdly, we learn by the experience of others. This is what makes biography and history so profitable for us -- especially Bible biographies and Bible history. This is the kind of teaching we have in John 19. This is selected history. It is a record that is absolutely true because it has been given to us by the Apostle John as he was directed by the Holy Spirit! It is the Word of God. This is not the kind of a report that Pilate would have approved of, nor the report which the Jews would have circulated, but it is what the Spirit of God directed that we should have so that we would learn some things which God wants us to know.

When we look at this passage in the light of what God is teaching us here, we will see, I think, three main subjects:

- 1) What the passage teaches us about man -- man in himself, man by nature, man without the grace of God, even though he may try to clothe himself in the garments of religion. There are some very important lessons that this chapter teaches us about man generally -- and so about ourselves!
- 2) Secondly, what the passage teaches us about our Lord Jesus Christ. There is never anything in Scripture that surpasses this in importance. We should always be looking in Scripture for things we are to learn about Christ.
- 3) Finally, I want you to see what this passage teaches us about God. Remember as we consider this passage (1) that history is His-story. His sovereign, guiding hand is to be seen throughout history. As Paul wrote in Eph. 1:11, God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." We need to see this in the passage before us. In fact, as I have mentioned many times, we need to see this in all of the events which led up to the crucifixion.

But we also need to remember (2), as I have indicated above, that this is God's Book. We have here what He wanted us to have. He has deleted what He wanted to; He has included what He wanted to include. Therefore, in the people

and the events of this passage we have exactly the facts which are designed of God for our learning.

First of all, then, let us notice

I. WHAT THIS PART OF SACRED HISTORY TEACHES US ABOUT MAN.

Let me mention three things that have to do with man.

A. The terrible sinfulness of the human heart.

We see this in Pilate, in the Roman soldiers, and in the Jews.

Try to visualize what the Lord Jesus looked like after the events of verses 1 and 2. Note what they did in verse 3. Listen to the Jewish leaders in verses 6 and 7 and 12 and 15.

One writer has said, "Never, surely was there such an exhibition of the depth of human wickedness since the day that Adam fell" (Ryle, II, 521). Even if it has been someone besides the Lord Jesus, it would have been terrible. But how much more was it an expression of their evil hearts when they did this to One in Whom they all knew there was nothing worthy of such treatment!

If you have a hard time believing what the Bible teaches about the heart of man, then look at this -- and look at circumstances today! You will find ample proof that the Bible is absolutely true on this point! History has some most dreadful lessons to teach us about the heart of man.

B. The appalling weakness of man.

We see this especially in Pilate. Note his words in verse 10 where he considers himself practically omnipotent, and then notice how he sacrifices his own conscience because he is afraid of displeasing the Jews!

Three times it is recorded that Pilate said, "I find no fault in him" (John 18:38; 19:4, 6). We have several indications in this passage that Pilate was very strongly moved in his heart by our Lord, and yet he scourged Him and ultimately delivered Him up to be crucified even though he knew that he was doing the wrong thing.

What greater evidence of human weakness would you want?

C. The disgusting hypocrisy of man.

We see this in the Jewish leaders. Their religious

robes and all of their knowledge of the Scriptures plus their scrupulous habits (such as staying out of the Judgment Hall) had done nothing to change their hearts, nor to keep them from wanting to murder the Lord Jesus Christ!

Listen to this commentator:

"It is a painful fact that in every age, none have been such hard, cruel, unfeeling, and bloody-minded persecutors of God's saints, as the ministers of religion" (Ryle, II, 530).

Another has written:

"Hypocrites within the pale of the visible Church may be guilty of such monstrous acts of wickedness, as even the consciences of the heathens without the Church may boggle at and protest against'" (Ryle, quoting Burkitt, II, 531).

The sin in man's heart is so great that it cannot be changed by religion. Only God can make that change. The need for salvation is never more evident in Scripture than in the events that led up to the death of the Lord Jesus!

Make sure that you learn these lessons from our text.

II. WHAT THIS PART OF SACRED HISTORY TEACHES US ABOUT CHRIST.

Again let me mention three things:

A. The testimony of Pilate to the innocency of Christ.

Three times he said, "I find no fault in him" (John 18: 38; 19:4, 6). This is from one who would have been delighted to find one excuse for condemning the Lord -- but he could find none!

Add to this:

- 1) What Pilate's wife said.
- 2) What Judas said.
- 3) What the centurion said.
- 4) What the thief on the cross said.

And then notice how this fits in with:

- 1) Peter's statement in 1 Peter 2:22, "Who did no sin . . ."
- 2) John's statement in 1 John 3:5b, ". . . and in him is no sin."
- 3) Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin . . ."

Can there be any doubt as to the moral perfection of Christ?

B. The emphasis upon two other major doctrines concerning Christ:

1. That He was the King of the Jews.
2. That He was the Son of God.

See verses 3 and 14 (and in the next passage, verses 19-22) for the first point above; see verse 7 for the second point, and the profound effect it had upon Pilate!

How amazingly God works even through the wrath of men to bring to light the greatest of all truths!

But there is a third and important point about Christ that is evident in these events:

C. Our Lord's submission to the will of the Father.

He went willingly to the Cross. Note how:

- 1) He subjected Himself to the ridicule of men.
- 2) He did not seek His own release.
- 3) He refused to speak to Pilate at a most critical time in His trial.

Our Lord's silence plus the statement in verse 16 that they "led him away," bring to mind the prophecy of Isaiah which was being fulfilled at this very time:

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."
(See Isa. 53:7.)

It is obvious that there was in our Lord's heart the knowledge that He was not dying for His own sins (for He had none), but for the sins of men! And He did this willingly!

But now let us turn to consider finally

III. WHAT THIS PART OF SACRED HISTORY TEACHES US ABOUT GOD.

All three of my points this morning show the hand of God in bringing certain truths to light, truths which all made their impression upon Pilate, truths in which we see the hand of God overruling for His own glory and bringing Pilate to the decision which he made.

For this point we need to look at verses 7 through 12a, especially verse 11 (the last words which are recorded that our Lord spoke before He was on the Cross).

Verse 11 gives us 4 important truths which Pilate needed to recognize:

- A. That he was where he was by divine appointment.
- B. That there were limits to his power, and that those limits had been set by God.
- C. That, being in his position, there were some things that Pilate had to do. He could not set the Lord free, as much as he wanted to.
- D. Lastly, that what Pilate was doing to Christ was sin, and that God would hold him responsible for it.

On this very point, read what Peter said in Acts 2:22, 23, and then what was prayed in the prayer of the Jerusalem church in Acts 4:27, 28.

Concl: Thus we see GOD'S HAND IN PILATE'S DECISION! Pilate could not let the Lord go because it was the will of God for our Lord to die. Everything that Pilate tried, failed! And yet, at the same time, there is no question but that Pilate and all of the Jews who had a part in this were held absolutely responsible for what they did. It was "sin"!

May this serve both as an encouragement and as a warning to us!

- 1) An encouragement -- to see how the Lord's hand was to be seen in the accomplishing of His will, in bringing to light most important truths, and in showing Himself sovereign over the Romans and the Jews; that His own perfect will might be done!
- 2) A warning -- to see that Pilate and the Jews were absolutely responsible to God for their sin. Oh, let us not look for excuses, or try to side-step the issue of salvation on the basis that there are some things that we cannot understand. Let us look for the light we need. Religion alone cannot change us. It is Christ we need! And without Him there is no hope. We bear the full responsibility for our sin.

Oh, give heed to the message of God's Word: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31).

FOUR PATHETIC SCENES

John 19:17-27

OR, FOUR STIRRING SCENES

Intro: There are four separate scenes in our text -- four scenes which we may term, pathetic, in the sense that they seem designed to move our emotions -- which is not a bad thing, but a good thing! If we play with people's emotions just to get them to do what we want them to do, that can be very dangerous. BUT -- if we seek to move people's emotions with the truth, with historical facts, with the fulfillment of the Word of God, leaving it up to the Holy Spirit to use such truth to draw people to Christ, then that is good!

Who can read about these four events in our text without having his emotions stirred? What must it have been like to have been there and to have seen it all? Think with me about:

- 1) The Lord carrying His cross, and then the crucifixion itself.
- 2) The dispute that Pilate had with the Jews over the title that Pilate had prepared to put on the Lord's cross.
- 3) The Roman soldiers dividing one of our Lord's garments, and gambling for the other garment.
- 4) The scene in contrast when the other three -- when the Lord told John to take care of Mary, and told Mary, in effect, to go to make her home with John.

What kind of a heart would you have to have not to be stirred by these four scenes -- stirred, first of all, with anger and indignation; stirred, secondly, with pity and compassion for those who could treat the Lord Jesus as they did, especially when we think of the consequences His enemies would face; and, finally, stirred, with wonder and worship for God Himself, to see the marvelous way in which the hand of God is so evident in the fulfillment of Scripture and in the carrying out of the will of God?

John's account, in all four instances, is very brief. But he has written, without any doubt, for the strengthening of the faith of believers, and for the conviction and salvation of those who do not believe.

Let us not what he has written, first of all, about

I. OUR LORD AND HIS CROSS.

All of the other Gospel writers mention Simon of Cyrene who was forced to help the Lord carry His cross, but John omits that probably so that we will get the full impact of the humiliation that our Lord suffered at this time.

This was the greatest possible disgrace for our Lord. Visualize Him, not in soundness of body, but with His body

the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

Do you see, now, what was happening? Do you not see the overruling hand of God in all these events? And it appears that the Jews and the Romans together seem determined to do everything in their power to fulfill the Word of God -- and yet they did it without the knowledge that this was actually what they were doing!

How can we help but marvel at the providence of a sovereign God?

But let us look at the second scene.

II. PILATE'S TITLE FOR THE CROSS (John 19:19-22).

It was this: "JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS."

Pilate wrote it! And every word of it was true. He may have written it to show His scorn for the Jews, but he wrote it, and he stuck with it, and it was there for all to see, "written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin."

Who can fail to see the hand of God in all of this?

It had to be God Who made Pilate stand by what he had done. And to think that Pilate wrote this, the truth of the Word of God, in the languages of the day which announced, in effect, that this message was for the whole world -- who cannot see that all of this was of God.

And yet at the same time how pathetic that this should be opposed by the Jews, and how pathetic that Pilate himself should come so close to the truth, and yet miss it altogether!

But this is not all. Let us hurry on to the third scene, and John himself explains the action of the soldiers.

III. THE ROMAN SOLDIERS AND OUR LORD'S GARMENTS (John 19:23, 24).

Again, without realizing the significance of what they were doing, they did that which had been prophesied 1,000 years before!

Note the quotation from Psa. 22:18!

Can you explain this in any other way except for the fact that God, instead of being silent, was in sovereign control, working all things out in accordance with His will, and establishing beyond any doubt the truthfulness of His Word?

But, then, we have one final scene in our text -- a scene entire-

ly different from the others, and yet one which should not only move our hearts to the depths, but one that has important teaching for all of us. It has to do with

IV. OUR LORD, HIS MOTHER, AND JOHN (John 19:25-27).

Here is a scene that is filled with godly emotion.

As we think of this, let me call your attention to the word, pierced. On this day, our Lord's hands were pierced with the nails. His feet were also pierced by nails (or by one nail, if they were nailed together as some think). And our Lord's side was pierced by the spear.

But, do you realize that something else was pierced on that day? It was the heart of Mary, the mother of our Lord.

Luke records for us the words spoken by Simeon to Mary in the Temple just shortly after the birth of our Lord. These are his words, recorded in Luke 2:34, 35:

"And Simeon blessed them (meaning Joseph and Mary), and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Our Lord knew what His mother was going through at that very moment. He knew her grief. And He was greatly concerned for her, even in the midst of His own grief and suffering. And so He said, "Woman, behold thy son!" And then turning to the disciples "whom he loved," said, "Behold thy mother!"

Here again the Word of God enters in.

What was the Lord doing?

He was obeying the fifth commandment in the Law: "Honour thy father and thy mother." Cf. Ex. 20:12a. The promise attached to the promise was not fulfilled then, but it will be fulfilled in a coming day!

What was the Lord teaching us in this? Three things:

- 1) The fact that we should be obedient to the Word of God regardless of what our circumstances may be. Trials do not excuse us from being obedient, but they make it even more important.
- 2) The unfailing care of our Lord. If He would be concerned for His mother at this time, we need never fear about any other time.
- 3) The importance of loving the Lord and of being loved by

Him in that special way spoken of in John 14:21, 23.

Concl: What an encouraging passage of Scripture, showing, as it does:

- 1) The absolute sovereignty of God.
- 2) The trustworthiness of His Word.
- 3) The way in which He works all things out for His own glory and for the good of His people!

May your heart be opened by the Lord to these truths, whether you know the Lord, or do not know Him. If you do not, may I urge you to put your trust in Christ, having seen the Gospel in this passage -- that Christ was not trapped by His enemies, but that all was the working out of God's plan to provide salvation for men from the judgment of God!

VICTORIES AT THE CROSS

John 19:28-42

Intro: There are two ways of looking at the cross of Christ.

In one sense, no person ever suffered such humiliation as our Lord did at Calvary. Everything possible was done to bring disgrace and shame upon Him. His sufferings were beyond both description and our comprehension.

But in another sense, there has never been any time in the history of man in which the power of God has been more gloriously displayed than in connection with the death and the resurrection of Christ! As I have said repeatedly, no one can arrive at a true understanding of the events described at the close of each of the four Gospels if he fails to see that the three Persons of the Godhead were in absolute control of every detail of those events.

Our passage this morning speaks of some of those victorious events -- three of them, to be specific. Let us notice what they were.

In John's account, the Lord was crucified in John 19:18. Therefore, at the beginning of our passage for today the Lord is dying on the cross. Verse 30 records His death. Thus the victories that we are going to consider have to do with the time immediately before His death, and then immediately after.

What are the victories?

There are three of them. The first is

I. THE VICTORY OF THE WORD OF GOD.

By victory here I mean fulfillment.

Men scorn the Scriptures. Our Lord's enemies would have done anything possible to separate our Lord completely from anything that had to do with the Word of God. But it was impossible for them to keep the Word from being fulfilled, and thus indicating its victorious character in these dark hours of human history.

Note how the Word of God triumphed:

A. Note the statement in John 19:28. (Read.)

While not in this instance a direct quotation from Scripture, it is definitely a reference to Psalms 69:21,

"They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my
thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

Psa. 22:15 is related to it where David spoke prophetically of the Messiah's sufferings:

"My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my
tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou has brought
me into the dust of death."

Next,

B. Note the statement in John 19:36. (Read.)

Our Lord died as the great antitype of the Passover Lamb. And in Ex. 12:46 it is stated concerning the Passover Lamb -- "neither shall ye break a bone thereof."

Also in Psa. 34:20 we have this statement:

"He keepeth all his bones: not one of them
is broken."

In our text this morning (vv. 31-33) we see that the Jews wanted our Lord's legs broken, Pilate agreed, the Roman soldiers came to do it (and actually did break the legs of the two malefactors), but when they saw that the Lord was already dead, they did not break His legs!

Then,

C. Note the statement in John 19:37. (Read.)

John is referring here to Zech. 12:10, where Zechariah was predicting the coming of the Lord and the day when Israel will recognize her Messiah.

Listen to the words:

" . . . and they shall look upon me whom they
have pierced . . ."

Here in John 19 it does not refer to the nails but to the spear. (See vv. 34, 35.)

All three of these OT prophecies were fulfilled. And in each instance, it was our Lord's enemies who were instrumental in proving that the Word of God cannot be broken!

But note another thing that is very significant: In Luke 24:44 our Lord mentioned that there are three divisions to the OT: " . . . the law of Moses . . .

the prophets, and . . . the psalms . . ." If you will look again at these references you will see that
 the first one is from the Psalms,
 the second is from the Law,
 and the third one is from the Prophets,
 thus confirming the truthfulness of the entire OT!

What a victory for the Word of God!

The second victory at Calvary in this passage is

II. THE VICTORY OF THE SON OF GOD.

I am speaking of the last recorded event in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ -- the last three things that He did before He died.

His last words and acts were expressive of the great victory which He claimed on the cross.

Why was He on the cross? He was there as a sacrifice for sins. He was there because it was the will of the Father. He was there because He voluntarily chose to "lay down" His "life."

The victorious accomplishment of all three of these is expressed in John 19:30. (Read.)

- A. "It is finished" -- referring to His work for our salvation.
- B. "And he bowed his head" -- expressive of His submission to the will of His Father.
- C. "And gave up the ghost," or His spirit.

It does not say just that He died, but that He laid down His life. His enemies did not take it from Him; He laid it down voluntarily by Himself!

Could anything be more glorious than the truths expressed in the words of this one verse -- John 19:30? What a victory for the Son of God!

Referring to the first of these, Matthew Henry says in his commentary that there were eight things that were finished:

- 1) The malice and enmity of his persecutors had done their worst, and He was now beyond their reach.
- 2) The requirements placed upon Him by the will of His Father had all been fulfilled. He had not left out a single thing.

- 3) All of the types and prophecies of the OT had now been accomplished and answered -- those that had to do with His death.
 - 4) "The ceremonial law was abolished, and a period put to the obligation of it" (V, 1201).
 - 5) Provison was made for the end of sin and of all transgressions.
 - 6) "His sufferings were now finished, both those of his soul and those of his body."
 - 7) "His life was now finished, he was just ready to breathe his last."
- BUT MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL,
- 8) "The work of man's redemption and salvation is now completed, . . . a full satisfaction is made to the justice of God, a fatal blow given to the power of Satan, a fountain of grace opened that shall ever flow, a foundation of peace and happiness laid that shall never fail. Christ had now gone through with his work, and finished it."

From the cross of shame came the victorious shout of the Son of God, "It is finished"! This is our hope, and this is the only means for the salvation of any sinner.

But there is one other victory recorded in this chapter:

III. THE VICTORY OF THE GRACE OF GOD (John 19:38-42).

We have this in what is record about Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus.

Both were very prominent men; both were very rich men.

Before I mention what they did, let me read Mark 10: 24 and 27. In the first of these verses our Lord said, "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!"

But, then, in verse 27 He said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible."

Here were two prominent, wealthy men, who were disciples, but they have not let anyone know that they had believed in the Lord. They were afraid to! But, now, all of a sudden, at the worst possible moment, they throw caution to the wind and come out of hiding. Joseph of Arimathaea even went to Pilate to ask for the body of the Lord Jesus. And Matthew tells us that he and Nicodemus buried our Lord's body in the tomb that Joseph had prepared for himself!

And did you notice that no human being is mentioned as

having a part in what Joseph and Nicodemus did? Who made them change? Did they change themselves? NO! "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

How were they saved? By the Lord. When? We do not know. But we have a great illustration here of Phil. 1:6 -- " . . . that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Sometimes, as in the case of these two men, God does the work all by Himself so that we can see what really happens in every case where people are saved. IT IS AN EVIDENCE OF THE VICTORY OF THE GRACE OF GOD.

Concl: Putting these three victories together, you have the complete story of the Gospel:

- 1) The promises of the Word.
- 2) The finished work of Christ.
- 3) The work of the grace of God in the hearts of men.

Is your faith in the promises of God which are all centered in Christ -- promises that can be yours this morning by the grace of almighty God, and by His grace alone!

THE EMPTY TOMB

John 20:1-10

Intro: In the passage before us we are confronted with one of the great historic facts of the Gospel -- the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ!

The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Corinthian church, gave them the essential points of the Gospel message. Here they are -- found in 1 Cor. 15:3, 4, 5 ff.,

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

"And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures;

"And that he was seen . . ."

The Gospel is concerned with:

- 1) The Person of Christ -- Who He was (and still is).
- 2) What He did: "Christ died."
- 3) Why He died: "For our sins."
- 4) What happened to Him afterwards: "He rose again the third day."
- 5) The proofs given that He both died and rose again: " . . . he was buried . . . he was seen . . ."
- 6) The final fact that all of this was "according to the scriptures" -- mentioned twice (1 Cor. 15:3, 4).

Right from the first discovery of the resurrection of Christ there was evidence that it was a different resurrection from that of, for example, the resurrection of Lazarus! We will see that in a minute, but let me simply say here that the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead never to die again! "Death hath no more dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9b).

We are concerned here with the fact of His resurrection (i.e., in John 20). And it is extremely important that we get this fact well in mind.

Before we look at our text in detail, let me point out from the death and resurrection of Christ that even here we have evidence that the ways of God and the ways of man are different. In John 18 and 19 we are concerned with the death of Christ; in 20 and 21, with the resurrection of Christ. Note these differences, clarified later on in the New Testament:

- 1) Everybody, believers and unbelievers alike, saw our Lord die.
- 2) NO ONE, NO HUMAN BEING, SAW THE RESURRECTION.
- 3) ONLY BELIEVERS saw the Lord after His resurrection.

We would have made it all public, but the ways of God are different

Read Peter's explanation of all of this in his message to those

who were gathered in the house of Cornelius: Acts 10:34-43, especially vv. 38-43.

There seem to have been three ways in which the Lord brought people to faith in the resurrection of Christ -- the third one I will mention being by far the most extensively used:

- 1) By the sight of the empty tomb with the grave clothes in it. This was especially true of the Apostle John. V. 8 indicates that "he saw, and believed."
- 2) By the sight of the Lord Himself, i.e., those who actually saw Him after He was raised from the dead. This happened to Mary Magdalene, to the rest of the Apostles, and to those mentioned in 1 Cor. 15, culminating with the Apostle Paul!
- 3) By the Scriptures -- indicated in John 20:9. This, as I have mentioned, is by far the most extensive. It is the way you and I have come. It is the only way that people will believe today. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

And in this connection it is important to remember what the Lord said to Thomas in John 20:29,

"Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed, blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

So the greatest blessing awaits those who believe through the Word!

But it is proper and fitting that we have the evidence given to us by THE EMPTY TOMB. And so let us turn now to examine the text before us.

First we have

I. THE DISCOVERY MADE BY MARY MAGDALENE (John 20:1).

Undoubtedly there were other women with her (see the "we" in v. 2), but John is focusing attention on Mary Magdalene because of what he records in vv. 11-18.

Remember: the stone had not been removed so that the Lord could get out, but so Mary and, later, Peter and John could get in to see that the body of the Lord was not there!

Mary must have taken time to look into the tomb. In fact, Matthew gives us the account of how the stone was removed, and what "the angel of the Lord" said to the women. John just gives the details with regard to Mary Magdalene.

II. THE DASH SHE MADE TO TELL PETER AND JOHN (John 20:2).

Quite obviously she did not at this point believe in the resurrection of the Lord.

III. THE DISCOVERY MADE BY PETER AND JOHN AT THE TOMB (John 20:3-9).

John does a very interesting thing in recording what he did and what Peter did when they got to the tomb: he uses four different verbs which can be translated, to look at, or to see.

1) Two of them are in v. 5:

a) "Stooping down, and looking in" (from παρακύπτω) is a verb which means to bend over to inspect something carefully and curiously.

John did this when he got to the tomb, but he did not go in.

Instead, we have the second verb which tells us that

b) He "seeth the linen clothes lie" (from βλέπω).

This can mean that he was hoping to understand, but it also means that he just saw the linen clothes as they were, but that he came to no conclusion about them.

2) The third verb belongs to Peter (from θεωρέω). It means that he was looking at every detail, amazed at what he saw, and that he wondered what it all meant.

What did he see?

Although there are some who differ with what I am about to say, it seems to me that the text here permits the interpretation that the grave clothes were just like they had been when they held the body of the Lord Jesus, but the difference was that the body was not there. However, the thing that amazed Peter was that the linen grave clothes were undisturbed!

This is what I had reference to earlier when I said the resurrection of Christ was different from the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus had to have his grave clothes taken off by others, but the Lord not only got out of His grave clothes without disturbing them, but He got out of the grave before the stone was taken away!

It is no wonder that Peter looked in amazement, noticing every detail, trying to figure out what had happened! Nothing more wonderful ever took place than the resurrection of Christ! What a victory! What joy it brought eventually to the disciples -- and what hope!

But there is nothing in the text to indicate that Peter got beyond that point of bewilderment. But look at the fourth verb.

3) The fourth verb (εἶδεν, from ὁράω) means to discern, to perceive, to understand.

Suddenly John saw what it meant. The light broke through. He realized that the Lord had been raised from the dead. And, when you see like John did, you will do what he did. "He saw, and believed." What a great moment this was for him!

But after all of this, John does a very interesting thing: he adds the words that we have in verse 9:

"For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead."

"They" means John and Peter; "he" means the Lord.

It seems that John has in mind one particular passage, but he does not say what it was. Perhaps he had Psalm 16:8-11 in mind -- the passage which Peter quoted in Acts 2:25-28. Other passages also could be cited.

But the important point is this: John himself wants us to know that his faith at this time was not as strong as it could have been IF he had believed, not just because he saw the physical evidence, but because he had believed primarily because the Old Testament prophets had predicted that the Messiah would be raised from the dead!

Perhaps we can even say this: The words of the prophets could have strengthened their faith even more than the fact that the Lord Jesus had predicted His own resurrection! NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT IN THE IMPARTING OF FAITH AND IN THE STRENGTHENING OF OUR FAITH THAN THE WORD OF GOD -- THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD.

And this brings even a greater blessing than if we had been permitted to see what Peter and John saw on that resurrection morning!

Oh, that you and I would realize more and more what a precious treasure we have in the Word of God, and that our position with the completed Word of God is much to be desired above the disciples and their actual experiences. Once you and I believe because of the Word, it is impossible to turn back into unbelief.

The text ends with

IV. THE DEPARTURE OF PETER AND JOHN (John 20:10).

Concl: What is the message of **THE EMPTY TOMB?**

- 1) It tells us that the Word of God is true.
- 2) It tells us that Jesus Christ was in reality the Son of God.
- 3) It tells us that our sins have been put away, that God has been satisfied with the work of His Son.
- 4) It tells us that we have a living Savior.
- 5) It tells us that He is the firstfruits, and that we, too, will share the glory of His resurrection when He comes again.

MARY AND HER MASTER

John 20:11-18

Intro: The Apostle John obviously has a great desire to tell his readers about Mary Magdalene! Although we know that other women came with her to the tomb, John mentions only Mary. That is the way John 20 begins. Then, after Peter and John went home (v. 10), John tells us that Mary was the one who stayed at the tomb.

An interesting background on Mary is given to us by both Luke and Mark. When Luke (Luke 8:1-3) mentions the women who "ministered" to the Lord "of their substance," he mentions Mary -- and he does so in this way: "Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils." Mark confirms this in his account of the resurrection (Mark 16:9), where we read:

"Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils," or, demons.

Spurgeon points out in his message on this passage that it was a woman who sinned first, and therefore it was consistent with the grace of God that our risen Lord should appear first to a woman. And then he adds that whatever shame belongs to women because of the sin of Eve is more than compensated by the glory that is conferred upon Mary by the fact that the Lord appeared first to her and that she was the one who carried the good news to the men who were the Lord's disciples!

Sometimes Mary Magdalene is confused with the immoral woman who is mentioned in Luke 7 (vv. 36-50). There is a truth mentioned by the Lord which applies to both women, and this is the reason for the confusion. The truth is this:

"Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

The Lord had done a great work for Mary Magdalene -- a work which no one else could possibly have done! This she knew. And so it is not surprising that our text begins with unmistakable evidence of

I. THE LOVE OF MARY FOR HER MASTER (John 20:11-13).

Read v. 10 with the beginning of v. 11 -- "But Mary . . ."

Whatever may have been Peter and John's reason for going home, Mary obviously had a greater reason for staying. She could not be satisfied until she found the body of her Lord. Not even the departure of Peter and John could change her in this. She not only stayed, but she wept. And she not only wept, but she continued to look into the tomb with,

perhaps, the idea that she still might find the Lord's body in the tomb!

Obviously she was looking in the wrong place, and her search was affected by her ignorance -- but John certainly wants us to see the great love which Mary had for her Lord, a love which probably brought a feeling of shame to the Apostle John as he records all of this for us. John truly loved the Lord, but it seems that Mary Magdalene loved Him even more!

What about our love for the Lord? Do we seek Him daily? Do other things, or do people, turn us aside from seeking Him? Are we encouraged as we read this passage with the evidence that those who truly seek Him, find Him? What a tragedy it is that other good things so often replace this, the best of all things! Perhaps we need to spend more time on this verses until our love for the Lord becomes more like Mary's love. To increase your love, just reflect continually upon what the Lord has already done for you. You may be at a point of discouragement in your life, or going through a time of confusion (as Mary must have been), but one means of curing all of that is to turn your thoughts to that which the Lord has done in the past. If He did no more for us than He has already done, He has already done far more than we could ever deserve.

But let us go on to look at

II. THE REVELATION THAT THE LORD MADE TO MARY (John 20:14-16).

Mary did not realize that the Lord was alive. She thought that she was doing all of the seeking. She did not realize that He was seeking her as she was seeking Him. In fact, could we go even a step further and say that she was seeking Him because He was seeking her?

What a comforting truth this is!

It is very possible that Mary was experiencing initially here what the two disciples experienced when the Lord joined them on the road to Emmaus: "But their eyes were holden that they should not know him" (Luke 24:16).

Remember that we can only find the Lord as we search for Him in the Word and in our daily experience as He is pleased to make Himself known to us. Spurgeon claimed that often when he preached he was more conscious of the Lord's presence with Him than he was of the presence of any other person in the congregation! The Lord does this for us; we do not force Him to make Himself known to us.

But note the precious way in which He made Himself known to

Mary. He simply spoke her name: "Mary"!

Just this last week I read those marvelous words at the beginning of Isa. 43:

"But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour . . ." (vv. 1-3a).

In John 10 we had those wonderful words of our Lord concerning the shepherd and the sheep:

" . . . and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice" (John 10:3b, 4).

Is it not interesting that Mary did not recognize the Lord by His physical appearance, but she did by His voice?

In a moment Mary's tears of sorrow became tears of joy! She had found Him Whom her soul loved, and the following passage indicates that she was determined that He would not get away from her again.

Note

III. THE MINISTRY OF THE MASTER TO MARY (John 20:17a).

This preceded her ministry for Him -- and the same is always true for us, too.

Mary had already had one point in her theology corrected -- that having to do with the resurrection of Christ. But it was necessary that another point be cleared up: that having to do with Christ's ascension!

A verse from the Gospel of Matthew will help us to understand the first part of v. 17 in John 20. That verse is Matt. 28:9, referring to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary:

"And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him."

When John records that Jesus said, "Touch me not," he is not saying that the Lord did not want the women to touch His body (perhaps to confirm that it was actually He),

but the meaning is, Don't hold me back! Don't try to keep me here on earth! I must ascend to my Father! Mary did not realize that the resurrection had to be followed by the ascension, and that this also was a vital part of our Lord's work -- a part that could not be left undone!

How essential it is that our knowledge of the Lord and of His work be clear before we attempt to minister to others! Remember that the person who can speak only of the earthly ministry of Christ is a person who is sadly deficient in his understanding of the total work of Christ. No truth related to the work of Christ has been more neglected than the work that He is doing now, and has been doing for the past 2,000 years!

But notice, finally, that which concludes our passage:

IV. MARY'S MINISTRY FOR HER MASTER (John 20:17b, 18).

The disciples who were men learned about the resurrection of Christ from a disciple who was a woman! Those who love the Lord most and seek Him the most are the ones who serve Him the most extensively!

She was not to go to the world, but to go to the Lord's "brethren." And she was to take to them the message of the ascension.

She went, and she told them just what the Lord had said. What an example of a faithful servant!

Look at our Lord's words for just a moment (and then look longer when you have the time):

1) "Go to my brethren."

Does this remind you of Heb. 2:11? "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren."

How amazing, what grace, that the Lord would speak in this way!

2) "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God."

Two things are apparent here: (a) The oneness of our relationship with the Father, i.e., the relationship that we share with Christ; (b) The fact that there will always be a difference in that relationship. God will always be uniquely the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Concl: Why was it important for the Lord to go back to heaven? If you want the full answer to that question, pray that the Lord will enable you to understand The Epistle to the Hebrews. But let me give you three simple and yet extremely impor-

tant reasons for the ascension of Christ as I close:

- 1) This was the final and climactic evidence that the Father had accepted the work of His Son for the sins of men.
- 2) This took the Lord to the place of His present intercessory ministry -- which, although we may not realize the full significance, is a vital part of our salvation. Cf. Heb. 7:25.
- 3) It is from heaven that our Lord will eventually come to claim His rightful position as King of kings and Lord of lords.

It is no wonder that our Lord told His disciples even before He died that it was better for them that He go away! Let us find encouragement for our own hearts in these words of our Lord for the evil days in which we live. And let these words comfort us, too, in our times of sorrow. He lives for us. He prays for us. And He is coming again for us. Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

John 20:19-31

Intro: As a background and in preparation for the message of the morning, I want to read Acts 10:34-43 -- Peter's message to the Gentiles who had assembled in the house of Cornelius. It has often been said that Scripture is the best commentary on Scripture. This is certainly true. The message of Peter in Acts 10 is important for a number of reasons, but one main reason for its importance is that it shows what Peter understood at this later date about our Lord's appearances and our Lord's actions and our Lord's words to the Apostles behind those closed doors!

Before I read from Acts 10, note in this passage

- 1) The words, "preaching peace," in v. 36 -- and then keep in mind that, when our Lord appeared to the disciples as recorded for us in John 20, three times He said, "Peace be unto you." It must have been more than an ordinary greeting at that time!
- 2) That the miracles of our Lord were referred to by Peter in Acts 10:38 -- and link this with John's statement of our Lord's miracles in John 20:30, 31.
- 3) That in Acts 10:40, 41 we have a brief summarization of our text in John 20 -- that Christ was raised from the dead, and the "chosen" ones to whom He appeared.
- 4) That in Acts 10:42 we have Peter's understanding of our Lord's words in John 20:21, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." It was a commission to preach the Gospel to the whole world -- to Gentiles as well as to Jews.
- 5) Finally (and one of the most important points of all), that in Acts 10:43 we see what Peter understood to be the meaning of our Lord's words which have been the subject of so many controversies:

"Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." See John 20:23.

With these points in mind, let me read Peter's message in Acts 10 to you -- beginning with v. 34 and going down through v. 43. (Read.)

Now, let us take this information back to John 20 as we consider the verses of our text.

Twice in our text the Apostle John mentions that the Lord met with His disciples behind closed doors. You have it in v. 19, and then again in v. 26 (eight days later). We can see in this something bad, but also something good:

- 1) It was bad because the disciples were there "for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19). This shows their weakness, their lack of faith, their need for greater understanding.

- 2) It was good because they were together! This was evidence that they had not given up! If so, they would have been scattered separately. But here they are together -- a marvelous example of Heb. 10:25, "Nor forsaking the assembling of yourselves together . . ."

It also illustrates Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

For some reason Thomas was not there the first time -- and he missed seeing the Lord! You never can tell what you are going to miss if you fail to meet with the saints when they get together.

What if I had bought a full page in the Oregonian yesterday and had just had these words of the page:

COME TO CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH TOMORROW AT 10:45 IN THE MORNING. JESUS CHRIST WILL BE THERE!

This place would be packed this morning. The aisles would be full. People would be crowding the foyer. They would be all over the parking lot -- and perhaps even out into the streets! Our telephone lines would be jammed with calls -- if I could get people to believe that this would actually be true!

This would not happen the way people, even some of the Lord's people, would like for it to happen, because the Lord does not work that way. But, isn't it true that He is here? And aren't there times when the Lord manifests His presence in special ways? But He doesn't tell us when we are going to experience His blessing in this way! If you are not here, you will miss Him! In a sense, we are gathered behind closed doors this morning -- away from the Word, waiting upon the Lord, seeking Him, expecting His blessing!

Charles Spurgeon, who certainly was not a man given to the sensational nor to the spectacular, once said to his people on a Sunday morning in 1875 (Vol. 21, p. 521),

"At favoured times I have felt as though his very shadow were over me, as though the touch of his right hand were upon me, and I heard him say unto me, 'Fear not, I am he that liveth and was dead.'"

And then Spurgeon added, "And why not again? Why not now?"

Oh, dear Christian, did you just come to church this morning, or did you come to meet with the Lord? Do you long to see Him, not in His physical presence, nor in some supernatural, spectacular way, but to see Him as He is revealed in the Word, and to experience that special blessing which He has promised when His people are met together with each other? Surely our text this morning is more than an historical record; it must be written as an encouragement to us to seek the Lord and to expect the Lord, and to meet with His people for that very purpose!

Let us look for real blessing and real help from our text.

First of all we have

I. THE APPEARANCE OF THE LORD TO THE APOSTLES (WITHOUT THOMAS)
-- BEHIND CLOSED DOORS (John 20:19-23).

- A. When He appeared, He stood in the center, "in the midst" (v. 19).

Let me quote Spurgeon again. He said in this connection, "I love the name of Calvin, but I always regard him as sitting on one side of the room; and I love the name of Wesley, but I regard him as occupying another side place in the assembly. There are many preachers in the church, but not one of them is in the midst of the family circle of the redeemed. The Lord alone is there, the centre of all hearts. Others are present, and they shine with differing lights, but he is the sun, the centre and ruler of the system of his church" (Vol. 21, p. 522).

This is the way it will always be when the Lord is manifesting Himself to us.

- B. The first words that He spoke, and the only words that He repeated: "Peace be unto you" (vv. 19, 21, 26).

Our Lord's ministry began with the angels speaking of peace. He spoke of peace in the Upper Room. Here we have that wonderful word again after His resurrection.

Bishop Ryle says it was "'peace,' and not blame, -- 'peace,' and not fault-finding, -- 'peace,' and not rebuke" (Vol. II, p. 656). Instead of all that He could have said because of their failure, this is what He did say.

- C. The first thing that He did: "He shewed them his hands, and his side" (v. 20).

He showed them the marks of their redemption. He loves to teach us more and more concerning the Cross. He deals with us as He did with the two other disciples on the road to ~~Emmaus~~ -- He speaks to us from all of the Scriptures "the things concerning himself."

Note the comment that John makes at this point concerning the disciples: "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." So it will be with us, and so the Lord deals with our fears!

But this is not all!

D. He commissioned them for their ministry (vv. 21, 23).

This was in two parts:

1. They were sent as the Father had sent Him -- for the same purpose, and to the same place (v. 21).
2. They were given a message of authority regarding sin. See v. 23.

Peter's message shows us what they understood by this -- not the right to forgive sins themselves, but to go with the message of divine forgiveness.

Note that this was the heart of their message and their mission -- not all of the things that are so commonly passed on as the Gospel today!

E. Finally, in the first appearance, He gave them One Who was sufficient for the task: "Receive ye the Holy Spirit" (v. 22).

Whatever there may be about this that we do not understand, one thing is clear. The Lord was impressing upon them the fact that they could not do this work on their own. Only by the power and blessing of the Holy Spirit could they be faithful and fruitful!

But, then, notice what is stated about Thomas in preparation for the second appearance of the Lord to His disciples -- behind closed doors. No reason for Thomas's absence the first time is ever given, and so we must assume that he had none, that he should have been there the first time!

II. THE ABSENCE AND ATTITUDE OF THOMAS (John 20:24, 25).

How obnoxious Thomas was at this point, and yet how gracious the Lord was.

III. THE APPEARANCE OF THE LORD TO THE DISCIPLES WITH THOMAS -- BEHIND CLOSED DOORS (John 20:26-29).

- A. The Lord's words about "peace" -- for the third time (v. 26).
- B. The Lord showed Himself to Thomas -- to minister to his faith (v. 27).

Note how differently the Lord responded to Thomas in comparison with His response to Pilate.

C. Thomas' confession (v. 28).

Note how this fits in with the last two verses of the chapter -- and the purpose for which John wrote this Gospel. Without hesitation or apology, Thomas gives one of the greatest confessions in all of Scripture: "My Lord and my God."

D. The Lord's response (v. 29).

His words indicate a full acceptance of Thomas' confession -- and thus He claims Deity!

But note the amazing statement -- that there is greater blessing in accepting the truth of the resurrection by faith than if every child of God were able to see and touch the scars which the Lord Jesus brought with Him from the Cross!

Where is our evidence? It is in the Word. To believe the Word brings greater blessing to the child of God, and greater glory to God, than to have the physical evidence of His resurrection.

The chapter closes with John's great statement concerning the part that he had in giving us the "written" Word of God -- a statement which has its application to all of the Word of God!

IV. THE PURPOSE OF THE MIRACLES AND OF THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD (John 20:30, 31).

This includes:

- 1) The changing of water into wine.
 - 2) The healing of the nobleman's son.
 - 3) The healing of the man who had been crippled for 38 years.
 - 4) The feeding of the 5,000.
 - 5) Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee.
 - 6) The healing of the man born blind.
 - 7) The raising of Lazarus.
- And, finally, the greatest of all of Christ's miracles:
- 8) His own resurrection from the dead.

When you put Thomas' confession with John's purpose, you have the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the absolute necessity for faith in him in order to have eternal life! There can be no other way!

Concl: For the believer -- Do you seek Him? Do you long to know more of Him? Does your heart cry out for more faith, for greater understanding of His Word? This passage should encourage you. For the one who has never believed -- believe on Him NOW, and you will have eternal life!

THE LORD'S THIRD APPEARANCE
John 21:1-14

Intro: Both v. 1 and v. 14 make it clear that the main point in this account is that fact that the Lord was showing Himself again to His disciples. It was further proof that He was alive, that He had been raised from the dead!

So we need to let our thoughts center on this fact as we consider this passage.

The expression, "the third time," in v. 14 requires a little explanation.

Even as far as the Gospel of John is concerned, this was the fourth appearance:

- 1) To Mary Magdalene.
- 2) To the disciples without Thomas.
- 3) To the disciples with Thomas (eight days later).
- 4) To the seven disciples who are mentioned in v. 2 or our text.

But we know that there were other appearances which our Lord made:

- 1) To the women who were with Mary Magdalene.
- 2) To Peter.
- 3) To the disciples on the road to Emmaus.
- 4) Paul, in 1 Cor. 15, mentions a special appearance to James.

So this was more like the 7th or 8th appearance that our Lord made. Why does John call it the third?

There seem to be two possible answers:

- 1) This seems to be the third day that the Lord appeared:
 - a) The first was the resurrection day when most of the appearances took place.
 - b) The second, mentioned by John, was 8 days later.
 - c) And then we have this third day which we are considering now in John 21.

But this does not seem to me to be the best answer.

- 2) The best answer seems to be that this was the third time that the Lord appeared to the "12," to the men who were not only disciples, but also apostles.

This seems to be confirmed by two details in the Gospel of John:

- a) This is the third appearance that John mentions having to do with a group of the disciples.
- b) This the point that John makes both in v. 1 and again in v. 14: "After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias . . ." "This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead."

Thus we have overwhelming evidence of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. If He had appeared just to 2 or 3 of them on one occasion, that would have been sufficient testimony to confirm the resurrection. But to all of the appearances that I have mentioned, add Luke's statement in Acts 1:2b, 3 where we have evidence that has led many to say that the resurrection of Christ has greater confirmation than any fact in all of history. Listen to these words:

" . . . after that he . . . had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

It is little wonder that the resurrection of Christ became the dominant theme of the apostles in their preaching throughout the book of Acts! The reasons for this are explained for us very thoroughly in the Epistles, but it is not our purpose to consider them this morning.

Instead -- will you note in John 21:1 the last statement of the verse: " . . . and on this wise shewed he himself." That is, the Lord Who could have shown Himself in any way that He might choose, chose this particular way! WHY?

Because fishing, as much as any other occupation, perhaps more than any other occupation, represented the work in the world which the Lord had called them to do!

In fact, it was a miracle just like this one which led to the calling of Peter and Andrew and James and John.

Look with me at Luke 5 -- the first 11 verses. (Read.)

Note the Lord's words at the end of v. 10: "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

Matthew's version of this is in Matt. 4:19, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Many commentators feel that Andrew was one of the disciples referred to anonymously in John 21:2 (and that Philip was the other), but, be that as it may, how could the other three have possibly gone through this second miraculous fishing experience without remembering the first one?

Now let us put all of this together: WHY DID THE LORD CHOOSE TO APPEAR TO HIS DISCIPLES AGAIN AT THE CLOSE OF HIS EARTHLY MINISTRY IN A MANNER VERY SIMILAR TO THE WAY HE HAD APPEARED TO THEM IN THE BEGINNING OF HIS MINISTRY WHEN HE CALLED THEM TO BE HIS APOSTLES? It had to be because there were lessons in the first miracle which they needed either to be reminded of again, or to

learn in a greater way!

Let us notice what the lessons were.

- I. THE LONELINESS WE EXPERIENCE IN THE WORK, AND THE FRUITLESSNESS OF OUR BEST, OUR COMBINED EFFORTS.

See v. 3.

We can be sure that Peter would have done everything that he knew to do in order to get fish -- but none of it was good enough!

- II. THE CERTAINTY THAT THE LORD WILL COME, AND THAT HE WILL TELL US WHAT TO DO.

See vv. 4-6a.

He came, in this instance, without being asked to come. He knew where these disciples were, and what they had been doing. He knew their frustration, their disappointment. And it was right at the worst of their discouragement that He came to them.

The worst hour often turns out to be the best hour.

The disciples were in a situation very similar to that of Jacob at Bethel when he was heard to say,
"Surely the Lord is in this place;
and I knew it not" (Gen. 28:16b).

The disciples did not call for the Lord to come, any more than Jacob did. But the Lord came, and the Lord did tell them what to do. How important it is to know that the Lord so often does this, and that He will never, under any circumstances, fail us!

- III. THE LORD OFTEN CHOOSES TO BLESS US FAR BEYOND ANYTHING THAT COULD POSSIBLY EXPECT.

What a preparation this was for the Day of Pentecost and the response which was given to Peter's preaching!

In our text see vv. 6b, 11. How important it is to wait upon the Lord and to do His will!

- IV. THIS IS FOLLOWED BY THAT WHICH WE SO OFTEN NEGLECT: AN INVITATION (REALLY, A COMMAND) TO COME TO THE LORD AND TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM.

Spurgeon referred to this passage as "BREAKFAST WITH JESUS." The word which the Lord used does speak of a morning meal.

What a unique way of emphasizing not only the importance of being with the Lord, but the importance of being with Him in the morning!

Do you remember those instructive words which Mark has given to us concerning the Lord and the morning hour? Cf. Mark 1:35,

"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."

David, in the OT, had also learned this truth:

"My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up" (Psa. 5:3).

Did you have "BREAKFAST WITH JESUS" this morning? Once you experience the fruitlessness of your own labors, it will be very hard for you to neglect your times with the Lord. You will know then, as you can never learn in any other way, how much you need the Lord and how futile it is to work without His blessing!

Finally . . .

V. THE SUFFICIENT WAY IN WHICH THE LORD PROVIDES FOR US, EVEN BEFORE WE CAN PROVIDE WHAT HE HAS GIVEN TO US.

See v. 13.

Concl: What are the important truths for the servant of the Lord to keep always before his own heart?

- 1) That without Him we will be fruitless in our work.
- 2) That He often seems to leave us alone and without any fruit in order to teach us this lesson.
- 3) That it is of the utmost importance that we do His will by obeying His Word.
- 4) That we remember that we need Him far more than He needs us. What He does for us and what He gives to us takes precedence over anything that we might give to Him or do for Him.
- 5) MOST OF ALL -- that we remember that we are dealing with a living Lord!

CHRIST'S MINISTRY TO PETER
John 21:15-25

Intro: The Gospel of John ends in a most encouraging way! The Lord had been raised from the dead (nothing could have been more encouraging than that). But, then, He ministers to His disciples, both in chapter 20 and again in chapter 21, in such a way that they are prepared even more for the great, but difficult, days that were to come!

John has recorded how the Lord ministered to all of the disciples, and he also tells us how the Lord ministered personally to Thomas and to Peter.

It is with Peter that we are especially concerned this morning.

We see, first of all, Peter's restoration to the place of ministry which the Lord had ordained for him. He might have felt that, because of his denial of the Lord, that the Lord would change His plans, and select someone else! But the Lord does not change! Many OT biographies teach us that. Think of Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses, and David, and Jonah (to name a few of the more prominent ones) -- and now Peter! Peter is restored, and his greatest days of ministry, and of suffering, were yet ahead. But more of that in a minute or two.

We also see in this passage, our Lord's instruction to Peter concerning His providential dealings -- first, with Peter himself; and then with John. These are found in verses 18-23, and are very helpful for all of us who know and serve the Lord.

Finally, we have two verses in conclusion (24 and 25) in which John explains in more detail how he wrote this Gospel, selecting what he wrote, leaving out more than he included!

Most of these verses have to do with Peter, and Christ's ministry to him, but they are for us, too, or John would not have included them in his Gospel.

Let us look, then, first of all, at

I. THE RESTORATION OF THE APOSTLE PETER (John 21:15-17).

Be sure to notice how important this was for the other Apostles, for the early church, and for us, as well as for the Apostle Peter himself. Peter was to have an especially important part in the ministry of the early Church. The Lord had already indicated that in Matthew 16. It was Peter who was preaching in Acts 2 when the Church was born! It was Peter whom God used to open the door to the Gentiles (in Acts 10). Peter wrote two Epistles in the NT, and may have been the one who assisted Mark in the writing of his Gospel. So,

if Peter had lost his place of Apostolic ministry, all of the things he did have to be set aside -- which would amount to a discrediting of the remainder of the NT!

But he was not cast aside; he was restored -- and it is important for us to see this morning how the Lord went about with His work of restoring His servant, Peter.

Notice with me:

- 1) The way the Lord addressed Peter.
- 2) The questions He asked Peter.
- 3) The charge that He gave to Peter.

A. The way He addressed Peter.

Three times the Lord called Peter by his original name -- lit., Simon, of John (his father's name was John).

In John 1:42 we are told that it was the Lord who had changed Simon's name to Peter, or Cephas (the Greek and Chaldean forms of the same name).

In reverting to Peter's original name, it seems that He was doing what God did so often in the OT with the name of Israel -- using also or instead Israel's original name, Jacob.

Perhaps it can best be explained in the light of Psa. 103:14,

"For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."

Peter's denial of the Lord had been a very humiliating experience for Peter, and the Lord intended for it to be a humbling experience. Therefore, he called Peter, "Simon," not to indicate that He was through with him, but to indicate to Peter that He did indeed know all things, and that, in denying the Lord, Peter had demonstrated exactly what he was and what he would do without the Lord!

And we are the same way!

Remember what Job said about himself after his trial of faith:

"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear:
but now mine eye seeth thee.

Wherefore I abhor myself,
and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5, 6).

All of the evidences of pride and self-love can only mean trouble for us in our walk and work as Christians!

Notice, secondly, in connection with Peter's restoration,

B. The question He asked Peter.

It is probably stated three times because Peter denied the Lord three times.

It is probably also stated three times because this is a question we need to ask ourselves over and over again -- Do we really love the Lord?

The Lord uses ἀγαπάω in the first two questions, and then changes to φιλέω. Peter only uses φιλέω.

Many attempts have been made to try to explain the use of the two verbs in this passage. Sometimes the verbs are used interchangeably. Peter's response in verse 17 does not seem to indicate that the two verbs meant two things. Peter knew that the Lord was basically saying, "Simon, do you love me?"

It does seem that we are justified in saying, as Thayer indicates (p. 4), that ἀγαπάω means to take pleasure in a thing (or a person), prize it above other things, be unwilling to abandon it or do without it. The other verb, φιλέω, seems to add the idea of intensity, and passion, because Peter wanted not only to convey to the Lord that he loved Him, but that He loved Him very, very much. And so the Lord goes to φιλέω in the third question!

But what, basically, is the main idea here?

It is this: The obstacles in the work are so great, Satan is so strong, and we are so weak, that nothing will enable us to persevere in the work of the ministry except a love which causes us to treasure the Lord more than anything or anyone else!

Thus, this qualification takes precedence over all other qualifications!

What was Peter's answer?

He could not point to the way he had demonstrated his love for the Lord, because he had failed to show it. Instead, he appealed to the Lord's omniscience -- that the Lord knew what Peter had failed to show! How wonderful this is! And how good to know that we can make this same appeal.

What did the Lord mean by "more than these" in v. 15?

Again -- there have been many interpretations. Perhaps the best has to do with Peter's claim, recorded in Matt. 26:33,

"Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended."

Thus, the Lord's question would mean, "Do you love me more than these other disciples love me?"

Peter had to learn that the Lord does not measure our love in comparison with the love of others, but by what it is in itself.

All of this is followed by

C. The charge He gave Peter.

It is seen in the last part of verses 15, 16, and 17: "Feed my lambs," or, "Feed my sheep."

Here, again, the Lord uses two different expressions for "feed" and "lambs," or, "sheep."

We have no difficulty with the latter expression because it is brought out adequately by the English. It means younger lambs in v. 15, and older sheep in vv. 16, 17.

The word for "feed" in vv. 15 and 17 is the same (); it is a different word in v. 16 (). The first word means mainly to feed; the second, to do all of the work that a shepherd is to do: not only feed, but lead, control, protect, and be with them.

Note:

- 1) The Lord gives His servants the same ministry that He has. See John 10.
- 2) We are to be occupied with the sheep primarily, reaching them, and then caring for them.
- 3) Most important of all in this passage: We are to show our love for the Lord by the way we care for the sheep.

The person who fails to care for the sheep cannot be either a true shepherd or one who really loves the Lord!

But let us look briefly at

II. THE INSTRUCTION GIVEN TO PETER (John 21:18-23).

There are two parts to this, and they both are concluded with, "Follow me" (vv. 19, 22).

- A. The first has to do with Peter's future ministry, and even his death (John 21:18, 19).

The path was going to get more and more difficult. The Lord in His providence knows how to deal with us, and when to increase the trials for His own glory.

But always, regardless of the nature of the difficulty, Peter's one, safe course of action was to follow the Lord.

How much trouble we would save ourselves if we would only remember this, and act accordingly!

- B. The second has to do with our tendency to compare what the Lord is doing with us in contrast with what He does with His other servants (John 21:20-23).

Peter was to glorify God with a martyr's death; if the Lord determined to keep John alive for 2,000 years, He had the right to do so, and could do so, but it was not to be a problem to Peter.

Again -- the same answer: "Follow thou me."

I am sorry that we cannot spend more time on these because they are extremely important. Leave the future and other believers in the Lord's hand; our primary concern is to do the Lord's will and to walk in fellowship with Him.

Finally:

III. JOHN'S WORDS OF CONCLUSION (John 21:24, 25).

Two things are emphasized:

- A. The truthfulness of the record given in this Gospel (John 21:24).
- B. The limited, but selective, record that we have (John 21:25).

The Lord has not given us everything that He could have given us, but He has given us everything that He intended to give us, and all that we need. We can never exhaust it, but there is much more that we will know it glory!

Concl: John began by speaking of our Lord's glory as the Son of God; he ends by speaking of our love for Him. If we see the one, the other is certain to follow. When we think of all that He is and what He has done for us, how can we help but love Him, and then serve Him by ministering to His people!