

Tuesday Bible Class
OUR LORD'S I AM'S IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

January 19, 2009

Intro: In our study of the miracles recorded for us in the Gospel of John, we came in the miracle of our Lord raising Lazarus from the dead in chapter 11 to our Lord's statement to Martha in John 11:25 and 26.

25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

And that gave me the opportunity to list for you the preceding five times, and two afterwards, where the Lord identified Himself by saying, "I am," followed by a predicate which described our Lord symbolically. And, just as the miracles were signs pointing to the Deity of our Lord, we can surely say that these "I am" statements were also to add to the evidence that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and that only through believing in Him could anyone, or can anyone, have everlasting life.

Each statement is given its meaning in the light of the context in which it appears. So we do not take the statement, and run with it (as the saying goes), but it is in the context that we find the meaning.

Now we do find in the Gospel of John that sometimes the Lord said "I am" without using a predicate. And probably the most important of these is the statement that we find in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I am." And we all should remember that when God called Moses in the land of Midian to go back to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, Moses has four problems to saying yes to God. The first was that he felt inadequate. But the second was expressed in Exodus 4:13;

13 And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?

And we see what God's answer was in verse 14.

14 And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

God is what He always has been and always will be. God was using this expression about Himself. The fact that the Lord used the same expression shows that the Lord Jesus was expressing the fact that He was God. We could also apply this "I am" to the Holy Spirit. They are all eternal. They are all timeless. They are all changeless. Time takes its toll on all of us. But that is not the case with the Members of the Godhead. The God Who on the first day of creation said, "Let there be light," is the same God, identically the same God, to Whom you prayed this morning. It is hard for us to take this in, but this is the truth of God. And, as you have heard before, this name of God was considered to be so holy that instead of pronouncing it when they read the Scriptures, or spoke of Him, said, "Adonai," which means LORD. For a long time it was thought that it may have been said as Jehovah, and later the idea has been that it should be YHWH, or Yahweh. If I am to choose between Jehovah and Yahweh, I prefer Jehovah because it means more to people. But I am even more content with LORD.

There is an interesting statement in the preface to the NAB translation which came out in 1960. I came across this just recently. This is what the Editorial Board had to say about this question:

It is known that for many years YHWH has been transliterated as Yahweh. No complete certainty attaches to this pronunciation. However it is felt by many who are in touch with the laity of our churches that this name conveys no religious or spiritual overtones. It is strange, uncommon, and without sufficient religious and devotional background. No amount of scholarly debate can overcome this deficiency. Hence it was decided to avoid the use of this name in the translation proper (NASB, p. lx).

What is important for us to know about God as the I AM God, is the ever-living God Who is timeless and an eternal God, never-changing, Who is as the Hebrews 13:8 describes our Lord, "the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

Let me repeat what I know I have mentioned before, and that has to do with the Greek words which are translated "I am."

The pronoun is usually indicated by the ending on the verb. So the Greek for *I am* is εἰμί. That by itself means *I am*. But if the Greeks wanted to intensify that statement, they would add, in this case, the pronoun I before it. And so in these verses that we are going to be studying, they not only have εἰμί, but Ἐγώ before the εἰμί. So if the printed page could speak to us it would say, "I AM the bread of life." In these verses it would be the equivalent of saying, "I am the Bread of life, and nobody else can claim that name." He is and always had been "the Bread of life. And so we can carry on that emphasis to all of these statements, which are actually claims, which the Lord was applying emphatically to Himself. These two words sound like AMY and then I ME. One writer I have consulted, said,

I genuinely believe that it is in the "I am" sayings of Jesus that we are presented with some of the clearest assertions, affirmations and proof of His divinity. For in them we have the very words of Jesus concerning His "true identity." Here we have the self-disclosure of the Incarnate God (Internet notes, p. 1).

Here is a list of the I am's of our Lord that we will be studying. But let us not forget in all of our study John 8:58 where it is recorded that our Lord said, "Before Abraham was, I am." So He did not become the Bread of life and the Light of the world, etc. when He became a Man; He has also held these positions, but it became more apparent after His ministry on earth began.

Here is the list:

- 1) In John 6:35, "I am the bread of life."
- 2) In John 8:12, "I am the light of the world." And He repeated this in John 9:5. See also John 12:46.
- 3) In John 10:7 and 9, "I am the door."
- 4) In John 10:11 and 14, "I am the good shepherd."
- 5) In John 11:25, "I am the resurrection, and the life."
- 6) In John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."
- 7) In John 15:1, "I am the true vine."

"I am the Bread of life" (John 6:35).

See also verses 32, 33, (41,) 48, 51, and 58. The complete context goes back to the beginning of chapter 6 where we have the feeding of the 5,000 men (see verse 10) but the part of the chapter which deals with our Lord as "the Bread of life" begins in verse 22, and goes through verse 69. (Read.)

Although many expositors like to link this passage with the establishing of the Lord's Supper (which John did not mention otherwise), yet it seems more accurate to say that the Lord's Supper surely illustrates the teaching that we have here, but it does not seem that it was in the Lord's mind when He gave them the discourse on Himself as the Bread of life.

What does seem more apparent by linking the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 with this event which followed, we have a clear revelation of the human heart. See what the Lord said to them in verses 26 and 27. People are more concerned about food for their bodies than they are food for their souls. This is very apparent

in our Lord's words to the crowd. And when we come to the end of the account, many who were disciples of the Lord, at least in name, spoke of His teaching as "an hard saying," and many of those "turned and walked no more with Him." We can understand from this that they left the Lord and never came back! It shows that even when people have shown some response to the truth, they reject it when it comes down to admitting that everlasting life can only be found in Christ. The Lord was never deceived by the popularity which He experienced from people. We were told back in the last three verses of chapter 2:

23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.

24 But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men,

25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man (John 2:23-25).

We see this increasingly in our own country today. Even some who have been recognized as Christian leaders are saying that there probably other ways of getting to heaven than by trusting in Christ. Millions of Americans have been hypnotized by a man who promises to give them everything here on earth, and at the same to they want to get rid of anything that has to do with God, or Christ, or the Bible, or the forgiveness of sins, or what is going to happen to them after they die. People flocked to see the Lord perform miracles. And they loved to be fed by the Lord. But talk to them about the Bread of life, and many will leave Him, and a growing number wanted to kill Him.

But since the Lord knew that they were interested in bread, He spoke to them about Bread, the Bread of life, the living Bread. The people asked Him when He had come where they found Him? Undoubtedly they were looking for the Lord to do the same thing for them that He had done the day before. The Lord began His response to them with the words, "Verily, verily." Those words transliterated into English could be, *Amen, amen*. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they appear as singles, not doubled. The Apostle John quotes our Lord as saying, "Verily, verily," twenty-five times. They indicate that our Lord was about to say something that was not only important, but very important! And the Lord was vouching for the absolute truthfulness of what He was about to say to them. Apparently there is no indication that the scribes and Pharisees of our Lord's day used this expression, so commentators are inclined to believe that this was unique to the Lord's teaching. And to add to the importance of what He was about to say, He added, "I say unto you." He was going to tell them something about themselves which they obviously had not realized. What was it?

They had seen the miracle that the Lord performed. That is, they knew that He had done a most amazing thing. But that they had not seen it as a *sign*. *The miracles that the Lord performed pointed to Who He was. They were to show people show that He was "the Christ, the Son of God," and so that by turning in faith to Him they would receive the gift of eternal life "through His Name."* So they saw the act, but they did not get the meaning of the act. Leon Morris says in his commentary that "they were moved, not by full hearts, but by full bellies" (p. 358). There may have been a lot of poor people who were seeking the Lord, but still the Lord held them responsible for the real meaning behind the miracle that they had seen.

When in verse 27 the Lord told them to "labor" not for the food that perishes, and which needs to be replenished all of the time. He probably was talking about all of the time and energy that they had given to find Him so that He would feed them again. But they need to put out that same kind of energy of enduring food that produces eternal life. Our politicians would like for us to think that money is the way to happiness and contentment. Then we can have what we want and do what we want to do. But some of the most unhappy people in the world are the people with plenty of money. Happiness does not come that way. True happiness comes through knowing Christ. And eternal life is a gift although it was provided at the infinite cost of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the Lord told the people that God the Father had placed His seal upon the Son as an indication that the Son had been appointed to secure this gift for all who would accept it.

The Lord's I am's in John's Gospel (4)

In verse 28 the people showed that they still did not get what the Lord was seeking to tell them, that this everlasting life was a gift. So they asked the Lord what they should do to “work the works of God” in order to get the life that He was talking about. They did not realize (and this is true of most people) that if salvation is a gift, no work is involved. If you work for it, it is not a gift, it is a reward. But it doesn't come that way. But the Lord responding to them told them the work of God, what God required, was “to believe on Him [Christ] whom He [the Father] had sent.” Our faith comes from God. It comes from hearing God's Word which the Lord Jesus was giving them. He is “the Author and Finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2).

Then they asked for a “sign.” And they used the very word that the Apostle John uses throughout this Gospel for the miracles which were to point people to Christ as the Son of God, leading them to faith. What blindness, spiritual blindness, is displayed by these people after they had witnessed the day before what no mere man would be capable of ever doing! The Lord was telling them what they needed to do. At this point they turned the whole case back on the Lord by telling Him that there was more that He needed to do. By this they surely meant that the Lord had to respond to their need. Then it was that the Lord told them very clearly what actually happened day by day to the children of Israel in their journey from Egypt to Canaan. They were saying that Moses fed the people of Israel; now you feed us.

How gracious the Lord was to these people, and how patient. We don't give up on people who cannot see the truth of salvation. We do what the Lord did here. We give people the light of the Word trusting the Father that the truth will get through to them.

And we come in verse 32 to another “verily, verily.” Remember what it means. So the Lord corrected their understanding of what went on for those forty years in the desert. He said, “Moses didn't feed your fathers in the desert; God did! And now He is seeking to give you the true Bread from heaven, and you will not believe what I am telling you that the Father has done. The bread of God is a person. He is the true Bread. And He has come “from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.” With these words that Lord was indicating that He had not come with a message of salvation, of eternal life, not just for the Jews, but for the whole world. He did not mean that the whole world would be saved, but that wherever people were to be saved, it could only be through Him.

January 26, 2009

Let me review briefly what we have covered in dealing especially with the Lord's “I am,” in John 6:35, the first of seven I am's that we will be studying in John's Gospel.

It is all a result of the miracle that the Lord performed in the early part of this chapter when He fed 5,000 men plus women and children at the end of a day when He had been healing people with all kinds of diseases. Remember that this is the one miracle that is recorded in all four of the Gospels, and so we have this indication of its great importance. It gives us a picture of human nature that is very important.

The following day the crowd was looking for Jesus again, but when they found Him, in 6:26 and 27 the Lord rebuked the people because they had not really *seen*, *i.e.*, they had not gotten the real significance of the miracle of the feeding of that large crowd, which as the Apostle John declared in John 20:30-31, was to show the Deity of Christ, and cause them to seek eternal life for themselves.

People naturally are more concerned about feeding their bodies than they are about feeding their souls. The Lord had fed them the day before, and now they had sought Him diligently because they wanted to be fed again. The “verily, verily” at the beginning of verse 26, as we learned last we (if we didn't know it before) indicated that He was saying something very important, and something that was absolutely true – not just true of some of

them, but true of all of them. And so in verse 27 we have a command which the Lord gave to them. (Read.)

6:27 The word "labor" can be translated as, *Don't make seeking food your main objective in life*. And can be expanded to seeking just those things that have to do with this life. They had eaten until they were all satisfied the day before, and now they were back hungry again. This is characteristic of human nature. What satisfied us yesterday, doesn't satisfy us today.

On the contrary the Lord pointed them to the need they had for eternal life, and that He was just as ready to give them eternal life at that moment as He had been the day before to give them food for their bodies. And when the people asked the Lord what they. Lange said, "Instead of seeing in the bread the sign, they had only seen in the sign, the bread" (quoted by Leon Morris, p. 358).

The Lord told them that He would give them eternal life. It is not the result of working for it. Then the Lord added, "For Him (speaking of Himself) hath God the Father sealed." One use of the seal in those days, as in our own day, was to authenticate that which was sealed. And it was the Lord upon Whom the God, the Father, had placed His seal. The Father expressed His authentication of the Son when at our Lord's baptism, the Father spoke from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased."

6:28 The people responded by using the same verb that the Lord had used for "labor." If, as the Lord said, they were to labor that meat which endures forever, what were they to do?

6:29 They were to put their trust in the One Whom the Father has sent.

6:30 They showed their spiritual blindness when they asked the Lord for a sign when He had already given them one in the miracle of feeding the five thousand.

6:31 Here is continued evidence of their blindness. Implied in their response was the thought that is their fathers had a daily supply of manna, but they knew that that supply eventually ceased. So if the Lord was to do more than Moses did, He must have come to give them a supply of bread that would never cease.

6:32 "Verily, verily" again indicates that the Lord was going to answer their question, and that He wanted them to listen carefully. They were going to hear the truth.

Notice several words here: First, "gave," a past tense, and "giveth," a present and continuing tense. The subject of "give" is "Moses"; the subject of "giveth" is "my Father." The idea is that Moses "gave," but the provision is now history. What Moses gave is no longer given. Besides, and here is where the difference is, what God provided through Moses was not "the true bread." The manna was real, but it was a type of the "true bread." Christ here speaks of Himself as the genuine, the real Bread. He is the antitype, So if we were reading about the manna given by God to the Israelites when they were in the desert, we would say that that manna was a type of Christ.

6:33 So our Lord here plainly declares that He is "the bread of God," and that He is the life whom God has given to the world. As I explained last week, this does not mean that all the world will be saved, but it does show that Jesus Christ is the only Savior that there is for the world. Believing in Him, trusting Him as the One Who came to save us from the penalty of our sins, is the only way of salvation. He is the only Savior. The Gospel is for the whole world. There is no other Gospel; there is no other Savior.

6:34 They are ready to receive what the Lord came to give. But it still does not seem that they understood

what the Lord was telling them. So now the Lord gave His message as clearly as it is possible to state it. And this brings us to our key text.

6:35 “I am the Bread of life.” Now remember what I told you about the words I am in all of this series. The verb is εἰμί. I means, *I am*. It is called “a verb of existence.” And it means “I am” if that is all that the Lord said. But He put before it the personal pronoun, Ἐγώ. This means *I*. And so in the Greek text it is ἐγὼ εἰμί. So to have the verb form which is translated “I am,” but to have the pronoun also, is like saying, “I, I am.” But the Greeks understood this to mean that the “I” is intensified for special emphasis. It means that “I, and no one else, is the Bread of life.”

But there is another intensive feature in these words of our Lord Jesus Christ. It has to do with the word “never.” There are two words in Greek for *no* in Greek. One is οὐ; and the other is μή. When you put the two of them together, the result is an intensive negative which needs to be translated *never, under no circumstances*. It indicates here that no one will ever hunger, or thirst if they come to Christ. This does not eliminate the possibility of wanting to know the Lord better. But it does mean that if you come to Christ, if you believe on Him as your Savior, your search for salvation is over, and it is a salvation that is eternal. Coming to Christ and believing on Christ are used here synonymously. Coming to Christ is mentioned here in John 6 in verses 37, 44, 45, 65. In verse 37 we have another οὐ μή. It is very clear in these verses that the person who comes to Christ, who believes in Christ, will never lose his or her salvation. See also verses 38-40.

Now from this point in verse 35 I want to move on down to verses 47 and 48 where the Lord came back to His claim to be “the Bread of life.”

6:47 Notice that again we have another “verily, verily.” The Lord is very strong about claiming Who He is, and that those who believe in Him, have everlasting life, and will never die. Now He does not mean that those who believe in Him will never die physically. But he means that believers, those who come in faith to Christ, will never die spiritually so as to end up in hell. Eternal life does not mean that we skip physical death, but it does mean that we continue to live spiritually even though we may die physically. “Absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

6:48 “I am the bread of life.” It is interesting to notice in the Gospels how the Lord used repetition in His teaching. The apostles followed His example in their writings.

6:49 He was going to contrast Himself with what the fathers of Israel ate in the desert. The fact that they died did not mean that they were not saved. It simply meant that manna did not give them everlasting life.

6:50 This is the first time in what our Lord said to the multitudes who had come to Him that He spoke to them about eating the bread which had come down from heaven. By this He meant eating Him! In this expression we have a very wonderful truth. From this point on we see that coming to Christ, or believing in Christ, is likened to feeding upon Christ. It speaks of the way in which as we eat food for our bodies, the food becomes a part of us, so when we believe on Christ, the Bread of life, the believer and Christ are united together in a living fellowship. We are made partakers of all that Christ is, and we become the instruments through whom He manifests Himself in a sinful world. The Apostle John said, “He that hath the Son hath life.” The Apostle Paul said, “Christ liveth in me.” He also told the Colossians, “When Christ Who is our life, shall appear, then shall [we] also appear with Him in glory.”

But what did the Lord mean by the reference that He made here to His “flesh”? Since eating and believing are

spoken of as meaning the same in this chapter, I believe that the Lord was stressing here the fact that is so evident in the Gospel of John, that the person who truly believes in Jesus, believes that He was the Son of God in human flesh. He was the a real human being, although a perfect One, that He might die for sinners, in their place, and by the reality of His humanity without diminishing at all His Deity, He was able to offer to God a perfect sacrifice by which He eternally put away our sins. The Son of God died in His human body, a sacrifice for all those who had been given to Him to save. A new believer may have a lot to learn about the incarnation of our Lord, but no one can be saved who denies the incarnation.

6:52 It is clear that the Jews to whom the Lord was speaking were shocked with the idea of eating His flesh.

6:53 Here for the fourth time in this chapter the Lord began His statement with, "Verily, verily." See verses 26, 32, 47, and here. And each time He followed it with, "I say unto you." Thus we have the truth that our Lord is the Bread of life on the highest authority.

The Lord adds here to eating His flesh. The addition is, "and drinketh His blood." Of course this speaks of His shed blood. It speaks of His death on the Cross, not a death that He deserved, but a death which we deserved, a substitutionary death for our sins.

Now this sounds like what we are doing when we take the Lord's Supper, doesn't it? And there is, of course, a very close relationship. When we take the bread at communion, we are symbolically eating His flesh, declaring our faith in the true humanity of our Lord. When we drink from the cup, we are symbolically drinking of His blood. We are picturing (and I add, symbolically) what we did when we were first saved.

Notice also that the Lord spoke of Himself in this verse as "the Son of man," which has to do with His real humanity. And notice also that the verbs in this part of our Lord's teaching is in the present tense. We not only ate of the Lord's flesh when we were first saved, and drank of His blood, but we continue to do that day by day throughout our lives, learning more and more about our Lord, and seeking by His grace to become more and more like Him.

6:54 By doing this we show that we have eternal life (that is why the Lord's Supper is only for believers).

And we lay claim to His promise that He will raise us up at the last day. This truth stated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 is, "For as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show forth the Lord's death 'til He come." What a lot of amazing truth there is here which is typified in the Lord's Supper. But remember that no where does the Bible teach that we are saved by observing the Lord's Supper. Our Lord was not speaking about the Lord's Supper. He was speaking about the reality of our union with Christ, and how that union is established for all of us who have come to Christ, who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, who have been joined to Christ in a living union. We observe the Lord's Supper to keep us reminded of Christ. It is in remembrance of Him. But it pictures how we have been joined to Christ in an eternal union.

6:55 Notice the repetition of the word "indeed." This word in the original Greek of the NT is related to the word "true" in verse 32 where the Lord said, "but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven." by "true" or "indeed," the Lord was saying again that He is the one and only "Bread of life." In Christ is real salvation. All other ways are false.

6:56 In the last three verses of our Lord's message, verses 56, 57, and 58, the Lord emphasized three wonderful truths concerning our salvation.

1) Here in verse 56 we see that our relationship to Christ is an abiding relationship. It is not a temporary relationship, but a permanent relationship.

6:57 Our relationship with the Lord Jesus is like the relationship that our Lord had with the Father while He was here on earth, and probably what it was before our Lord came to the earth, and what it continues to be now that He is back with the Father. So what is the point here?

2) As we feed on Christ daily, continuously, we live by Him. Our obedience to God and to Christ is only possible as Christ is our life. The Apostle Paul was probably thinking of this when he told the believers at Philippi, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

6:58 Those of you who have spoken to me about how deep the truths in this chapter are, were speaking the truth. But this does not mean that they are impossible to understand. Let us all keep reading this marvelous chapter until these truths become a greater reality to us in our lives. For this last verse I want to give you a quotation which has been a great help to me, and I hope it will be a great help to you. This writer said, Jesus now (i.e., in verse 58) reminds them that, wonderful though the manna had been, there had been no life giving quality in it. Those who ate of it died like other men. But the bread of which He has been speaking (i.e., of Himself), the Bread which really came down from heaven, is different. The man who eats of it will not die like other men. He will, to be sure, pass through the gateway of death, but he will live eternal. It is likely that the singular, "he that eateth," in contrast with the plural, "the fathers," is significant. At any rate throughout the discourse the singular is regularly used to denote him who is in right relationship with Jesus. Faith must be personal. There is more to it than being a member of a group (Morris, Leon, p. 381).

Concl: I think we are all familiar with how this story ended. We are told that "many," not just a few, said, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" By hard they did not mean that it was hard to understand, but that it was difficult to accept. It was not what they did not understand, but what they did understand that bothered them. And a large group who had professed faith in the Lord 'went back and walked no more with Him.'" It is as the Lord said when He was concluding His Sermon on the Mount that He said, Not every one that saith unto Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 7:21).

Another writer said,

Time and again it is not the intellectual difficulty of accepting Christ which keeps men from becoming Christians; it is the height of Christ's moral demands. . . . To this day many a man's refusal of Christ comes, not because Christ puzzles and baffles his intellect, but because Christ challenges and condemns his life (quoted of Barclay by Leon Morris, p. 383).

The Lord's words do not leave any place for us to have confidence in ourselves. The very heart of the Lord's teaching is that we who profess faith in Christ must show our faith by our complete dependence upon the Lord. Without Him we can do nothing, that is, nothing that is pleasing to God, nothing that will glorify Him. He is our life.

Let me close by asking two questions that the Lord asked those people on that day at the conclusion of His message to them. The first was: "Doth this offend you?" And when many began to leave the Lord, and He knew that they were leaving with no intention of returning. But then He asked the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" One was there who eventually did. But Peter spoke for the others when he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (vv. 61, 67-69). What will our answers be? I trust that it will never be the answer that the disciples gave by their walking away, but the answer to that Peter gave, by which He indicated that he was ready to hear more. What is your answer? And I ask myself, "What is mine?"

February 2, 2009

“I am the Light of the world” (John 8:12).

This is the second of the I am's of our Lord in the Gospel of John:

12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life (John 8:12).

See also John 9:5; 12:46. The first of these tells us that Jesus said, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” The second says, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.”

There are several passages in the Gospel of John which speak of our Lord as the light, and I want to take the time to read them to you because they will help us to understand what it means that the Lord Jesus Christ is “the Light of the world.”

The first of these is in John 1. If you will turn to that chapter, I would like for you to follow as I read. (Read John 1:1-14.) Contrast the was's of verse 1 with the “was made” of verse 14. And note also that “the light is put in opposition to “darkness” in verse 5.

The second passage is in John 3. Turn with me to that chapter, and let us look at verses 18-21. And again here we see light contrasted with darkness, and the opposition of darkness to light is stated very strongly.

We have already looked at John 12:46, but the third and last passage that I would call your attention to is also in John 12, verses 35-36. Here the Lord spoke about those who would believe in Him as becoming “the children of light.”

So the Lord Jesus as “the Light of the world” is a major theme in John's Gospel.

It is not difficult to see the light and darkness are used repeatedly in the Bible in contrast with each other. We actually have it in the first chapter of Genesis where we have the record of original creation. Verse 2 of Genesis 1 tells us that “the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” Then God said, “Let there be light, and there was light.” Then verse 4 of Genesis 1 tells us this:

4And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

God said that the light was good. But there was Day and Night before there was a sun, or moon, or stars. They came on the fourth day. I don't know how to explain that there was light before there was a sun except for the statement that we have in the book of the Revelation about light in the eternal state. Let me read to you what we are told in Revelation 22: 5 about the eternal state:

And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; **for the Lord God giveth them light . . .**

Evidently our Lord was the light on the first day of creation, and God said that it was good. But He is also to be the light forever.

Light and darkness have a threefold meaning in the Bible. It meant in Genesis 1, actual day and night. But they also speaks of good and evil. And yet they have a third meaning, that of knowledge and ignorance.

Paul actually linked creation with what God was doing when Christ came to replace the ignorance of God which you find naturally among men since man sinned, with the coming of Christ into the world. See 2 Corinthians 4:6, where we read:

The Lord's I am's in John's Gospel (10)

6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

Just as God originally commanded the light to come out of the darkness at creation, so Christ came to give the light of the knowledge of God. Darkness means ignorance; light means knowledge. And that knowledge is revealed knowledge. Psalm 119:103 tells us, "The entrance of Thy Word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple."

The people of the world are in spiritual darkness. They are blind to the knowledge of God. Only in Christ can we have the light of the knowledge of God.

The fact that light and darkness represent good and evil, or righteousness and sin, is brought out by Isaiah in Isaiah 5:20 where he said,

20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Paul had this to say to the believers in Ephesus:

8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)

10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret (Eph. 5:8-12).

Let me give you one more familiar passage of Scripture to show that light and darkness represent good and evil. It is found in 1 Peter 2:9-11:

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

We were born in the darkness of sin, but we have been born again into the light of Christ.. Nevertheless, we must always keep up our guard against sin. The Apostle John in 1 John 1:5-7 clearly indicates this:

5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

But now let us go back to our text in John 8:12 where the Lord said, "I am the Light of the world."

Again we have ἐγώ εἰμι, not just εἰμι, but ἐγώ εἰμι – a very emphatic declaration by our Lord, meaning that He is, always has been, and always will be, "the Light of the world. Furthermore He meant that He was the only Light of the world. There is no other, and never will be. Again quoting the Apostle Paul, he said in Ephesians 5:13-14,

13 But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

14 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

And the Psalmist said in Psalm 36:9, "For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light."

And although I have already indicated this, notice that the Lord did not say that He was just the light for Israel, but that He was “the Light of the world.” Remember that this does not mean that everybody in the world is going to be saved, but that wherever people are going to be saved, it will always and only be through Christ. There is only one Gospel, and only one Savior. Nobody will ever get to heaven, no one will ever have their sins forgiven, except through Christ. In every nation, whatever the language is, Christ is their only hope. That is why the Lord gave His disciples the exhortation that He gave to them just before His ascension: Acts 1:8:

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Now it is important to notice as we go on reading in John 8 that the Lord was not speaking to His disciples, nor to the multitudes of the people, but it was to His enemies that the Lord was speaking, mainly the Pharisees. See 8:13, 22, and throughout this discourse to the end of the chapter we read that Jesus said what He said to them, the Jews, or what they said to Him. In verse 30 we read that “many believed on Him.” It may be that other people were listening as the Lord spoke to the chief priest and Pharisees (see 7:45), but it does not seem that the Lord saw any of “the Jews” believe on Him. All through the chapter the Lord was giving them Light as He spoke repeatedly of God as His Father, and of His relationship with Him.

We don't know exactly what led the Lord to speak of Himself as “the Light of the world.” As we have seen in going through the Gospel of John the many references to light and darkness, a theme which runs through the OT and the NT. It may have been, if this were the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, as many expositors suggest, the lighting of the candelabra may have prompted the Lord in declaring that He was the Light of the world. We don't know. Actually our Lord would not have needed any particular emphasis to have prompted Him to speak as He did. He was (and is) God, and so He knew what was in the hearts of those Jewish leaders. One thing is certain: although they were the religious leaders of the Jews, they were still in darkness. Their ignorance of the truth was very apparent. Notice “true” in verse 14. And again in verse 16, and 26. See “the truth” in verse 32, and in verse 40, 44, 45, 46. Verse 58 was the ultimate claim that those Jews could not accept, and so they took up stones to stone Him, but they could not touch Him because His time had not yet come.

It would seem that any Jew who was familiar with Isaiah 42:6-8 would have recognized that our Lord's claim was that of the promised Messiah. This is what those verses tell us:

6 I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;

7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

8 I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images (Isa. 42:6-8).

And we have essentially the same emphasis in Isaiah 49:6:

6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

When we think of that expression in verse 12 that the one who follows the Lord, shall have “the light of life,” it is interesting to contrast this with John's statement concerning our Lord in John 1:4 His life was the light. But with believers the light comes first and then the light is to be seen in their lives.

This chapter is a clear revelation of the authority of the Lord Jesus. He obviously gave them teaching that they were not prepared to understand or accept. But He gave them the truth anyway. What an important message this contains for us! We are to give the truth to people who do not have the ability to understand, but we do it.

like the Lord did, trusting the Father, or the Holy Spirit, to give them the understanding that they needed in order to believe and to be saved.

We need always to remember that a text without its context is, or can be, a pretext. A pretext when we are speaking of the Scriptures is a false interpretation. Some people say that you can make the Scriptures say anything that you want them to say. You can, if you isolate a verse or a passage from the chapter or book in which it is found, or in the greater sense, if you lift it out of the Bible entirely and isolate it from the whole teaching of Scripture. So what did the our Lord's teaching to the Pharisees mean?

Well, in the first place the Jews questioned the Lord's right to bear testimony for Himself, or to bring in His Father as a second witness. This takes us from verse 13 down through verse 20.

In verse 15 the Lord seems to emphasizing that He did not come to judge men, that is, with final judgment; He came to illuminate as the Light of the world, and so to save.

In verses 21 the Lord told the Jews that He was on a mission sent by the Father. It was a mission of salvation. He had come from above, and if they did not believe on Him, they would die in their sins. But if they did believe on Him they would not only be delivered from death, but would be freed even from the power of their sins. This goes down through verse 32.

From verse 33 on to the end of our Lord's message to the Pharisees the Lord was answering their claim that their relationship to Abraham was sufficient for their acceptance with God. The Lord told them that even though they claimed Abraham, they were really the children of the Devil. And then the Lord pointed out that even Abraham "rejoiced to see His day. And then in conclusion the Lord declared, "Before Abraham was, I am." This means that before Abraham was born, the Lord had an eternal existence which had no beginning, and it will never end. Here, as in verse 12, the Lord said emphatically, ἐγώ εἰμι.

At that point they took up stones to stone the Lord.

Notice that in this chapter, John 8, we have three times that the Lord said, "Verily, verily" -- in verses 34, 51, 58. These emphasized the importance of what the Lord was saying, and so calling upon them to note carefully what He had said. The Pharisees were like a lot of politicians today; they would say anything to keep their hold upon the people. But the Lord always and only deals with the truth, the truth of God. And such was the truth that He is "the Light of the world."

February 9, 2009

"I am the Door" (John 10:7, 9).

The text for "I am the Door," is John 10:1-10. But the setting for it is in John 9. We studied John 9 when we studied the miracles of our Lord in the Gospel of John. A quick glance at John 9 will remind you that there we learned about the Lord giving sight to a man who had been born blind. This was such an amazing miracle that even some of the man's neighbors disagreed as to whether he really was the man who had been born blind. *But the real problem quickly developed when this formerly blind man was taken to the Pharisees. In quizzing the man who had been given his sight, the Pharisees raised what was a common objection against the Lord, saying that He could not have been "of God" because He had performed this miracle on the Sabbath Day.* The parents were called in and questioned, but they were very guarded in their response to the Pharisees because they knew that anyone who claimed that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, he would be put out of the synagogue! The second time that they called the man who had been given his sight by the Lord, he was impatient

with the Pharisees because they were asking him for information he had already given them. So he asked them if they wanted to be the Lord's disciples. This infuriated the Pharisees, and after a few exchanges between them and the man who had received his sight, "they [the Pharisees] cast him [the man who had been given sight] out" – that is, out of the synagogue!

When Jesus heard what had happened, he looked for the man to whom he had given sight, and the Lord gave him spiritual sight as well. Read John 9:35-38. And then see how verses 39 to 41 set the stage, so to speak, for the teaching that we have in chapter 10 and, first, the Lord's claim to be "the Door."

So, when we begin reading in chapter 10, and read that the Lord said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you," to whom does the "you" refer? Obviously, to the Pharisees. The "you" in the Greek text is plural, because the Lord was speaking to several Pharisees.

10:1 Now let me emphasize with you again the meaning of the words with which this verse begins: "Verily, verily, I say unto you." The Apostle John uses this expression twenty-five times in this Gospel, and if I have counted correctly, this is the fifteenth time. Number sixteen comes along in verse 7. Let me give you Leon Morris' explanation of this very important expression. Remember it is the transliteration of a Hebrew word which comes into Greek and into English as *Amen*. For many years it has been used by congregations in response to one who has been leading them in prayer. The word itself comes from a verb which means *to confirm*, and so when a congregation responds with an "amen" they are expressing their agreement with what has been prayed, and they are making it their own. And then all of us use this word to conclude our own prayers. Paul used this word as an argument against praying in tongues because people would know what you are saying if you pray in a language that is foreign to them.

In the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it is never used in the double form that we have here, but in John it is always doubled. It does not seem that anyone knows the reason why. However, in all four Gospels the Lord is the only One Who used it. Now let me tell you what Leon Morris wrote about this:

In the gospels it is used only by Jesus, and always a prefix to significant statements Presumably this is to mark them as solemn and true and important. This use of Amen to introduce one's own words appears to be Jesus' own, no Jewish parallel being adduced. In view of the associations of the term it almost certainly has religious significance. It marks the words as uttered before god, Who is thus invited to bring them to pass. There are also probably christological implications. Jesus identifies Himself with the words and also with the God to Whom He appeals (pp. 169, 170).

So it seems that what we need to remember about these words are two things: 1) it is very important; 2) it is the absolute truth. And we could also add that the Lord Jesus in using this word, was calling upon God to confirm it.

Now what did our Lord say after this "verily, verily" in verse 1?

He said, "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." Lit. "sheepfold" is *the fold of the sheep*. It was an enclosure, usually with high walls to keep wild animals and human thieves out. A shepherd would bring his flock into the fold, and leave them to the care of a "porter." And it usually be large enough to hold several flocks of sheep. Sheep need constant care and protection. Luther is often quoted by commentators as having said, "This simple creature, the sheep, has this special note among all animals, that it quickly hears the voice of the shepherd, follows no one else, depends entirely upon him, and seeks help from him alone, cannot help itself, but is shut up to another's aid (JFB, V, 411). I am sure that often the shepherd would stay with his flock. In this case the Lord was concerned about thieves and robbers, *which seems to be a clear reference to the Pharisees*. The Lord was indicating that while

they posed as shepherds of Israel, they were thieves and robbers who would steal the sheep to get them away from the shepherd. They were up to no good purpose. The Pharisees were incapable of caring for the spiritual needs of the Lord's sheep because they were unregenerate men themselves. They wouldn't use the door, but would climb over the wall. And they seemed to be always present to oppose the true shepherd of the sheep.

10:2 The true shepherd can be easily identified, and the reason is given in verse 3.

10:3 Notice that the "voice" of the shepherd is mentioned in verses 3, 4, and 5.

The shepherd can easily be identified because the sheep respond to his voice. When the shepherd comes back to take the sheep out, the porter opens the door to him because he can see that the sheep are responsive to his voice. He calls his sheep by name. The thief and the robber might know their names, or, as it was in some cases, the sound by which the shepherd identified himself. But the name or sound would not affect the sheep if they did not hear the shepherd's voice.

10:4 When the shepherds of Israel came after their sheep, they did not drive them like shepherds in many countries do, but the shepherd goes before them, and they follow him because they know his voice.

10:5 They won't follow a stranger primarily because they do not know the stranger's voice. Instead, the sheep will flee from a stranger for one simple reason: "they know not the voice of strangers."

The figure of the Lord's relationship to Israel in the OT as that of a shepherd to his sheep, was well known in the OT Scriptures. Undoubtedly the most familiar is Psalm 23 which begins as we all know, "The Lord is my Shepherd." See also Jeremiah 23:1-4.

There are a lot of wonderful lessons for us to know and depend upon in these verses:

1) We are like sheep – weak and defenseless, and so dependent upon our Shepherd. It is the nature of sheep that they won't trust anyone but their shepherd. We are born with proud hearts. It is probably the most difficult lesson that we have to learn – how dependent we are. This is why there is so much panic today. People without the Lord have no one to depend upon but themselves, or other people, or big government, but they know that none of that is enough. We have verses like Proverbs 3:5-6.

2) The world is full of thieves and robbers who will do everything they can to capture us. It may be through false doctrine, but it is always through sin, compromising with the truth, false and empty promises.

3) We have a Shepherd. He is the Lord. One Who is always faithful, always caring for us, equal to any situation that may threaten us.

4) Our Shepherd knows us by Name.

5) But one practical matter for which we are responsible. We need to know the sound of His voice. How do we do that? He never speaks audibly to us. Our Shepherd speaks to us through His Word. Therefore we are to get so familiar with His Word that we can discern the voice of false shepherds, false teachers, those who would lead us astray, because they are not speaking the truth to us. One of the greatest tragedies of our time is that so few who claim to be Christians spend any time reading the Word, nor do they sit under a ministry where they can be taught the Word of God.

6) It is always wonderful to know that when the Lord leads us, He goes before us. When we come to trials and testings in our lives, we know that it has had to get past Him before it gets to us. And He has promised never to leave us nor to forsake us. He cares for us like there is nothing else that He has to do.

10:6 This is not the familiar word for a parable. It is an illustration that the Lord gave to the Pharisees which, if they understood it, would have completely changed their lives. As we have seen, it holds many

lessons for those who know the Lord. But we are told that “they understood not what things they were which He spake unto them.” These were probably facts about shepherds and sheep that they were all acquainted with because shepherds and sheep were such a major part of their society. But they didn't get it! And there is no record that anyone asked the Lord what His words meant. Cf. 1 Cor. 2:14, “But the natural man . . .”

But it was different with other Pharisees, wasn't it? The Apostle John alone gives us the story of Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. And we are given it in three installments: John 3, John 7, and John 19. Remember also the two publicans: Levi, or Matthew, who became one of the apostles (Matt. 9:9), and Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10. And who can forget another Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul (Acts 9).

We are to preach the Gospel to every creature. This is the general call of God. “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). But when those who are called are also chosen, this is the effectual call. They are the elect who come to Christ. But people can be very intelligent, very education, very proficient in their life work. But unless the Spirit of God works on their hearts, convicting them of sin and drawing them to Christ, they will go to their graves believing that the preaching of the Gospel is utter foolishness. Such were those Pharisees to whom the Lord was shining the light, but which they could not see.

10:7 We come here to the second part of our text. And we have #16 of the verily, verily's of our Lord. It is another special message of great importance which the Pharisees needed to pay careful attention to. “I am the door of the sheep,” not “of the sheepfold,” but “of the sheep.” We have here those very important words, ἐγὼ εἰμι, “I am.” So we not only have a strong double emphasis in “verily, verily, I say unto you,” but we can make this a triple emphasis (as always before) when the Lord said, “I am,” the pronoun with the verb. It means “I am” and no one else is. “I am” and I always have been, and always will be. I have a name that is uniquely mine: “I am the door of the sheep.”

It seems that with all of the other emphases that we have in this declaration that the Lord was making, there is a new and special emphasis on the words, “of the sheep.” Later on in this chapter at the feast of dedication, the Jews were after the Lord again. Beginning with verse 24 we see what “the Jews” said to the Lord, and how He responded to Him. See John 10:24-28:

24 Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.

25 Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.

26 But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

The Jews had not understood before, and here they acknowledge again that they had not understood the Lord. By “My sheep” the Lord was referring to the elect, those chosen to be Christ's before the foundation of the world. They alone are going to hear. They alone will believe. They alone will come to Christ because they will be convicted of their sins and believing, will be saved.

10:8 The Lord was not saying that everyone who had come before Him “were thieves and robbers,” but those who preceded Him who claimed to be the Messiah, or who paid allegiance to someone else, or who denied that He was the Messiah. These were very strong words, but they are consistent with what the Scriptures say about false teachers. Arthur Pink said,

Nothing seems so offensive to Christ as a false teacher of religion, a false prophet, or a false shepherd...

It is a notable fact that the severest denunciations which are to be found in the Scriptures are reserved

for false teachers (p. 111).

And then Pink referred to our Lord's words against the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23 where our Lord called them "blind guides . . . serpents" and a "generation of vipers." Pink reminds us also that John the Baptist also called "the Jews" "a generation of vipers," and that he asked them, "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" In 2 Corinthians 11:13 the Apostle Paul wrote about false teachers, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ." Like the sheep in the Lord's opening words in this chapter, "the sheep do not follow them," the strangers who were thieves and robbers who would use any tactic and go to any extreme, even what they did to the Lord Jesus when they were not satisfied until they saw Him dying on the Cross.

The history of the opposition to the Gospel is marked by deceit and violence. And there is growing evidence that such opposition is on the rise again today. But there are still "sheep" who must be reached with the Gospel, so we can be sure that our labor will not be in vain in the Lord.

10:9 Here we come to the key verse among the first ten verses of this chapter. The Lord reaffirms that He is the door. In some cases, the shepherds themselves would put their sheep in a fold, and then lie down at the entrance becoming a human "door" to protect their sheep. But the Lord is showing that all of this is an illustration of salvation.

The Lord repeats with the strongest emphasis: "I am the door." The words "by Me" are also in an emphatic position. It is only "by Me," that is, by the enabling grace of Christ that anyone can enter. There is only one way of salvation, just one door. Men must enter through Christ and by the power of Christ, *or stay outside*. It is alarming to here many leaders today, who ought to know better, that there may be other ways for people to be saved except through Christ. If that were possible, the Lord Who always spoke the truth would not have been able to say this. And if some can be saved some other way, why couldn't all be saved some other way so that the Son of God would never have had to come, or to die as He died. Christ came a Savior because there was no other way for sin to be forgiven, no other way for people to be assured of a place in heaven.

When the Lord spoke of *going in and out*, He was not talking about going in and out of salvation. Godet in his commentary gives an excellent description of what this means. He mentioned verses like Deuteronomy 28:6 where the Lord promised blessing to His people in Israel if they would be obedient to His Word. The verse tells us, "Blessed shalt thou be when you comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out." Psalm 121 also gives us this figure of speech. I am sure you remember that in that Psalm we are told that "the Lord is Thy Keeper." I will just read to you the last part of the Psalm, verses 5-8:

5 The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.

6 The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.

8 The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

Going and coming includes all that we do. In the case of going out where we find pastures, we are assured of the nourishment in pastures for the growth and strength of our souls, the abundant nourishment in the green pastures. Coming in we have complete security under the protection of our all-sufficient heavenly Father and our Savior.

Our passage concludes with the contrast between the false teacher, on the one hand, and the Lord Jesus, on the other hand. The thief is the one who would steal from us, kill us, and destroy. Of course the Devil is the Master of all of this, but he has numerous henchmen, If he could, he would take away all that we have in Christ. But while he cannot do that, he will try to turn us away from our Lord so as to rob us of the joy and blessing of our fellowship with Him.

The Lord Jesus, on the other hand, has come to give us life, and to take away the death, and that we might “have it more abundantly.” We all have life if we know the Lord. But do we have abundant life? One lexicon describes such a life as abundant in quantity and superior in quality. The repetition of the verb “have” in the present tense means to have and to continue to have this life in a continually growing way.

The Lord Jesus was not talking about some kind of a second blessing, but He was talking about a growing in our knowledge and fellowship with God and with our Lord Jesus Christ. He was talking about a growing understanding of our salvation and of all of the blessings bestowed upon us when we were first saved, which at the first we understood so little. He was talking about the peace and rest and comfort that we can experience in times of trial and testing. Once we have life, eternal life, we need to grow more and more in the likeness of our Savior. Our faith needs to be strengthened. Our walk needs to be more and more in the Spirit of God. Like the Queen of Sheba seeing all of the glory of Solomon and listening to the God-given wisdom that he had, she said that the half had not been told her. That is the way it is about knowing the Lord and walking with Him. The half was not told us. But we continue to discover new riches in the Word that we have not understood before, and to see the amazing faithfulness of our God even when we are not faithful to Him.

February 16, 2009

“I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11, 14).

The text for this “I am” of the Lord is John 10:11-33. (Read.)

By reading the whole tenth chapter of John we can easily see that there is a close connection between the Lord as the Door and the Lord as the Good Shepherd. The Lord prepared His listeners, and now His readers, that He was going to speak about “the door of the sheepfold.” He mentions “the shepherd of the sheep” in verse 2. “Sheep are mentioned twice in verse 3, and twice again in verse 4. The Lord was referring to the sheep twice in verse 5 by the preposition “they.” In verse 7 Jesus claimed to be “the door of the sheep.” And then, finally, in verse 8 He mentioned “sheep” again.

10:11 As we come to verse 11 we see that the Lord plainly declared, “I am the good shepherd.” While probably not many of us have had anything to do with shepherds, we know that a shepherd is one as the name suggests, who herds sheep. He tends them – protecting them, leading them, seeing that they have pasture and water, and so on. Now the Lord called Himself “the good shepherd.” The term suggests that there are bad shepherds. In verse 12 the Lord mentioned hirelings who were hired to assist the shepherd, but they showed that they were no true shepherds because when a wolf would come, the hirelings would flee.

Now the Lord did not mean that He was just a shepherd, and a good one, but *the one and only good Shepherd. Whatever title the Lord claims for Himself, He is always at the top of the list because He is the best! He is in a category all by Himself. There is none other who can even begin to compare with Him.*

But what did He mean by the word “good”? It is not related to the word we had on Sunday when I spoke about the goodness of God. The word used here is **καλός**. If the Lord had intended to say what we were talking about on Sunday, He would have used the word **ἀγαθός** because that could be correctly applied to the Lord also. What does the Greek adjective **καλός** tell us about the Lord? Trench in his book, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, said that it “expresses beauty,” but “beauty contemplated from a point of view especially dear to the Greek mind,” which is “the harmonious completeness, the balance, the proportion, and the measure of all the parts,” of course, speaking of our Lord's character (p. 389). Let me illustrate this with an example we have all had set before us recently in our government.

We have watched and listened as our new President has suggested people for his cabinet. He suggested a man whom he said was the best man available to because of his knowledge of finance, but then we find that he had not paid his own taxes for years. He was at least dishonest, and maybe even a crook. You could never say that he was a good man for the job. And he hasn't been the only one the President has nominated who had the same problem. One got the job; the other did not. We commonly hear of people who tell the truth, but they don't tell all of the truth, in which case they are liars.

It seems that when a person is running for a position in government, that members of the opposing party will try to dig up all of the dirt that they can about that person. The scribes and Pharisees were like that. If there had been anything wrong about our Lord, they would have found it. But the Lord faced the Pharisees squarely and asked, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" (John 8:46). The verb translated convinceth is an Old English word for *convict*. You can be sure that the Pharisees had done their homework on the Lord, but even up to and including the time of His death, the only witnesses that brought charges against the Lord were false charges.

The Lord Jesus Christ as the Shepherd of His people is an ideal Shepherd. All that it takes to make a "good" Shepherd, was true of Him. In fact, He is the One Who defines what a shepherd should be. He cannot improve because He is perfect.

I think that we will find in this passage great encouragement in these day when there is so much for us to be discouraged about, and as a first point we have our Lord's statement, "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." I believe there is some truth in this statement that we don't usually see. We know that as the Lord would explain later in verses 17 and 18, laying down His life meant that He would die for His sheep. But the Lord was not just talking about Himself here at this point in verse 11; he was talking about what a good shepherd will do. He will lay down His life for the sheep. This is what any good shepherd does. And to point out the general definition of a good shepherd, laying down his life, is in the present, continuous tense, meaning that a good shepherd actually lives his life for his sheep. We can be thankful that not every shepherd has actually to die for his sheep (although there probably have been many shepherds who have died trying to protect their sheep from some wild animal, or in seeking to keep thieves from stealing the sheep. What this verse is saying, I believe, that a good shepherd lives his life, he literally gives himself, for the sheep.

Now when you bring this truth over and apply it to our Lord Jesus Christ, remembering that we are His sheep, it means that the Lord as our Good Shepherd, actually lives His life for us. If a man was a shepherd in those days, day and night, the sheep were under his care. He was so busy with the sheep that he really didn't have time to do anything else.

That is the kind of care the Lord gives us. When David wrote the twenty-third Psalm, he began by saying, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." The Lord "want" means "lack." So "I shall not want" means that He so completely cares for us that we really don't have any needs. Paul said it like this: "But my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). This doesn't mean that we don't need to work, but it means that He gives me the work that I need. The Lord is the One Who is sufficient for every need that we have. Does this mean that if we get sick we don't go to a doctor. No, it doesn't mean that. But it does mean that the Lord is the One Who has given that doctor the training and the wisdom to know what to do to help me, so ultimately we can say with Psalm 121, "My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth." We need to see the Lord as the One Who is helping us, meeting our needs, guiding us and protecting us all of the time. When we were little children going to be, we were taught to pray, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep." A mother will often lay down to sleep when her baby sleeps, but the Lord never has to do that. While we sleep, who takes care of our children? The Lord does. And He does this twenty-four hours of every day. "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." How wonderful it

is that we have a shepherd who lives to take care of us. We are saved eternally because "He ever liveth to make intercession for us" (Heb. 7:25).

With all of the grim predictions we are hearing these days, let's take real encouragement in this. When I was a young child I remember that there were times when I cried myself to sleep worrying about what would happen to me if my Dad and Mother would die. I hadn't yet learned that I had a good Shepherd Who was taking care of me. "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. The value of one sheep is expressed in the story that the Lord told about losing one sheep out of a hundred. What did he do? He left the ninety and nine properly cared for and went looking for that lost sheep until he found it. See Luke 15:3-7. All of this shows how precious we are to Him.

To be sure the Lord gave His life for us when He died for us on the Cross, but He is also living for us, giving His life to care for, until we are finally save home in heaven.

10:12 Now a hireling is not like that. The shepherd will risk his life to care for the sheep, but not so with the hireling. He is working for a shepherd to get what the shepherd will pay him, But if and when a wolf comes he forgets the sheep in order to save his own life. This is where pastors need to beware because a pastor is a shepherd. And he needs to be careful that he is not just a hireling, but that he has the heart of a true shepherd.

10:13 No hireling will *care* for the sheep like a shepherd will. The verb that our Lord used here is the same verb that Peter used in 1 Peter 5:7 where he wrote, "Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." Sometimes "He careth for you" is translated, *It matters to Him about you.* And all of this applies to the smallest lamb in the flock as it does to the oldest sheep. God is not respecter of persons, nor of His sheep. All of us are of the greatest concern to our Shepherd.

10:14 Again the Lord said what He had said in verse 11. Repetition is always for emphasis. It puts away all doubts about our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. He really is the only true Shepherd and we belong to Him.

The Lord makes an emphasis here that is important for us to see. This will give us encouragement also. The word "sheep" does not appear in the original text. Instead the Lord uses *my own*, or "mine own." So the latter part of this verse can be translated, *I know my own, and my own know me.* Here the Lord shows delight in the fact that He knows that we are His, and in the fact that as His, we know Him. And this idea carries over into verse 15 - - -

10:15 to show that our relationship with Him is just like His relationship with the Father.

There is a simple poem that I have used before. It used to be very popular among the Lord's people. I don't remember if it was put to music or not, but it went like this:

Near, so very near to God, nearer I could not be;
For in the Person of His Son, I am as near as He.

And then those lines were followed with this:

Dear, so very dear to God, dearer I could not be;
For in the Person of His Son, I am as dear as He.

And so to show how near and dear we are to Him and to His Father, our Lord went on to say, "And I lay down My life for the sheep." Before He had said, "I give my life for the sheep"; now He says, "I lay down My life for the sheep." The first tells how constantly He cares for us; the second speaks of His death for us. This is what

theologians call, Limited Atonement, or Particular Redemption. When the Lord died on the Cross, He died for His sheep. He did not die for everyone, or everyone would be saved. Nobody is going to be in hell for whom Christ died. The death of Christ did not provide salvation for anyone who would believe, but He died to secure the salvation of all whom He knew, would believe. And how did He know who would believe? Because He had chosen them before the foundation of the world to be His. I am talking about the elect. We know that if God had left it up to us to come to Him, no one would ever have come. As the Scriptures say, "There is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11). And so God draws those to Himself whom He has chosen for salvation. The Apostle John said in John 6:44, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." But our Lord also said, just a few verses before that, that "all that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." And "in no wise" is a double negative which I have explained to you before, οὐ μή, means *never under any possibility*. Once a person is genuinely saved, there is not the slightest possibility that they will ever be lost!

I don't think that any of us who know the Lord will understand how much the Lord loves us, how much He delights in us – we will not be able to understand that until we get to heaven. But knowing this we need to ask ourselves, How much do we love Him? And how much do we delight in Him? Can we say with great joy and great peace, "The Lord is my Shepherd"?

When we speak of how the Lord delights in us, I am reminded of what Isaiah wrote from God concerning Israel in Isaiah 43:1,

1 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.

But now let us move on for more blessing to verse 16.

10:16 Remember that the Lord was speaking to Jews, primarily the Pharisees, but probably many Jewish people were listening to what He had to say. But now look at what He had to say.

"Other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also I must bring." Since the Lord was speaking primarily to Jews, we can assume that the Lord was talking about *Gentile sheep*. You see, you and I didn't become sheep when we were saved; we became sheep before the foundation of the earth, *i.e.*, before creation itself. That is when we were chosen. So the Lord was talking about us here in this verse. Please notice the word "must." It is the translation of a little Greek word, but a very powerful word: δεῖ. It speaks of *that which has to happen because it is sovereignly ordained of God*. It was used by our Lord back in John 9:4. See also John 3:7 and 3:30. In Luke 19:5 the Lord told Zacchaeus, "Today I must abide at thy house." Zacchaeus was one of the Lord's sheep.

We choose to be saved by the Lord, but we chose because He chose us first. We must not make the mistake that a lot of Christians make in thinking that the Lord is sovereign in everything but salvation. He is sovereign *especially in salvation*. The Apostle Paul wrote about salvation with these words which are found in 2 Timothy 2:8-10:

8 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel:

9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.

10 Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Salvation is all of God. He chose us, Christ died for us, the Spirit seeks us and draws us to Christ, and He saves us. But our salvation was secured when God chose us. The most important thing for us to remember about our world, is that there are still sheep out there who must be saved before the Lord will return. Reaching

them has to be of great concern to all of us.

Now notice in John 10:17 and 18 how the Lord expressed the sovereignty of the Father and Himself with respect to our Lord's death on the Cross. Even there the Members of the Godhead were in sovereign control over the death and resurrection of Christ. We need to read these verses before we read about the arrest, trial, suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord in any of the four Gospels. From a human standpoint it looked like the Lord's enemies were the victors, but it was there that God obtained and secured the greatest victory in all of history. All of history is His story of the triumph of the Godhead over sin and death, the Devil and hell.

In John 10: 19-21 we see the division that was caused among the Jews because of our Lord's teaching. And we have the same division today. But let us pick up the story again in verse 22.

10:22 This is the only time in all of Scripture that the feast of dedication is mentioned. And there is a wide difference of opinion as to what it refers. The most prominent idea is that it had to do with the rebuilding of the temple, but which temple is not certain. It is only important to us because it was a time when Jerusalem would have been crowded with Jews from all over Israel. We are told simply that it was in winter.

10:23 We are interested in this event primarily because Jesus was there.

10:24 As was usually the case, wherever Jesus was, "the Jews" were there too. And they were trying to get the Lord to say something that could be used against Him. And so they asked Him to tell them if He were the Christ, the Messiah.

10:25 The Lord said that He had told them, but they had refused to believe Him. And then the Lord reminded them of His works, which basically meant the miracles which He had performed (which was the main purpose that John had had in writing this Gospel). His miracles bore unmistakable evidence that He was, in the words of John 20:31, "the Christ, the Son of God." But more than that, it was that believing Who Jesus was, they would have life through His Name. Salvation and deliverance from an eternal hell was only through faith in Jesus and what He had come to do.

Then Jesus said a very significant thing about salvation, and this had to do with the fact that He was the Shepherd of the sheep, made up, as we have seen, by both Jews and Gentiles.

10:26 The Lord, the Son of God, knew that they had not believed because they were not His sheep. And He had made this clear to them. But their hearts were blind. Their ears were stopped. They heard the words which the Lord spoke, but they did not have the ability to understand the truth of God. This is why people, even today, either are indifferent to the preaching of the Gospel, or are hostile against it. We don't know who the sheep are, but God knows, and Christ knows, and the Spirit knows. And They are going to lead us to those we are to reach with the Gospel of the grace of God.

10:27 How can the sheep be identified? They hear the Lord's voice. They are responsive to the Word of God however it may come to them. The Lord knows who they are, and where they are. And the proof that they are sheep is that they follow the Lord. This means that they see their need of a Savior. They believe that Jesus is the only Savior. And they follow Him. This means that from that time on their lives are lived in accordance with the teaching of our Lord which is recorded for us in the written Word of God. The people who do not follow, have never really heard the Word. The following is the test of true salvation.

10:28 Salvation is a gift, not a reward. It is a personal gift from a personal Savior to a personal believer.

Salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ. This means that all of salvation is from God through Christ. Our faith even is a gift from God. So is our repentance. Robert McCheyne wrote in his diary many years ago, "Clear conviction of sin is the only true origin of dependence on another's righteousness" (p. 22). When we see our sin as it really is, all hope that we would ever be able to save ourselves, is gone.

The Apostle Paul gave Timothy excellent advice when he wrote the following words to him, words that are preserved for us in 2 Timothy 2:24-26:

24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,
25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;
26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

When the Lord gives us eternal life we have His promise that we "shall never perish." And would you believe that here again in the word "never" we have οὐ μὴ. If salvation were dependent upon us and our behavior, or upon what other human beings could do for us, οὐ μὴ could never be used. We would have no security at all. But our salvation depends upon Jesus and upon God. The Lord has us in His hand, and no one, not even the forces of hell, can force Him to open His hand. In addition, we are in the Father's hand. We have double security, security from all past offences, as well as for all to come. The Father and Jesus Christ are united in not only saving us, but in keeping us.

When we talk about salvation, it is undoubtedly true that we do not spend enough time thinking about the fact that salvation is "eternal life." We will never perish. We are in Christ's hand and in God's hand, and no one can snatch us away. And this includes us. We may deserve to be cast away. Some may say, and have said, "Yes, but we can take ourselves away." The Lord said, No one can snatch us out of His hand, and that includes us.

Concl: What greater security than to have these words from the Lord Jesus Himself. I know that God has given us His Word through men in such a way that what they have written from the beginning of Genesis to the end of The Revelation is all the very Word of God. But aren't you thankful that they have given us the very words of God and the very words of Christ. The Apostle John here in chapter 10 has given us the very words of Christ as He spoke so lovingly of us, His sheep, delighting in us, when we are so far from deserving what the Lord has done for us, and what He continues to do in us and through us, that you would think it would be a blot upon His character to have His Name associated in any way with ours. But He not only claims us for His very own, but He assures us that He will never let us go. And He will never be perfectly satisfied until we are all safely at home in heaven, safe forever from the ravages of the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

Let me close our study of John 10 with Paul's words concerning our salvation in Romans 5. I will just read verses 6 through 11:

6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.
7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.
8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.
10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.
11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

February 23, 2009

“I am the Resurrection and the Life” (John 11:25-26).

I looked back over my notes on the miracles of our Lord in the Gospel of John, the study which we had just completed before we started on our present study, also in John, on the I am's of our Lord. It appears that it was on the last Tuesday in November and the first Tuesday in December (2008) when we studied the miracle when the Lord Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. That miracle was the seventh, and usually the last, of the miracles which other teachers have studied the miracles. Now in the study of the I am's of the Lord, this same chapter, John 11, gives us the fifth of our Lord's I am's: “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” So we can thank the Lord that for the second time in the space of not quite three months, we have the privilege of getting back into this chapter which brings so many wonderful truths before us. And, of course, it is the second look that we are having at this wonderful claim of our Lord: “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” All of these I am's are actually titles, or we could consider them names of our Lord – “The Bread of life,” “the Light of the world,” “the Door,” and “the good Shepherd.” And the “I am” before each one of these indicates that He is the only One Who can claim these, that they describe Who He always has been, Who He is now, and Who He always will be. And although it is obvious in John's Gospel, these were not titles or names which were given to Him by others, but they are names which He gave to Himself. And, since He is the Christ, the Son of God, we know that each one is true.

Now we all know that the setting of the revelation that Jesus is “the Resurrection and the Life” is given to us in John, chapter 11, in connection with the death of a very dear friend of our Lord, Lazarus of Bethany, who had two sisters, Martha and Mary. Their home was in Bethany just about two miles from Jerusalem.

- 11:1** The opening verse tells us that Lazarus was sick. We are also told that he had two sisters, Mary and Martha, and that they apparently lived together in Bethany.
- 11:2** This verse identifies Lazarus' sister Mary as the one who anointed the Lord's feet with precious ointment, and then dried His feet with her hair. This is recorded in the first three verses of John 12.
- 11:3** Here we learn that Lazarus' sisters sent someone to Jesus to tell him, “Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick.” They felt that this was all that it would take for the Lord to drop everything that He might be doing and come immediately to heal Lazarus.
- 11:4** When the Lord got the message, he simply said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son God might be glorified thereby.”
- 11:5** The Apostle John was explaining in this verse that the Lord did not delay because of any lack of love for Lazarus or his two sisters, but *because He did love them!* We are often inclined to question God's love for us when our prayers are not answered. This gives us something very important not only to think about, but to remember when we come into times of trial.

Last night when Lucille and I had Bible reading and prayer together, we read Isaiah 55. There we came across those two verses which apply to everything that God does, doing it not in our way nor in what we expect that the Lord would do in our circumstances. I am referring to Isaiah 55:8-9:

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

God's ways are not only different from our ways, nor does He think about things the way we do, but we can

always count on the fact that His thoughts and His ways are infinitely better than ours – “as the heaven are higher than the earth.”

11:6 We are told where the Lord was. We learn that in John 10:40. Because the Jews were seeking “to take Him, He had gone east with His disciples, and had crossed the Jordan to be in a safe place. Instead of going immediately to help Lazarus, the Lord stayed longer where He was. This was not at all what Mary and Martha had expected that He would do. But we know that the Lord's purpose was to glorify God, not to respond immediately to meet Lazarus' need. And, of course, as we read on, we see that the God and Christ were both to be glorified, not just by healing a sick man but by raising him from the dead, especially after he had been dead for four days.

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11:7 After the two days Jesus announced to His disciples that He wanted to go back into Judea again where Bethany was located.

11:8 I think I can safely say that the disciples were horrified when Jesus announced to them that He was ready to go back, actually, to Bethany, and they told Him so!

11:9 It is generally thought that in this verse the Lord made a statement which had a double meaning. In those days they did not have clocks or watches like we do. Time was divided into day and night, or light and darkness. There was a proverbial saying that it is better to walk in the light than in the darkness. You are more likely to stumble in the night than in the day. However, the Lord seemed to be thinking about the day as the time in which He had to work. The disciples were fearful that the Lord would lose His life. The Lord, however, knew that His hour had not yet come. He still could walk in the light.

But moving on to verse 10 . . .

11:10 Here the Lord seems to have been thinking about the people of the world who are walking in spiritual darkness because they, or he has “no light in him.” This is why expositors think that the Lord was mindful of the work that the Father had given Him to do. This would tie in with the Lord's words found back in John 9:4-5:

4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

11:11 In this verse the Lord turned again to speak of Lazarus, calling him, “Our friend.” He said that “our friend Lazarus sleepeth,” By this statement our Lord showed that He knew that Lazarus was at that very minute, dead. To awaken him out of his sleep meant that the Lord was going to raise Him from the dead.

11:12 The disciples thought that the Lord was talking about physical sleep, and expressed the feeling that he would get better if he were sleeping.

The Lord's I am's in John's Gospel (25)

11:13 But years later when John was writing about all of this he realized that the Lord had been speaking of Lazarus' death. And He said so in verses 14 and 15 He said so.

11:14 He told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead." But then in verse 15 the Lord said an amazing thing to them.

11:15 The Lord's word in this verse indicates that the Lord had a real purpose in all of this for His disciples. Remember that the disciples needed a greater understanding as to just Who the Lord was. So there were purposes for the disciples as well as for Mary and Martha in all of this. And He wanted His disciples to go with Him to be with Mary and Martha.

11:16 None of the disciples said anything except for Thomas. He was called Didymus which means that he was a twin. Thomas felt that the Jews would get hold of the Lord, and that all of them would die with Him.

11:17 When they all arrived, they found that Lazarus had been in the grave for four days. The words "Jesus found" may be an indication of our Lord's humanity. He had known that Lazarus was dead (evidence of our Lord's Deity, but he learned how long Lazarus had been in his grave after He got back to Bethany.

11:18 Bethany was about two miles from Jerusalem.

11:19 Many of their fellow Jews had come to comfort Martha and Mary.

11:20 Somehow the word got to Martha that Jesus was coming, and she went to meet Him. We are told that Mary was in the house, and so she did not know that the Lord was coming.

11:21 She greeted the Lord probably the same way that we would have, with the words, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." When Mary finally heard that the Lord was coming, she said the very same thing. See verse 32. The two sisters had probably said this over and over to each other in their sorrow.

11:22 Mary added, "But I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." She did not say that she knew that the Lord could even then raise Lazarus from the dead, but she may have been thinking it although she did not have the faith to express such a thing. The Lord had raised other people from the dead, but no one who had been dead four days.

11:23 Jesus responded to her, "Thy brother shall rise again."

11:24 Martha indicated that she had been well taught in her response to the Lord. She said, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

And then it was that the Lord spoke those memorable words in which the Lord added to the memorable words in this fifth of His I am's:

11:25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

11:26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11:25-26).

Now I do not plan to go beyond our Lord's encounter with Martha because it was to her, and ministering to her, that our Lord spoke those wonderful words in verses 25 and 26.

What was Martha's response? You have it in verse 27:

11:27 "She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."

Now we all know that Mary heard that the Lord was coming, and that she hurried to meet Him, fell at His feet, and said to Him what Martha had said. But she was weeping. As they went to the grave, Jesus wept also. John said that all of this caused the Lord to groan in His spirit and to be deeply troubled. But the Lord, after a brief prayer, called Lazarus to come out of the grave. And he came! And John the Apostle has told us in relating this amazing miracle that many of the Jews who saw what Jesus did, "believed on Him" (v. 45), meaning that many were saved.

Now let us go back especially to the Lord's dealing with Mary, and those wonderful word which He spoke to her.

One thing is very clear as we study the Gospels. It is that the Lord never lost sight of His mission in coming into the world. Nothing could remove it from His mind. Nothing could turn Him away from it, as the disciples, and Peter especially tried to do.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is a perfect picture of the Gospel, and what is ahead as far as salvation is concerned. Martha was well taught. She knew that there was going to be a great resurrection of believers in the end time. She also knew that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of God, which she had come into the world." But those were little more than doctrines which she had been taught, but she had not drawn from them for the comfort of her own soul in this time of a great sorrow. And many of us are like that. That is the reason that we need to note carefully what the Lord was doing in the lives of Martha and Mary.

There is no question but that Martha was saved. There is not doubt but that Mary was saved. And there is no doubt but that Lazarus was saved. The sisters described Lazarus to the Lord as "him whom Thou lovest." They all loved the Lord, and the Lord loved all of them. The problem with Martha, and probably with Mary as well is that they had not seen the Lord in His relationship with them. She knew that there was going to be a great resurrection in the last day, but she had never understood that Jesus was that resurrection, and that He was also the life which follows that resurrection.

Notice the words which He spoke in verse 25: "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Before any of us knew the Lord we were dead in trespasses and sins. The Apostle Paul said in writing to the Ephesian believers told them this, that we have been made alive in Him, "quicken together with Christ" and that we have been "raised up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:1, 5, 6). Salvation itself is a resurrection. We have been brought out of death into life, eternal life. *Life is the main theme of the I am's of Christ.*

What kind of bread is the Lord? He is "the bread of life" (John 6:35). He is "the bread of God . . . which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world" (John 6:33).

What does it mean that our Lord is "the light of the world"? It means, as the Lord Himself said, that "he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

What could Christ say that He was "the door"? He answered that question with these words: "By Me if any man enter in he shall be saved . . . I am come that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly"

(John 10:9, 10).

Why did the Lord call Himself “the good Shepherd”? Because “the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.” “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish” (John 10:11, 28).

In our text for today our Lord is “the Resurrection and the life.” We have been raised out of death into the very life of God.

And when we get next week to John 14:6 we will learn that our Lord is “the way, the truth, and the life.” And then last of the I am's is “I am the true vine.” We are the branches. And it is only because of our living relationship with the vine that we can possibly bear fruit. The life of the vine is in the branches, and so the Lord said, “Without Me ye can do nothing.

All of the I am's of our Lord have to do with the life that He has given to us, *but it continues to be the life that we have in Him.*

But now let us go back to our text in John 11:25-26.

But what happens to a Christian when he dies. He continues to live because of his relationship to Him Who is “the Resurrection and the Life. The body dies, but the child of God passes through physical death into the reality of life eternal. Those of our loved ones who have died in this life, are not in the grave. They are immediately with the Lord, and they will never die. Do you remember what I have told you about the word “never”? Here it is again and it is οὐ μὴ. “And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die!” If the Lord delays His coming, we will pass through the valley of the shadow of death, but it is to the fulness of a life that is eternal. It will never end.

But let me point out before I close that there is one word which is used three times in the two verses of our text. Let me read the verses to you again to show you what they are. (Read John 11:25-26.)

To believe is to have faith, isn't it? It is not just to believe that there is a God, or that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but it is to have faith in Him; it is to trust Him. Remember what we saw last Sunday: “the fruit of the Spirit is . . . FAITH.”

The Lord Jesus asked Martha if she believed what He was telling her. He wanted to confess with her mouth the Lord Jesus, confess that God would raise Him from the dead, and raise her in Him, delivered forever from the darkness of sin and death, to live forever with Him and in Him. When we are saved, a living relationship is established between us and Him which will never be broken.

Let us all answer this question: “Believest thou this?” And let us not hesitate to ask each other what the Lord asked Martha, knowing that she did, but wanting to hear her say so.

March 2, 2009

“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6).

The first six verses of John 14 are among the most familiar, and the most beloved, of all of the passages in the Word of God. Only the Lord knows how many times these words of the Lord Jesus have been used to comfort the people of God in their afflictions, or how many times the sixth verse has been used to draw sinners to faith in Christ. John 3:16 has often been called *the Gospel in a nutshell*. The same could be said about John 14:6.

We have the Gospel in these verses, and we have the promise of the Lord's return in these verses. So they really cover the whole scope of the Christian life. And, like all of the other I am's of our Lord, they point us immediately to our Lord Jesus Christ. These are His words. This is His claim. No other person can truthfully say, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

But we need to notice the setting of these verses. We find this in chapter 13.

Although the Apostle John did not record for us the first observance of the Lord's Supper, yet we know that as the Lord met with His disciples in the Upper Room, this is where He initiated what was to be throughout the history of the Church, the way in which they were to remember the Lord's death until He returns. But the disciples did not yet understand that He was going to die, and after that, that He would leave them. Let me read to you John 13:33-38. And for Peter to be told that he would deny the Lord three times before the cock would crow the next morning, was especially painful to him. Truly as chapter 14 begins the disciples are "troubled," troubled in heart, which means deeply and genuinely troubled. In fact, even after what the Lord said to the disciples in the first six verses, they continued to be troubled because in verse 27 He repeated these same words, "Let not your heart be troubled."

14:1 What does "troubled" mean? "Troubled" is actually a good translation of the verb which the Lord used. They were in turmoil, agitated, disturbed by what the Lord had told them. They couldn't imagine what life would be without the Lord. It is a word which describes how our insides feel when we are upset by some bad news. Matthew Henry said that the Lord knows not only "how we are afflicted, but how we stand affected under our afflictions, and how near they lie to our hearts." This is a good example of what the Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount in connection with prayer. The Lord does not have to wait for us to tell Him our needs, because "the Father knoweth what things [we] have need of, before [we] ask Him." And if the Father knows our needs, so does the Lord.

The Lord's word to His disciples indicate that they were already troubled, but "let not your heart be troubled" was a command that they were to stop being in a troubled state of heart and mind. They were not troubling themselves, but they had been troubled by what the Lord had been saying to them. That is the way it is with most of our troubles and worries. We didn't trouble ourselves, but we were troubled by the effect such news would have upon us. If you look at most of the things that worry us, we don't deliberately try to be worried about them, *but that is the effect that unpleasant things that we hear have upon us*. It was what the Lord told them that troubled them. That is just the way the we humans react to bad news. The Lord was not blaming them for the reaction they had to what He had told them, but He was telling them how to deal with that which troubled their hearts. How were they to do this?

It seems that the only way they could have peace was for the Lord to say that, in view of their reaction to His words, He would not go away after all. He would change His plans. But the Lord could not change His plans. He had not come to the earth to stay. The Father had sent Him on a mission to secure the salvation of those whom the Father had given to Him (as we learn from His prayer in John 17). The Lord had come to die. Then He would be raised, would return to His Father, but later would come back, not to stay on earth, but to take them to be where He was! And He was going to leave them by way of His own death first. Then after His resurrection, with His work on the Cross completed, He would leave them again.

As I read this I can be very sympathetic with them, can't you? I have often wondered what it would be like to have the Lord with me physically. I am sure that if that could ever happen to me, I would be "troubled" to have Him tell me that He was going to leave Me and that I wouldn't be able to follow Him. I know that He is with us, and that He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us, but I'm like the little boy whose mother put him to bed, but he didn't want his mother to shut out the light, leave, and close the door. She explained to him that

the Lord would be with him, but he responded by saying, "Yes, but I want somebody with skin on him."

But the Lord did have an answer for the disciples. Do you see what it is? He said, "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me." Now to believe is to have faith. The disciples needed to trust the Lord that what He had said that He was going to do, was the right thing. After all, if the Lord tells us something that is not true, or if He makes a mistake in what He does, it would be the first time ever that He had lied, or it would be the first time ever that He has made a mistake. In either case it would have been sin, and God never has sinned, and He never will sin. He is incapable to sin, and so is the Lord Jesus Christ. If you believe that the Lord Jesus could sin because He became a Man, you don't really believe that He is the Son of God. Let me say again that the Son of God Who became a Man, was just as incapable of sinning as He had been before He was born in Bethlehem. If He could have sinned, He would have sinned, but then He could not have become our Savior. He was the Lamb of God without blemish and without spot.

Now the two words translated "believe" in John 14:1 are spelled exactly alike. And anyone who has studied Greek knows, therefore, that they could both be simply statements of fact, "You believe in God, and you believe in Me. Or they both could be commands, "Believe in God; believe in Me also." Or you could be a command and the other a statement of fact, "Believe in God, you already believe in Me." Or the first could be a statement of fact, and the second could be a command. So the student of Scripture is faced with the question, Which is it?

Well, I believe that the KJV has it right. It seems to me that the Lord was saying, You believe in God (He was not doubting their faith in God), but now you need to trust Me the way you trust God. The disciples would not question anything that God said; now, although they were "troubled" by what the Lord was telling them, they needed to put the same faith in the words of Jesus that they had put in the words of God.

That's the way we all should be, shouldn't we? The Lord Jesus is not going to say the wrong thing, or make a promise that He cannot, or will not, keep. So the cure for trouble hearts is faith in God and faith in Christ. We need to simply trust the Lord. If He would leave the disciples, He is still going to take care of them. And as He went on to say in chapters 14, 15, 16, He would going to send the Holy Spirit of God Who would abide with them, all of them, each of them, forever! The world's biggest problem is SIN, and the greatest need of the child of God is FAITH – faith in what, or Whom? Faith in God. Faith in Christ. Faith in the Holy Spirit. And this kind of faith comes from the Word of God, or the Word of Christ, or the Word of the Holy Spirit. We don't read the Word of God to decide what we are going to believe, or what we are not going to believe. We read the Word of God *knowing* that we can believe it all! Our problem in reading the Word is not to distinguish what we can believe, and what we can't believe, but our problem in reading the Word is understanding what we believe. But "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Long ago it was written in Psalm 119:165, "Great peace have they which love thy law (Thy Word), and nothing shall offend them." The NASB translated that last part of this verse, "and nothing causes them to stumble."

The disciples had a long way to go in seeing their faith grow. But so do we! They were stumbling all over the place because they were not trusting the blessed Lord Jesus the way they needed to. They could imagine getting into all kinds of trouble if the Lord left them. And they were right IF THEY WERE NOT TRUSTING HIM. If you haven't read *Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges, you need to read it. And those of us who have read it need to read it again. But let us all remember that the Lord was telling His disciples that the way to have rest and peace, and to keep from having hearts in all kinds of turmoil, troubled hearts, is simply to believe Him, to trust Him. It sounds easy, but it is impossible to trust the Lord as we should apart from His grace.

But now let us go on to see how the Lord emphasized the truth that we have seen in verse 1. In verse 2 the Lord told His disciples where He was going, and what He was going to be doing. In verse 3 He told them that

He would be coming again, and why. Then in verse 4, 5, and 6 the Lord's teaching, and His response to Thomas' question, had to do with "the way." So let us look now to see what the Lord said to the disciples about where He was going.

14:2 It was at the end of this verse that the Lord told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them. And where would that be? "In my Father's house." Now who lives in the "Father's house?" Well, let me answer that question by reminding all of us about the houses we live in. For whom did you buy your house, or the houses you have lived in, say, since you have been married. And if you are not married, who did your parents have in mind when they got the house that they lived in. Well, we all know that our parents, or we as parents, got a house *for the family*. We didn't get houses for all of our relatives, or for anyone who happened to come along. We got a house to make it a home *for our family*. So as the Lord spoke to His disciples about His going away, He said in so many words, I am going to get "my Father's house" ready for you. "I go to prepare a place for you. So what was implied in all of this. Well, He was thinking of His disciples, and all of us down to the present day as the children of God. Now we have homes for our children. They grow up, get married, and establish homes for their children. Now our children leave our homes and establish their homes, but in the family of God we are not home yet. But our elder Brother has gone to His Father's house to get ready for us. And one by one we leave this life to go home. That is a wonderful thought, isn't it? The Lord Jesus was going to the Father's house to get ready for our arrival. And He said, "In my Father's house are many mansions." The word "mansions" means a dwelling place.

When we bought our first home one of the main things we did in planning that home was to make sure that we had a place for each one of our four children to sleep. Now the Father has chosen His children. We are the elect of God. When our children were born we had to take what the Lord gave us, and we were very happy with each one as they came along. But our heavenly Father has chosen all of us ahead of time. He knows just how many places He needs to house all of His children. Now I don't know what it means that the Lord has gone to prepare a place for us, but it gives the idea that only the best will be suitable in the eyes of the Lord for the family of God. It seems like we are all going to be together as one happy and holy family. Our Savior has gone to make sure that everything is in readiness for our arrival. David Brown says in his commentary that there will be "room for all, and a place for each." You and I can be sure that the finest house or mansion on earth could never begin to compare with the place that the Lord has gone to prepare for us. Doesn't it get you a little excited to think about what it all is going to mean. It will be the perfect home for a perfect people prepared by a perfect Savior and supervised and provided for by a perfect heavenly Father. "I go to prepare a place for you." Take from these words how our Father and our Savior and the Holy Spirit are anticipating with the greatest delight when we are all home. And to be received by faith, the Lord said, "If it were not so, I would have told you." People often make promises that they cannot keep. Or we are seeing today how our nation's economy throws everything in question. Politicians make promises that they often know that they cannot keep. But the word of our Savior is sure and certain.

But now look at verse 3.

14:3 But where is this house, and how are we going to get there? Now the Lord is thinking about the final and complete gathering of the family of God. And so He said that since He was going to prepare a place for the family, He personally would come again, to receive the family to be with Him, that where He is, the other members of the family will be.

Now when you think of how grieved the disciples were that the Lord was leaving them, at this point we see that the Lord is so concerned that we be where He is, that this is how He describes heaven. Now which is better, to have the Lord physically present with us here on earth with all of the sin and troubles that are connected with this life, or for us to be where He is, in all of that eternal perfection, where there is no sin, no sickness, no pain,

no death, nothing that is the product of sin which we have here on earth? There is no question about the answer is there. For eternity, we want to be with Him where He is instead of having Him with us here on earth.

The language of verse 3 describes exactly how Paul predicted that the coming of the Lord would be in his first epistle to the church at Thessalonica, chapter 4, verses 13 through 18:

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Notice how Paul describes where we will be. To be it will be in heaven, but Paul did not use the word "heaven," although he could have, but instead he said, "And so shall we ever be with the Lord." And Paul said in Philippians that "to depart and to be with Christ," not just to go to heaven, "is far better." See Phil. 1:23.

14:4 Finally, the Lord said, "And whither I go, and the way ye know." Notice the emphasis on "the way."

But as we learn in verse 5, Thomas disagreed with the Lord. And we need to be sympathetic with him because we might have asked the Lord the same question if we had lived then.

What did Thomas say?

14:5 He said, "We know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" That sounded reasonable enough. If they didn't know where the Lord was going, how could they know how to get there? And if they had realized what the Lord was talking about, it would still be a problem to know how to get there.

14:6 And here the Lord said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father, but by Me." This statement is all emphatic. We have already learned how emphatic "I am" is. But we have "the way," meaning the only way; "the truth," meaning absolute truth, "and the life," meaning eternal life..

Several expositors remind us that earlier the Lord Jesus had said, "I am the Door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9). Here in 14:6 He said, "I am the Way." He is not just one way out of many ways. He is the only way. There is no way of getting to God and to heaven except through Christ.

One teaching that is being taught in many places, and even by some prominent leaders among Christians, is the idea that there could be, under certain circumstances, like with people who have never heard the Gospel, who could be saved some other way. Could it be through Allah, or Buddha? Could it be by good works? What is another way? There is none. Jesus Christ is the only Way to God. He is the only way to heaven. There is no other Savior, no other way of salvation. And it is blasphemous to even suggest that there might be. If anyone could be saved apart from the Cross of Christ, then why couldn't anyone be saved with out Christ. God sent His Son to die for the salvation of sinners. Peter made that very clear when He proclaimed in Jerusalem,

12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other Name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

When the Lord was teaching that no one could be saved unless the Father drew him to Christ, there were many who professed to be disciples of the Lord who "turned and walked no more with Him. Then He turned and asked His disciples if they would leave Him too, to which Peter replied,

John 6:68-69

68 . . . Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

69 And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

Cf. also Romans 5:1-2:

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Even John 3:16 indicates that there is no other Savior but Jesus Christ. Cf. Also John 5:24:

24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

And read 1 John 5:11-12:

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

But Jesus is also "the Truth." He not only tells the truth; He is the Truth. All teaching must be accepted or rejected in the light of His teaching Who is "the Truth." And this applies to what John had written at the beginning of John 14. This is why the Lord appealed to those in His day to believe on Him to trust Him. He must be believed when He taught that He was going to prepare a place for them, and that He would come against to receive them to Himself so that they could be where He was. This is the truth of God. And the very fact that His word is believed concerning His return, is further evidence that it is a living truth.

And He is "the Life," eternal life, the One Who guarantees that all of the Word will be fulfilled, that every promise is secured by His life, and that those who believe in Him have life. He delivers his people from death, and becomes their very life. Cf. John 10:10, 27-29. See also Col. 3:1-4; Gal. 2:20.

No one comes to salvation except through Christ, and no one will make it to heaven except through the living Lord Jesus Christ. In closing repeat John 14:6.

March 9, 2009

"I am the true vine" (John 15:1, 5).

We can consider this statement, and the way in which the Lord developed His teaching upon it, as a parable. The vine and its branches illustrate a believer's relationship with Christ. This is brought out even more clearly in verse 5 where the Lord said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches.

You will notice in the last verse of chapter 14 that the Lord Who had been teaching His disciples in the Upper Room, said to them, "Arise, let us go hence." So many think (and I am among them) that at this point the Lord and His disciples left the Upper Room to go to the Garden of Gethsemane, and that as they went they passed possibly a lone vine, or possibly a field of vine, which led to the parable that we have in chapter 15.

Now the object of the vine and its branches is fruitfulness. And the condition which makes fruitfulness possible, is the relationship between the vine and the branches. That relationship is described in this chapter as abiding. And that is brought out very clearly in verse 4. (Read.)

One thing we have to learn about parables is that they usually teach one main thought. So, when we try to take

every detail in a parable, and press them all to what can be said about them, we run into trouble. I mention this at the beginning of our study of this "I am" of the Lord to say that the Lord was not teaching here that a child of God can lose his salvation. The eternal nature of salvation has been brought out by the Apostle John many times in his Gospel. For example, let me take you back to the "I am" that we had in John 10. After claiming twice that He was "the good Shepherd" (in vv. 11, 14), the Lord said this beginning with verse 27:

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand (John 10:27-29).

And then we have the same truth, that salvation is eternal, in John 11:25-26 where the Lord said to Martha, Lazarus' sister,

25 . . . I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

Even our Lord's words in John 3:16 to Nicodemus indicate that salvation is eternal.

So the Bible never contradicts itself. That is one of the most amazing features about the Bible. Actually the oneness of all of Scripture is one of the greatest evidences that the Bible is the Word of God. God never changes, nor does His word teach conflicting truths.

So when we read in verse to that the Lord said, "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit he taketh away," and in verse 6,

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned,

the Lord was not speaking of the loss of salvation, but He was just saying what every farmer did each season in pruning away fruitless branches to give more life to the branches that were bearing fruit. So don't pay any attention to those who try to use this passage to teach that a true believer can lose his salvation. That never is possible.

So I repeat that this parable was meant to emphasize the fruitfulness of Christians as branches who are vitally related to the Vine, Who is our Lord, and that relationship is spoken of as *abiding*. The Greek word for *abide* is used in verses 4 (3x), 5, 6, 7 (2x), 9, 10 (2x), and 16. In verse 9 it is translated "continue," and in verse 16 "remain," but they are all the same Greek verb, **μένω**.

The main text for this "I am" is John 15:1-17. (Read).

Now let us go back to verse 1.

15:1 Jesus is not really a vine, nor is God, His Father, really a farmer, or a vine dresser. But they are pictured here by the Lord as such to teach us, first, about the relationship between Him and His Father, and ultimately about our relationship as the people of God to both of them, and to each other. This gives us a mental picture of what the Lord intended to teach His disciples, and through what John has written, what the Lord wanted all of us to learn. How wonderful it is when we get down to verse 4 that we are the branches of such a vine, and under the care of such a Vinedresser.

15:2 We are familiar with the point that is made throughout the Bible that not everyone who professes to be a child of God, actually is a child of God. We see that in the parable of the wheat and the tares. We see it in the parable of the soils. All four received the seed, or the Word. In some cases it actually began to produce

what seemed to be true growth. But only one of the four soils really was fruitful. Judas was an example of even an apostle who was not saved. And the Lord said as He was concluding His Sermon on the Mount that:

21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matt. 7:21-23).

So that as a husbandman, or vinedresser, would go through his field of vine, carefully cutting of the branches which were not going to be productive, he also would purge, cleanse, wash, the branches that looked like they were going to be fruitful. In a day before there were sprays, water was used to keep the branches clean from bugs which could cut down on the fruit.

5:3 At this point the Lord departed temporarily from his parable to make a special application to this disciples. Just as the vinedresser would clean his plants with water, the Lord said to His disciples, "Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you." This is one of the primary purposes of teaching the Word. It cleanses us. It purges away sin. So what the Lord said in this verse would apply in this instance to the teaching He had been doing in chapters 13 and 14.

Now this ought to remind us of what the Lord had done to His disciples while they were in the Upper Room. He had washed their feet. It was customary for someone to do this when they would come in off of the dusty roads. It would clean their feet, and be refreshing to those who may have been weary by walking on the roads.

In the Upper Room where the Lord had gathered with His disciples, there was no host. The person to whom this room belonged was not there, and so there was no host, or hostess, to do the foot washing. None of the disciples prepared to do it, and so John 13:4 and 5 tell us that the Lord laid aside his outer garment, took a towel and a bason of water, and prepared to wash the disciples feet and to dry them with the towel that He had. None of the disciples seemed to object until He got to Peter. And Peter said to the Lord, "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" I would have felt like Peter. I should have been washing the Lord's feet instead of having Him wash mine. Well, the Lord responded by saying, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." Peter persisted with His objection and told the Lord, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." But then the Lord said to Peter in response, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." At that point Peter changed completely, and said to the Lord, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Rather than have anything separate him from the Lord, then Peter said, in effect, "Give me a complete bath." Then the Lord said an especially interesting thing. He said, "He that is washed" (and the Lord used the verb, bathed, and by this the Lord was speaking of salvation) – "He that is bathed, needed not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit."

The symbolism of what the Lord said is very important for us to understand. It meant that once you are saved, bathed from head to foot, you only need to be careful about your feet, your walk, the way you live. Now in our lives as Christians it is the Word of God which cleans our feet. And like our Lord said it is the "spoken" Word. God speaks to us through His Word. And therefore as we hear it for ourselves by reading, or if we hear it from others, we need to respond to, and in so doing we are cleansed. In Psalm 119:9 we read this question, and its answer:

9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word.

Now it appears that when the Lord spoke the words of John 15:3 He was giving His disciples the main point of His parable in saying that in their daily lives, their walk, they needed to pay the closest attention to their fellowship with Himself. And so for the first time in this chapter, in verse 4, the Lord used the word "abide" three

times, a fact which in itself indicates that this is what was primarily upon the heart of the Lord.

15:4 (Read this very important verse, slowly and thoughtfully.)

We have a responsibility to make sure that we are abiding in Christ. The extent to which we abide in Him will to a great degree determine the extent to which He abides in us. And we are to abide in Him because we are just as helpless to bear fruit by ourselves as a branch of a vine would be if it were not connected with the vine. And the Lord's concluding words in this verse ought ever to be in our minds and hearts: "Without Me ye can do nothing." Our relationship with the Lord is to constantly have our closest attention. True, lasting fruit is impossible if we are not living in fellowship with the Lord. The branches of the vine are weak in themselves, and have to be propped up. Our strength lies in our consciousness of our own weakness and our need to depend upon the Lord. A fruitful life is just as impossible for us, if we do not abide in Christ, as it would be to expect fruit from a branch of a vine if it were not vitally connected with the vine.

It was at approximately the same time that the Apostle John wrote his Gospel, that he wrote 1, 2 and 3 John, as well as "the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ." This theme of abiding in Christ was prominent in 1 John, and probably was written as a kind of a commentary on our Lord's discourse with His disciples such as we have especially in John 15. It is very clear that from the Gospel and from 1 John that abiding in Christ speaks of a daily, moment by moment, fellowship with Christ. And remember that the word "fellowship" speaks not only of a right relationship with our Lord, but a participation in all that our Lord is just as a branch is constantly drawing upon the life of the vine.

In the first chapter of 1 John the Apostle John declared in 1 John 1:3:

3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

But it is not until we get into chapter 2 that we run into this very important word *abide*. But I think it will help us to understand what is involved in abiding if we see a part of what John wrote in his first epistle.

For example, in 1 John 2:6 the Apostle John wrote, "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." If we are abiding in Christ, it will show up in the way we walk. Walking means how we live – what we do, and what we don't do, how we talk, how we think, where we go, and where we don't go. Our walk has to do with everything about us. And to walk like the Lord Jesus walked is only possible if we are living in intimate fellowship with the Lord.

In verse 24 of 1 John 2 we have a very important verse on abiding in Christ. This is what it says:

24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

Here the word "abide" in the Greek appears three times, but unfortunately it is translated with three different words. (Read and point out the three times.) Now all three translations are right, but I think that the verse would be far more impressive if the same word had been used all three times – preferably "abide," but "continue" or "remain" would be just as correct.

What did the Apostle John have in mind when he spoke of that "which ye have heard from the beginning"? Well, obviously he was speaking of the teaching that they had received since they had been saved. We don't learn truth to forget it. We learn truth to understand it, to remember it, and to obey it. And to the extent that the Word becomes permanently rooted in our hearts, and lived out in our lives, to that degree we will be abiding in Christ, or to state it another way, we will be walking in fellowship with the Lord. We are branches will be strongly related to our vine, and fruit will be the result. And it would seem that "fruit" has to do with Christian character. How important the Word of God is in maintaining and strengthening our fellowship with

the Lord! It can never be overemphasized. To neglect reading our Bibles is going to affect our fellowship with the Lord and so limit our abiding in Him.

But we are not finished with the verses that speak of abiding. Three verses later, in verse 27, we have these words:

27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him (1 John 2:27).

Who, or what, is the anointing that we have received from the Lord. Whatever it is, or Whoever it is, has to do with what we have learned. So the anointing speaks about the Holy Spirit. He is our Teacher. Now we all have "received" Him, and He "abideth" in us. So again we learn that our fellowship with the Lord, our abiding in the Lord, is directly related to the Word of God and what we are learning as the Holy Spirit has been teaching us. The Holy Spirit teaches us the Word so that we can enjoy personal fellowship with the Lord and be strengthened in our daily walk. We never walk alone. We always walk with the Lord. The Holy Spirit teaches us the Word, and through the Word gives us the strength to bear fruit to God's glory.

But I want to give you one more verse from 1 John 2. It is verse 28:

28 And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

If you believe that the Lord is coming, and that He could be coming soon, very soon, then you would not want Him to come and find you not abiding in Him. It is exciting to think that no generation of the Lord's people has lived closer to the coming of the Lord and the rapture of the Church than we are living. Everything in the Word of God points to the importance of walking in fellowship with the Lord. That is when, as the Apostle John went on to say, when "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

Now look at what the Apostle John went on to say in verse 6 of our chapter, John 15. (Read.)

15:5 In verse 1 we were told that the Lord Jesus is "the true Vine," and that His Father is the Husbandman, or Farmer, or Vinedresser. Now we are told again that the Lord Jesus is "the Vine," and that we are "the branches." This speaks of our union with Christ. The branch does not have any life but what it receives from the vine, nor do we have eternal life except in our union with Christ. So that should show us that, as the Lord said, "without Me ye can do nothing." And this is stated as a double negative. Without Him (the first negative) there is not anything that we can do (the second negative). This means that without Him and a vital relationship with Him, it is impossible for us to bear fruit.

Perhaps you have notice, or someone has pointed out to you that the Lord spoke of "fruit" in verse 2. And then later in the same verse He spoke of "more fruit." And then here in verse 5 He spoke of "much fruit." That speaks of a growing, stronger relationship with the Lord: fruit . . . more fruit . . . much fruit.

Leon Morris says of this verse, and especially the last statement:

And the verse concludes with an emphatic declaration of human helplessness apart from Christ. In isolation from Him no spiritual achievement is possible. For the complimentary truth, *cf.* "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

15:6 This verse adds to the truth of the latter part of verse 5. There is no hope for progress in the Christian life, no hope for bearing fruit for the glory of God and of Christ, except by abiding in Christ. The best picture of us would be a branch that lies on the ground severed from the vine. Thank God that can never happen to a true believer, but our failure to maintain an abiding relationship with our Lord through the Word and prayer, renders us just that helpless. May the Spirit of God so work in our hearts that we will continually

seek a closer fellowship with the Lord and constantly give Him the first place, the preeminent place, in our lives.

15:7 In verse 4 the Lord had said, "Abide in Me, and I in you." Here at the beginning of verse 7 we have a synonymous statement: "If ye abide in Me, and my words abide in you." There is not way for the Lord to abide in us except through His Word. To have the Word abiding in us is to have our Lord abiding in us. This emphasizes again the importance of the Word of God in our fellowship with the Lord. And this in turn indicates how important for us to read the Word, to meditate on the Word, to memorize the Word, to study the Word, to have fellowship with others in the Word, to read good books about the Word, and to sit under the ministry of those who can help us understand the Word, and to obey it. But none of this will be effective in causing us to abide in Christ apart from the ministry of the Spirit.

But notice the last part of this verse. It not only has to do with prayer, but with answered prayer. Nothing can give us greater blessing in prayer and in praying than for us to be abiding in Christ and to have Christ abiding in us. But in this connection look at verse 8.

15:8 Here we have two repetitions from earlier verses in the chapter. We have not read about the Father since verse 1. But here we see the ultimate object of a life of abiding in Christ. The Father is glorified. But how is He glorified. This is where the word at the beginning of this verse is so important: "Herein." Herein what? In a life of abiding in Christ where prayer is answered.

The second repetition is "much fruit." I think that this proves that a large part of the fruit we bring to God for His glory, is answered prayer. We can say that the fruit of a Christian is a life that is pleasing to God. We can also say that the fruit that God is looking for is that which He gives to His people in answer to prayer. Dawson Trotman used to say that the fruit of a Christian is another Christian, meaning that we are bearing fruit to God when we become His instruments in leading others to Christ. The blessing seem to roll in one after another when we are really abiding in Christ, living in fellowship with Him.

March 16, 2009

"I am the true Vine" – continued.

Because it has been a week since we last were studying the key verb in this part of John's Gospel (John 15: 1-17), let me point out again where the key verb *abide* is used in this section of Scripture. The Greek word for *abide* is used in verses 4 (3x), 5, 6, 7 (2x), 9, 10 (2x), and 16. In verse 9 it is translated "continue," and in verse 16 "remain," but they are all the same Greek verb, **μῆνω**.

Matthew Poole, one of the great Puritans, born in York, England in 1624, and educated at Emmanuel College in Cambridge University, wrote a three-volume commentary on the whole Bible which is still in print today. Spurgeon considered in the best commentary on the whole Bible that was available in his day, next to Matthew Henry's commentary. He summarized the verses we looked at here in John 15 and in 1 John which I want to read to you because I think it will help us to understand better what is involved in abiding in Christ. Here is his statement:

This, our abiding in Christ, is expounded by an abiding in His words, verse 7, by abiding in His love, verse 10, an abiding in His Spirit, 1 John 2:17, a walking as Christ walked, 1 John 2:6, an abiding in the light, 1 John 2:10, as not sinning, 1 John 3:6 (Vol. III, p. 359).

And then he added:

The exhortation is, without doubt, to a holiness of life and conduct, but which our union and communion with Christ is upheld and maintained, and which is in itself an abiding in the love of Christ (*Ibid.*).

Poole helpfully added that “our union with cannot be dissolved, nor our communion with Him wholly interrupted” (*Op. cit.*, p. 359). These are two good words to remember in connection with abiding in Christ: union and communion. Our union with Christ is salvation; our communion with Christ is our fellowship with Christ after salvation.

But let us go on to verse 9.

15:9 After mentioning the Father in verse 8, the first time after verse 1, our Lord now emphasized the bond of love which exists between Him and His disciples, and all of His people. There is the closest bond of love between the Father and the Son. And as difficult for us to take it in, the Lord Jesus loves us just like the Father loves Him. We know that the Father finds all of His delight in His Son, so that means that the Lord Jesus has His greatest delight in us. It is impossible for us to fully understand how greatly the Lord Jesus loves us, but this is our greatest security. And it must mean that the Father also loves us like He loves His Son. The exhortation for us is that we are to “continue” (abide) in Christ's love. This is another way that the Lord had of saying that He wanted them to walk, to live, in the closest fellowship with Him. So one of the greatest of incentives that we have to abide in Christ is because of His love for us. Just as we would grieve one who loves us if we did not return their love, so we can grieve our Lord if we neglect Him, and much more if we sin against Him.

5:10 We are reading through the book of Deuteronomy in our Bible reading. I hope this includes all of you. We all need to be reading the Bible every day, and reading through the Bible at least once every year. If you are reading Deuteronomy, you know that it is made up of four messages that Moses delivered to the children of Israel in the month just before he died. And there is one theme that runs through the whole book. It is that in going into the promised land, the most important thing that the people had to be concerned about was obeying the Lord, keeping His commandments. Here we need to review John 14:21, and then also verse 23. In both of these verses our Lord was speaking about our fellowship with Him. It is a fellowship of love. It is a fellowship in which we show our love for the Lord by our obedience to His Word (review verse 7), and where the Father and the Son both respond by special manifestations of Their love for us. It was Moses' disobedience to the commandment of the Lord that caused the Lord to close the door for Moses to entering the land. It was continued disobedience that caused the Lord to close the door to the whole generation of people who had come out of Egypt. And the Lord made it clear here that it was obedience that was His people's part in maintaining fellowship with the Lord. And it was through their fellowship with the Lord, their love for the Lord, that they would get the desire and the ability to obey the commandments of the Lord.

5:11 Now we know, or we ought to know, that we can never do anything that will keep the Lord from loving us, or that would change in any way His love for us. But to continue to abide in the Lord (with all that that means) is what ultimately leads to a “full” joy, or perfect joy. Like many other things that will be perfected when we see the Lord, there can be, and needs to be, a growing joy through our abiding in Christ, or, to state it another way, through a growing fellowship with the Lord.

Related to this, and actually producing such a life of fellowship with the Lord, is traceable to our taking the Word of God to heart. There is much to distress us and worry us in the world today. And there always has been. But the child of God who is walking in fellowship with the Lord, learns that there is a joy in the Lord that the world knows nothing about. The Word is absolutely essential to a life of fellowship with the Lord. If we want to abide in the Lord, and we do, then the Word has to have a dominating influence in our lives. The Word leads us to Christ, and Christ is our joy, our peace, and the delight of our hearts in every way.

5:12 One of the first evidences of salvation is that we love the people who are our brothers and sisters in the family of God. The Lord had been speaking of our love for Him. That is the first commandment. Now

He speaks of our love for the people that we didn't care about before we are saved, and probably would just be pleased not to have anything to do with them. Now there is a special lesson for us here. We can't really be abiding in Christ if we are out of fellowship with any of the brethren. This probably is one of the greatest reasons for the lack of special blessing in the Church today. We are going to have our differences. Not everybody is going to want to attend Trinity Bible Church. Not everybody is able to attend TBC. We are all at different stages in our spiritual growth. And we have to admit that some of us are hard to get along with. The Lord knows all about this, and still His commandment is that we love one another, listen – *as He has loved us*. Remember what the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:14. He said,

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

Remember when we went through these chapters a short time ago, and we learned that while the Lord and the disciples were still in the Upper Room, He gave them a new commandment. It is in John 13:34 and 35:

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

What God commands us to do, He enables us to do. So we have no excuse for not obeying the Lord IF we really know Him. You remember that the original commandment to love our neighbor (who is really anybody that we have any continued contact with, was that we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Notice what the Lord's new commandment was. We are to love our brethren, the Lord said, "as I have loved you." *Only a true child of God can love like that*. This is not human love; this is the love of God and of Christ. And it comes to us as we learn to abide in Christ, drawing our love from Him, and motivated by an intense desire to do what is pleasing to the Lord.

Look at verse 13:

15:13 The greatest earthly gift that we have is our lives. And most people will do all that they possibly can to keep it. The giving of our lives is the supreme sacrifice that we can make. And so there is no greater manifestation of love for another than for us to lay down our lives for our friends.

But the Lord Jesus did more than this. Do you remember what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5 about this? I am thinking about Romans 5:6-8:

6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Let me give you another passage on this subject which is found in 1 John 4:7-13

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth (abideth) in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell (abide) in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

All of this means that if we are abiding in Christ, and in God, it is going to make a remarkable difference in the way we live. It is all the manifestation of His presence in us, and that we are abiding in Him.

15:14 Here the Lord brings up another reason as to why they need to abide in Christ. He calls them friends. A friend is one who, as Leon Morris said, shares common aims and outlook. But the disciples were to show that they were the Lord's friends by doing what He had commanded them to do, and this would mean that they were abiding in Christ.

15:15 The Lord did not usually address His disciples as bondslaves (which is the word that He used here). But He certainly implied it in John 16:13 and 16. But He was enlarging upon the fact that they were His friends. And the evidence of this was that, although a master does not discuss his plans with his servants, since they were His friends, He had made known to them all things that the Father had made known to Him. This shows the result of the Lord's communion with them as they were abiding in Him. How blessed we are, or can be, if we are walking in fellowship with the Lord. Think of all that you know that the world has no access to. And as we walk in fellowship with the Lord, as we abide in Him, He opens the truth of His Word more and more to our hearts.

15:16 Now the fact that the disciples were disciples, was no credit to them. They were chosen to belong to the Lord, chosen primarily for salvation and fellowship. All that the Lord had said to them in this chapter about abiding in Him, was His plan for their lives, not primarily their choice (although they, except for Judas, were all devoted to Him). And He had chosen them to make them fruitful, and that their fruit would "remain." Here is our word again: "That your fruit should remain" (abide). *And then for the second time in this chapter the life of abiding is connected with prayer, but not only with just prayer, but answered prayer. We need to pay special attention to this. It definitely links fruit with answered prayer.*

15:17 This is a repetition of what the Lord had said in verses 12 and 13. Therefore, we see how important this was to the Lord, and how this becomes intimately related to a life of abiding in Christ, and it becomes also a candidate for what the fruit of a Christian is.

So far we can see fruit to be fellowship with Christ and with God, spiritual character as an evidence of growth, love for the brethren, and answered prayer.

Concl: Now the big question facing all of us as we come to the end of what the Lord taught about this great truth illustrated by a vine and its branches is, am I abiding in Christ? We don't create this relationship with our Lord; it has been established for us by the Members of the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Lord was teaching by an illustration. Our relationship with our Lord in salvation is like the relationship between branches and the vine. It is a living relationship. It is a living union. Christians received eternal life at salvation by being joined to Christ (certainly one of the most amazing truths in the Bible). But that life is maintained day by day, not by what we do for Christ, but by what Christ is doing for us. But we have a responsibility in this, and that is stated in verses 5 and 6. We need to know that without our Lord working in us and through us, we can't do anything that will produce fruit, or that will glorify God. We are joined to the Lord when we are saved; but our fellowship with the Lord is maintained by communion with Him day by day. But this also involves the work of the Lord in us.

Andrew Murray wrote a book many years ago called, *Abide in Christ*. He was a South African Dutch Reformed leader who was born in 1828 and he died in 1927. He wrote many books of a devotional nature which have been blessed by the Lord in the lives of countless numbers of people. Most of them are still in print and still being used by the Lord to help believers in their walk with Him. One thing in particular that he pointed out in his book, *Abide in Christ*, which was especially helpful to me, was his reference to what the

Apostle Paul said in his letter to the church at Philippi, which has been considered by many, and rightly so, as his spiritual autobiography. You will find the words I am referring to in Philippians 3:12-14:

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Here Paul described his salvation as being apprehended, laid hold of, by God for a specific purpose: "That I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." He meant that the Lord had laid hold of him for a special purpose, and that now, as he wrote, he was seeking to lay hold of that for which he had been saved, and he was doing it as though it all depended upon him. But earlier in exhorting the Philippians to work out their own salvation in Philippians 2:12 and 13, he had added, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Is that inconsistent with what Paul said when he told the Philippian believers to "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling"? Absolutely not because what Paul was doing was the outworking of God's work in his life. It was just as true that Paul was to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling as it was for the disciples to abide in Christ back when the Lord Jesus was still on earth.

Why had the Lord saved Saul of Tarsus? He had saved him to make him like Himself, like Christ. Could Paul do that? No. Was he to work at it? Yes. How diligently was he supposed to be? *As though it all depended upon him!* He said, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Now apply that to our Lord's words in John 15:4 and 5. This means I have a responsibility, and that you as the people of God have a responsibility to abide in Christ. Can we do that by ourselves, and in our own strength? Absolutely not! But are we responsible to abide in Him. Absolutely yes! How do we do it? By reading the Word, and obeying the Word. By avoiding sin, but confessing it immediately when we do sin in either thought, or word, or deed. By prayer. By loving God, and by loving the people of God. Can we do all of these things? Well, yes and no. We do them, but we do them by faith in our Lord, remember that "without Him" we can not be faithful or successful in doing any of them.

This is all basic Christian living. Without the Lord we can nothing, but, on the other hand, as impossible as the Christian life is for us to live, we can say with the Apostle Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). This puts even Philippians 4:19 in a new light. Think of it in connection with our daily, moment by moment need to abide in Christ. "But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

This is why we can say, What God commands us to do, He enables us to do. Life is one endless sequence of things that are too much for us, but nothing is too hard for God. Nothing is too hard for the Lord Jesus. Nothing is too hard for the Holy Spirit. Let me close by reminding you of what Paul told the Colossians regarding their walk with the Lord, their fellowship with Him. You will find these words in Colossians 2:6 and 7: Col 2:6-7

6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

7 Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

And so, in the Lord's strength and by His grace, let us know that if the Lord tells us to abide in Him, He will enable us to do just that.