



SIGNS AND SIGNALS!

Summary of Bible Studies in

JOHN'S GOSPEL

Part Three

Chapters 10 – 12

Chapters 18 - 21

Undertaken at Allander Evangelical Church

Spring / Summer

This summary booklet is a little different from others in this series due to technical issues. Most of the studies were followed on Zoom rather than in-person attendance.

While Zoom is an excellent means to enable people to join in from home it is not always easy to hear and follow what is being said. Consequently these summaries may not adequately reflect all the contributions made. Apologies for any omissions.

HJ 30.06.2025

Introduction

The studies in John's Gospel started in September 24 and have progressed each week until the summer of 2025r, covering Chapters 1 – 4 with a summary of those studies (Chapters 1-3) issued in booklet form in December 2024, and Chapters 5 – 10a in March 2025. This is the third volume in the series covering chapters 10b to 12 and 13 - 21.

Introducing the studies at the beginning, Manuel offered a structure for the Gospel which defined it as two 'books', one a Book of Signs (1: 19 – 12: 52) and the other a Book of Glory (13): 1 – 19: 42) sandwiched between a Prologue(1: 1 – 18) and an Epilogue. (20: 1 – 21: 25).

A	<i>Introduction</i>	<i>Divine Identity</i>	<i>1: 1-18</i>
B	<i>Book of Signs</i>	<i>Messianic Identity</i>	<i>1: 19-12 50</i>
C	<i>Book of Glory</i>	<i>Preparation, Passion and Resurrection</i>	<i>13: 1 – 19: 42</i>
D	<i>Epilogue</i>	<i>Restoration and Commission</i>	<i>20: 1 – 21: 25</i>

The Prologue presents the Lord Jesus as the incarnate expression of God in one Word, resident in our world, bringing the gift of eternal life from God to humanity to be received and believed (alas, only by some).

The following chapters are taken up with events described as SIGNS confirming Jesus' identity as the Messiah. It is referred to as The Book of G;ory.

This section is again sub-divided into three 'cycles' according to the nature of the vents which took place.

BOOK OF SIGNS CHAPTERS 2 – 12: 50

In this section of John's Gospel there are three cycles in what we are calling the Book of Signs (2: 1 – 12: 50)

1. The Cana Cycle (2 - 4)
2. The Festival Cycle (5 – 9)
3. The Lazarus Cycle (10 – 12)

each of which has its own distinctive set of components.

The whole of the 'Book' (of Signs) is concerned with revealing Jesus as the Son of God as declared in the Chapter 20: 31 verse, "*so that believing you might have faith in His name*". so that within the Lazarus Cycle **belief** becomes a key issue.

(a) Chapter 11

The Raising of Lazarus

Prior to this key event, the public – ordinary people and the religious leaders – were presented with a dilemma: whether to believe in Him or not. Many of the ordinary observers did, being convinced at his works which demonstrated his divine mission (the signs) while officially the Authorities, while acknowledging these ‘signs’, balked at the idea of His being The Messiah.

In stark contrast to the public manifestations and declaration, Chapter 11 sees him on his way to visit his close friends: Martha, Mary and Lazarus in Bethany. The narrative which describes what happened records many signs of his affection (e.g. *Jesus wept*) and tenderness toward them. When news of Lazarus’ sickness and death came, the expectation was that he would come quickly and effectively administer healing. But, he didn’t. Both sisters expressed their disappointment in the words: *“Master, if you had been here he would not have died”*. Jesus, who had delayed going by two days, assured them that all would be well. And in so doing opened up the question of his purpose. There was no doubt that Lazarus was dead but his resuscitation was assured. The delay had been deliberate.

Its main purpose was that Jesus’ glory should be revealed. But Jesus, as the Son of God, who had already shown that he could deal with the serious situation, now has opportunity to demonstrate his ability to deal with the fatal. He was / is *“the resurrection and the life”*. He could overcome the ‘final enemy’; but he needed to be believed, and significantly trusted. That was the message *“He that believeth in me, though he die, shall live”*. That is the heart of the gospel.

Ironically, the Sanhedrin inadvertently showed how that would work by suggesting that *‘one man should die for the whole nation’*. And that, as we shall see in the Book of Glory, is precisely what happened when Jesus died for the sins of the world.

The implications of that are significant, as we shall see in the next chapter.

(b) “Sirs, we would see Jesus” Chapter 12

In many ways this chapter represents the climax of Jesus’ ministry. The *“hour”* which had not come in chapter 2 is now here and the manifestation of Jesus’ glory’ imminent. But, the whole chapter presents a contrast and introduces an important spiritual principle.

The chapter begins with an incident at Bethany, the home where Lazarus lived with his two sisters. There, during a meal, Mary washed Jesus’ feet in an act of devotion and obvious gratitude. That was not only because of the Lazarus miracle but a genuine devotion from fellowship with Jesus expressed in adoration (as opposed to sister Marth’s acts of service). This was true ‘belief’ and kind of response to his revelation of God that Jesus wanted to see.

Others, however, saw it differently. While the ointment was a resource that the woman was only too ready to bestow on Jesus as an expression of her worship, Judas, on the other hand, saw it as 'waste' thinking of material gain only. The two responses are significant but not without their challenge to us as to what our true motives and priorities are and how much we are prepared to sacrifice in our expression of devotion. *"Love so amazing, so divine; demands my soul, my life, my ALL."*

The second incident, again recorded by the other evangelists with detailed variations, was a public act of worship and appreciation by the crowds gathered in Jerusalem. Although the text does not say so in so many words it could be assumed that those who shouted Hosanna and cast their clothes and garments as a royal gesture, had personal reason to acknowledge both the kingship of Jesus and his Messiahship in fulfilment of OT prophecy. Many would have already benefitted from his miracles and teaching. It was a public declaration that Jesus had successfully made himself and his mission known. Even if the crowd was a mixed one containing those swept along by corporate euphoria there is no doubt that it contained genuine believers. And their response proclaimed Jesus' success'. He had shown the Father and conveyed his word. He was king. It was success.

Word had even reached beyond Jerusalem. Some Greeks came who requested, *"We would see Jesus"*. In due course they met him but the answer he gave and his interpretation and foretelling of events was in total contrast to the scene which had been set. It hinges on the quest of Greeks, presumably visiting hearers, but not participants, in what had been happening. Their request was, *"We want to see Jesus"*. Jesus' response was presumably both to them (as potential discoverers of Jesus) and to the wider group of His followers, those who believed in him. That response was startling, far reaching and very significant.

Proclaiming, soon after the spontaneous Palm Sunday extravaganza, that his "hour" had come, and that he was about to be 'glorified', Jesus introduced a concept far removed from any notion of triumphalism. He spoke of *"a kernel of what falling to the ground dying alone"* subsequently to yield abundant fruit. Or of losing one's life (as a consequence of surrender to Another) and yet finding it. That would be the experience of those who followed him in deep commitment.

It was not a pleasant prospect, yet a necessary one. Through this process God confirmed that Jesus would be glorified and endorsed that with a thunderous voice heard by the disciples. Furthermore it would mean the destruction of the evil one's powers and victory over death. Lifted up (referring to the manner of his substitutionary and redemptive death, he would draw all men unto him. Jesus would be the triumphant light. He was the light that the darkness would – and could - not - overcome. And so, having declared his potential victory ,he left them.

It was only then that the realisation that, despite the gloriousness of the message, unbelief would be rampant as Isaiah had predicted and as John had already indicated (*He came to his own but his own received him not*).

Reflecting on the passage, reference was made to the Corinthian mention of believers being in a 'triumphant procession' evidencing the fragrance of Christ, the encouraging sign of 'some believed' even if fearful of the authorities' reproach, the OT predictions of anticipated unbelief and the victory of Jesus' redemptive submission in the victory "*o'er sin and death and hell.*"

And, that brings us to the end of The BOOK OF SIGNS as the first part of John. It forms an essential part of the Gospel's declared purpose of being written "*that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ*". As the One sent by God as a Gift to fallen humanity, Jesus had been encountered by individuals and the public as one who brought life and power from another realm that made a difference in a whole range of personal and situational needs, each occasion was accompanied by an explanation and teaching of its divine origin and essence so that they were more than incidents: they were SIGNS that conveyed a message. From the relatively domestic scene of the Caana wedding to the public declaration at the Feast, Jesus revealed himself as the Messiah appropriately acknowledged by the Bethany anointing and the Palm Sunday explosion of praise.

Yet, it went beyond that. Accepting Jesus as the Christ would lead to a process of mortification and denunciation of self in obedient subservience (subsequently, post-Pentecost, expressed in believer's baptism representing death and resurrection). For Jesus to be truly the Redeemer the path to the Cross with its humiliation and resurrection needed to be traversed.

Consequently, the substance of the rest of the Gospel – designated by Manuel as THE BOOK OF GLORY – deals with intimate insider information to the disciples and the unique enactment of the redemptive procedure by Jesus concluding in a commission to them to be "*witnesses unto Me*"; and to renegade, vulnerable souls like Peter to "*feed my sheep*" within the searching question: "*Lovest thou me?*"

BOOK OF GLORY

Chapters 13 to 20: 11

This final 'half' of John's Gospel focuses on two main sections: Jesus' private briefing of the disciples culminating in his prayer for them in chapters 13 to 17; and in the public events of the crucifixion and resurrection of 18 – 20; and a concluding epilogue (21).

(a) The Briefing in the Upper Room Chapters 13 - 17

Chapters 13 to 17 contain the substance of the discourse with the disciples prior to the Passover where Jesus briefs his dedicated followers as to what lay ahead. The chapters are:

13	Washing the disciples' feet, providing an example of humility; teaching a new commandment; predicting betrayal by Judas and denial by Peter. Announcing his departure	
14	Comforting them in his absence; explaining what he was going to, and to do; promising the Holy Spirit.	
15	Teaching about abiding in Him as the Vine; the hostility from the world; the value of fruitfulness in individual and corporate testimony and the role of the Holy Spirit.	
16	Detailing the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit as protector and enabler for the disciples.	
17	Jesus' prayer to the Father confirming fulfilment of his ministry on earth and praying for the disciples and the believers who would follow them.	

In contrast to what might have been anticipated with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem acknowledged by the crowd with shouts of Hosanna, what followed in Jesus' life and ministry and encapsulated in the concept of his 'hour', was the very opposite. Gathering his disciples together he voluntarily took on the role of a humble servant, washed their feet in an act of subservience and commanded them to act similarly towards one another, paying heed to the new commandment to "*love one another*" Up until now their allegiance had been to him: now they had a corporate , reciprocal, responsibility.

The briefing covered a range of topics informing them of what was going to happen and promoting in them the right attitude and behaviour as his remaining witnesses in the world, enabled by the Holy Spirit or The Comforter.

(i) Washing the Disciples feet Chapter 13a

In the study which focused on the first incident in the briefing, several points were shared.

- Having loved them, he loved them to the end. This was an interlude, not a termination. But the form that loving took was challenging.
- It showed the character of Jesus and the role of the Messiah in humbling himself to serve them. It was reminiscent of the Philippians servant passage describing his being willing to be '*obedient unto death*', even death on a cross.
- What it signified is more important than the form it took. Replicating the physical action is not the same as adopting the attitude.
- Reactions to the event were different. For Judas it led to subsequent betrayal. For impulsive Peter it provided an explanation that initial cleansing is complete and finished but occasional mishaps need to be dealt with.
- Loving one another is a powerful and persistent command running through NT teaching and practised in the church.

The rest of the chapter goes deeper into these two reactions and the part they play in the redemption narrative.

(ii) Predicting Judas' betrayal

Having set an example of his servitude, Jesus warned them that similar humility was required of them, also. They were a privileged group sharing in his divine mission; but flawed. So, he warned them that significant flaws would soon be apparent.

One of these was the fact that one of them (it turned out to be Judas) would betray him. Already there had been the hint that Satan was 'recruiting' Judas, possibly through Judas' developing disillusionment. Jesus knew who it was and shared that knowledge with John, the beloved disciple, by indicating the sharing of bread dipped in the wine. Yet, Jesus was disappointed just as the disciples were shocked. When Jesus prompted Judas to act, the others failed to see the significance, thinking it was in relation to discharging payment responsibilities. The narrative tells us the chilling news that, at that moment, Satan entered Judas' heart; and eventually he betrayed Jesus with a kiss .

The disciples saw it as an incident: Jesus was aware of its eternal, redemptive, significance. Comments which followed the study focused on the fact of betrayal and its replication in so many incidents in Christian history.

As the discourse – and briefing– continued, Jesus gave them a new commandment: they were to love one another as Jesus loved them. That should be the ethos and practice after he had left them and the distinguishing feature of their witness. At the mention of going away Peter, impulsive Peter, expressed a desire to go also and vowed allegiance only to be stopped short with the prediction that shortly he, too, would 'betray' Jesus by denying him.

While there are many lessons to be gleaned from this section and these incidents, it is worth looking at the whole in context and to note that:

- The band that Jesus had chosen to be his witnesses was a motley crowd consisting of a range of disparate characters, some- like Judas – who turned out to be sinister.
- Yet, Jesus’ attitude towards them was both tolerant and non-judgemental: he had chosen them. There is little, if any, evidence of any anger and rebuke. Only disappointment.

He clearly knew what was, had and would be, happening. Yet there is no suggestion that any of these incidents were deliberately engineered by him. Indeed, they are attributed to human behaviour. *Yet*, they demonstrated “*the course of this world*” and paved the way to the course of redemption ‘planned before the foundation of the world’.

- It also helps to throw light on the cosmic issues of foreknowledge and sovereignty.
- That prompts the question of what motivates such action. Clearly, Judas was ‘influenced by Satan, and Peter was his typical impulsive self.
- Being with Jesus and admitted into the inner circle with its classified information had the effect of exposing and refining their perceptions and moulding their actions.
- The command (an order, as David reminded us, not a suggestion or recommendation) was to love (regard, think of, perceive, recognise, include, treat, etc) one another **as I have loved you**.
- Although frequently epitomised in welcome and kindness practised by churches and Christians, loving one another **as I have loved you** clearly has wider and more far-reaching implications, hence the substance of the subsequent briefing.

Obedying that command and exercising it as a corporate body was to be a major challenge but one that was fully resourced -by precept and provision – as spelled out in the next chapters of this section.

(iii) Let not your heart be troubled Chapter 14a

Resuming the studies after the Easter break, the portion under consideration was the latter part of chapter 13 and the beginning of 14.

There is little doubt that the disciples were indeed troubled. Jesus, to whom they had committed their lives as followers, now announced that he was about to leave them, entrusting to them the work of the kingdom which he had come to establish. That meant being witnesses and working together corporately even though they had initially come as individuals. Not only were they to collaborate but they were commanded to **Love one another** . That was a big ask for such a diverse group of disparate individuals.

As if that was not enough to trouble them, Jesus divulged that he would be let down by two of them: once by betrayal and another by denial, much to his deep personal disappointment. They were left with a challenging task and reminded that the chain that they were had (at least) two weak links in it.

That was the context in which Jesus spoke to them and said, “*Let not your hearts be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to myself*”. What followed was reassuring. It continued to provide them with the briefing required for their involvement in the divine mission.

Several comments were made on significant features of these early verses in chapter 14. One was the fundamental issue of them believing Jesus, and through him, the Father, with all that that meant by way of comfort and motivation. Increasingly they were to be *Jesus people*. Others highlighted the fact that Philip, presumably speaking on behalf of the others, could not understand and sought clarification from Jesus. That was commended as good practice for Christians today: to ask for understanding instead of assuming that we know it all. Another lesson for today was the reference to Jesus’ coming again when, in the Rapture, living saints will be caught up in the air. Contemporary events would indicate that we are closer to that happening in an increasingly godless world.

Understanding is a key part of the process of being God’s witnesses for it is left to the church to reflect who – and what – God is.

The chapter goes on to unpack in detail what belief implies, the progression it calls for and the divine equipment available to the believer in pursuing that calling.

More of that in Chapter 14 next week.

(iv) Count your blessings Enabling resources

Against the background of their fear in chapter 13 the opening words of Chapter 14 are so appropriate: they need not be troubled for preparation was being made for them for the future. Meantime they were to continue in their faith in God. It was still confusing for them so this section of the chapter is punctuated with questions. In response they are assured that Jesus is “*the Way, the Truth and the Life*” and the only way to the Father. Responding to Philip’s confusion Jesus emphasised that he and the Father were one and that the incarnate one was a manifestation – in word and deed – of the other.

Someone commented that this teaching, along with subsequent promise of the Holy Spirit, was an illustration of the Trinity working together as one to facilitate the witness of the believers.

Another comment drew attention to the fact that, as practising believers, the disciples would be able to perform the same works, ask anything they wished (not from selfish motives but as they saw their role as delegates) and be participants of “*the mighty army*”

Underpinning this commissioning responsibility is the truth that it is all based on “*Christ in you*”. Belief in Jesus as the gift of God means reception and regeneration.

They are to be born again. They are to experience a new existence, *“translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son”*. That received life is what distinguishes them. It is that life that they are to ‘use’ and practise.

The second part of the chapter acknowledged the fact that in exercising this divine commission (to be ‘the church’) they would be without the physical presence of the Jesus they had been followers of. However they would not *“be left as orphans”* but would be sent a Comforter, an Advocate, a Helper whose contribution would be to enable them by being with them and subsequently in them. He would bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had taught them and enable them to implement it effectively..

This was a position and state that was way outside the world’s domain. It was foreign to the world which had rejected Jesus and was walking in darkness. It was a new realm.

Having elaborated further, Jesus, in encouraging them to progress further into the new, spiritual, domain finishes this chapter with the invitation: *Come, arise, let us go hence”*

Where he was leading them and how that advancement could be achieved will be dealt with in the next chapter.

(v) The Vine and its branches Chapter 15

In a sense Chapter 15 is permeated with aspects of that new realm. As God’s special people they are (an essential part of) the Vine. That means not only being simply a component of an entity but of being a collaborative part of a divine entity, for the vine analogy is used in the OT to depict Israel who were for God a people while he was to them a God.

The Vine had two attributes. It was the true vine which had the Father as the vinedresser. Privileged though it was, it was not static. It had a Cultivator who would work benevolently on the vine, which had to show evidence of being alive. It was not nominal membership but a dynamic one. Branches which showed no evidence of life or fruitfulness would be discarded while fruitful ones would be pruned and encouraged to grow better. There was to be a formative activity.

In such a ‘work in progress’ the fruitful disciples were the branches: they were expressions and extensions of that dynamic entity. And that carried responsibility.

They had come into existence through accepting the gift of life, which was Jesus. Through belief they were *“born again”* and had the *“well of water springing up within them”*. Now as branches of the vine, with the dynamic of *“Christ in you”* they were to actively abide in and feed on that Source in a process which produced fruit. That fruit – the living evidence of *“the life of God in the soul of man”* - brings glory to God. Access to the divine resource is limitless. But it cannot operate without it for, *“Apart from me you can do nothing”*.

In practice, it entails (the voluntary, spontaneous) obedience to the commandments seeking to please the Saviour and maintaining the essence of the Vine, It means specially obeying the new commandment to *“love one another”*. They have been chosen and commissioned for this divine mission and purpose.

While a blessed privilege, it has inherent dangers. As it grows distinctively divine it draws hatred from the world. That was the experience of Jesus: that will also be their experience.

Yet, the promised Comforter is available. The Holy Spirit, the Divine Enabler, will see them through.

How, in specific ways is developed in the next chapter.

(vi) The work of the Holy Spirit Chapter 16

The context of these five chapters (13 – 17) is the commissioning by Jesus of his faithful disciples, now purified by the departure of the betraying Judas. Jesus, having finished his incarnate work of redemption in his life, death and resurrection, is returning to his *“Father’s House”*, leaving them to be witnesses – and fully equipped.

That equipping is recorded by Luke in his Gospel and Book of Acts when these disciples are commanded to *“tarry in Jerusalem until you be endued with power from on high”*. Here in the upper room it was predicted, promised and explicated. Jesus warned, informed, and assured them beforehand.

Now his entrusted disciples – ambassadors – they would represent him in an alien world full of hostility. While he was away preparing a place for them where they would eventually join him they were to be witnesses, variously described in the NT as his body, his dwelling place, his family, his church. In that role they would be constantly sustained and enabled through two different but complementary modalities.

In the first place they needed to *“abide in me”*. Just as they had come into being by ‘receiving / believing’ the Lord Jesus through initial commitment by accepting him into their life as the dominant force. Subsequently, they would receive perpetual succour from ‘abiding’ in him in all his divine essence, producing fruit in the process. It would serve as a kind of umbilical cord.

Secondly, in Jesus’ physical absence, the Holy Spirit, clearly a Person within the Trinity, would operate as an ‘influencer’ or enabler. As Spirit, he would not be confined to a time or place

(as the incarnate Jesus largely was) but could be effective simultaneously in any situation. He would convict

- Of sin, because of unbelief, not accepting the Lord Jesus as the Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. While that applies to 'the world', to 'those who received him not' it can also hold true for the disciple shutting Jesus out of life resulting in the sad situation represented by the Revelation 3 picture when Jesus is depicted as standing at the door, knocking, seeking entrance, and operational residence and dominion..
- -Of righteousness, because he has entered the Father's presence as the only one free from all sin and integrally holy. *"He only could unlock the gate of heaven and enter in"*
- Of judgement because he has overcome the world and is all-powerful: no foe can stand against him.

For the disciples (the young church) to be effective it is expedient that the executive ministry is conducted by the Holy Spirit. But, in doing so he is continuing and carrying out the work of the Father as exemplified in Jesus' earthly ministry. Peter had already declared *"Lord to whom shall we go, You have the words of eternal life"* and Jesus had explained *"the words I speak to you, they are spirit, they are life"*. So now the Holy Spirit would bring these sayings to their remembrance and guide them through their challenges with the inspiration inherent in the declaration of the mind of God, for *the Spirit searches all things* and *"shall reveal them unto you"*. Nor would it be an alternative or an extra. It would be integral; for the effect they would have would be to glorify God.

Jesus is realistic enough to acknowledge that being left 'alone' (without his physical, material presence) would be a serious challenge for them. Exacerbated by the surrounding hostility it would be both sad and painful. But, like joy after the anguish of childbirth, they would reap the benefits and be glad with the outcome. That is strengthened by Jesus' assurance that he has overcome the world and that nothing could or would thwart to purpose of God.

Those sentiments -enabling for survival and fulfilment are the essence of the prayer that is the subject of chapter 17

(vii) The Prayer: summing it all up Chapter 17

This chapter represents an Important point in Jesus' earthly ministry. It stands at the conclusion of his special briefing of the disciples (minus betrayer Judas) to whom he was delegating the challenge of continuing his work by being *"witnesses unto me"* without his physical presence yet with the enabling of the Holy Spirit; and the resumption of his position in glory. Acknowledging that his mission (*Christ Jesus*

came into the world to save sinners" was complete and *"he was made a little while lower than the angels)* he now 'reports' to the Father and yearns for his eternal position following the fulfilment of his 'hour'.

Thus it begins with an intimate declaration that he has established the glory of God in a world that held no place for the Divine. Now, he could clearly say *“he that hath seen me hath seen the Father”*. And with that mission accomplished he would return to his rightful place – with the Father.

The initial greeting is followed by a more detailed account of what he has accomplished on earth. That is to bring into being a distinctive people committed to God: and a real example of *“they shall be to me a people and I will be their God”* - an aspiration frequently mentioned in the OT but rarely realised. These were children of faith, not just lineage. As such, they were given by God. would be – a ‘holy people’ surrounded by a hostile, godless, world. Jesus’ primary concern was to pray for them in this conflicting situation. That prayer was for strength, survival and protection. Guidance would come from God’s word and their behaviour would be clearly indicative that they were *“born again”* and a different genre deriving their life from God himself.

They had been promised ‘a home in heaven’ – but not yet.

The request was not for escape by being taken out of the evil world but for survival and overcoming – itself a manifestation of glory and triumph.

The New Testament pages amply illustrate the vicissitudes – both the failures and the successes – of that testimony as it was lived out.

The NT pages also illustrate how the witness of this first generation of ambassadors bore fruit. For centuries following new believers would be ‘born again’ and ‘be witnesses’. Invariably, that would also be in a hostile world and so, anticipating such scenarios, the Lord Jesus also prayed for them – and, blessedly, we are included in that number having the enabling Holy Spirit working in us and the Word of God inspiring us living in victory and manifesting *“Christ in you, the hope of glory”*.

(b) Going one step further ***Chapter 18***

While the previous chapters have been concerned with Jesus preparing his disciples for what lay ahead and the responsibility that would rest on their shoulders, Chapter 18 to 20 see him facing the crux of his ‘hour’, and the fulfilment of his divine mission, alone. Rejection and crucifixion – and subsequent resurrection – were experiences that only He could undertake. And they were taken redemptively, for by those actions (for which he had willingly ‘come down from his glory,’ accepted humiliation, and exercised total faith in God) ensured salvation for everyone who believes. No human could achieve that. He *“trod the winepress alone”*.

And so, going further as it were, he leaves the disciples only to encounter determined opposition. Ironically, that was spearheaded by the very exponents and guardians of God’s

OT redemptive plan in Judaism with all its acquired external practices. Jesus' simple – but – powerful and clear – presentation of the truth was a threat to their developed system; therefore he should go, a single sacrifice on behalf of the many.

Jesus was ready for them and declared that he was the one that they were seeking. But in doing so he released the disciples from that fate.

The determined opposition, however, encountered an obstacle in that they did not have authority to execute him, as they had predetermined, and so they turned to Pilate. Pilate, in turn, was indifferent. He could not understand their vitriolic animosity but probed the concept of kingdom with Jesus concluding that there was no real threat in that direction. Consequently, he offered to release Jesus only to be rebuffed by the antagonists.

That was a critical choice. It was a human choice but, through his foreknowledge, God used it to fulfil his greater purposes. Jesus was to pray: *If it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not what I want but what you will*” But that did not absolve the people from committing a grievous sin.

That has lessons for us in that the choices we make are critical. In his sovereignty, God overcomes their consequence and fulfils his own purposes. But that does not absolve us from the responsibility of praying – and practising – *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*.

Ironically, in this chapter, Peter's denial illustrates that opposition does not only come from outside opponents but can be caused by underperforming 'insiders'.

This chapter has also shown that Jesus faced this ordeal alone. His disciples will need to “take up their cross”. That is something that is emphasised in the New Testament,

particularly in Romans 6. Baptism – immersion in water – is a symbol of being crucified with Christ, reckoning ourselves to be dead unto sin and being raised again, knowing that “ *The spirit that raise Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he that raised Jesus from the dead will quicken your mortal bodies by his spirit that dwells within you*” It was that that enabled Paul to say: “*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; but not I, but Christ who liveth within me. And the life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me*”.

(c) The Final Sacrifice

Chapter 19

The critical choice that was made by the authorities and the people left Pilate in a dilemma. Clearly, he did not consider Jesus to be a threat or deserving of death. Yet, he succumbed to the crowd's demands out of fear and thereafter had to live with his own compromise with its associated thoughts and emotions.

The choice, deciding to give in to the crowds (after expressing his own misgivings) led to him handing Jesus over saying: *Behold the man*. Why he had Jesus flogged is not stated but his actions led to a spate of mocking and taunting by the soldiers. Pilate, however, was doing some serious thinking of his own.

Looking at the chapter as a whole it represents a range of responses to Jesus.

In the first place the crowd had gained their objective of seeing 'one man' (and this man in particular) die for the nation. 'Away with him' summed up what they thought and what they ensured would happen. And even after he had obviously died they pierced his side. Total rejection. That is the unbelieving world's stance.

Pilate, on the other hand, was still reflecting on who and what kingdom, which superseded any authority exercised by an earthly regime. And so, when he could, he made a bold stand and wrote the inscription: *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*" And, when opposed he replied firmly: "*What I have written, I have written*". It was deliberate".

Strangely enough, John records very few of the many details about what happened when Jesus was on the Cross, other than an exclamation that '*I thirst*' and the command to the beloved disciple (presumably John himself) regarding the care of his mother, Mary. That in itself would indicate that his disciples were present but virtually nothing is recorded of them or the spectacular events – like the Temple veil, the darkness, the utterances of Jesus, or even the last-minute conversion of the thief on the Cross.

The opponents were still not finished. Time was short and so they pressed for action to ensure extermination and a clearing of the ground before the religious festival was due to take place.

It was then, after these procedures had been done, that two 'outsiders', as it were, stepped in with a kindly act of taking down the body and ensuring its safe location in a new tomb. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus from John 3 may well have been 'secret believers' but now openly committed.

Whether the disciples were too overcome by what had happened on this day with the trial, crucifixion and burial, is not known but, as we shall see next week in Chapter 20 they certainly featured after the resurrection.

(d) The sequel Chapter 20

The apparent 'absence' of the disciples from the scene spanning the crucifixion, burial and before the resurrection is intriguing. No doubt there was a sound reason for that; as there would have been for the emergence of other personnel. The circumstances were such that, in the eyes of the religious authorities and, possibly, the traditional crowd, the contaminating debacle had to be cleared quickly. It was a rush job. And so, early after the

sabbath Mary Magdalene hurried to the grave presumably to complete the anointing and embalming. To her surprise the stone was rolled away and the But, before continuing with those details it is well worth noting how God, in His sovereignty (and foreknowledge) made use of natural circumstances to achieve his own purposes. For example there does not appear to be any indication that the disciples had any intention of seeking to find out what was happening to Jesus. Indeed, it is said that understanding Scripture about the resurrection was not at the forefront of their thinking. Yet, in this way they became involved.

Not that that involvement was significant at first. There is no record here in John that they did anything after seeing the empty tomb and the discarded grave clothes that they undertook any deliberate action but subsequently met (as was their custom?) in a closed room for fear of the Jews.

It was there that the risen Jesus appeared to them and spoke peace to quieten their confused minds. He assured them that it was he: he showed them the wounds from his suffering to assure them.

Prior to that, on the morning of the resurrection Mary Magdalene was given the privilege of encountering Jesus in his risen form. Thinking she was speaking to angels in the tomb and to the 'gardener' she was overcome at hearing her name called and at that moment recognised the Jesus she had worshipped before. Warned not to touch him physically, she then hastened to tell the disciples. And from that time it was a new existence.

That new existence (promised beforehand) became clear when Jesus spoke peace to them in the upper room for the second time. This was not consolation but a commission reminding them that they were now to be witnesses replicating – as far as they were able – the ministry of Jesus in his incarnation. As the Father had sent Jesus so was now sending them into the world (to be 'witnesses unto me'). And, like every commissioning God, they were given the wherewithal. There he breathed into them / upon them the Holy Spirit, the very comforter he had predicted in the briefing in the upper room.

One disciple was missing from this gathering expressing doubts about what he had been told. But when Jesus appeared to him, showed him proof, he responded with the wonderful expression: *My Lord and my God*. He believed.

The chapter concludes with making explicit what the Gospel, as written by John, was intended to do. That was to enable people to see that Jesus was the Son of God and that believing they might have life in his name. The key is positive response.

What that response entailed is presented in the next and final chapter, a kind of appendix to the main story but foretaste of what the implications of proper responding are.

EPILOGUE CHAPTER 21

It would appear that the disciples were nonplussed with all that was happening around the crucifixion and resurrection. Their Leader had gone. What were they to do? It appears that any prediction, promise or commission had been forgotten.

Not surprisingly Peter declared that he was returning to his old profession of being a fisherman. Some of the other disciples joined him. But they caught nothing.

Unknown to them the risen Jesus was waiting on the shore. On hearing that their night's fishing had been futile, he advised them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat whereupon they caught an abundance of fish. Yet for all that, "*the net was not broken*". That is a promise that has upheld many a labouring Christian service since.

John himself had early recognised this figure at the water's edge as 'The Lord' and Peter, impulsive as ever, plunged into the water to greet him. The events which followed tell of a

breakfast prepared on a fire of coals by the Risen Lord and an experience which left them all acknowledging Him as the Lord.

Apart from being the third appearance according to John, it represented a re-connection with what they had been called to. As mentioned earlier, the events surrounding the death and burial may well have been so confusing and disorienting for them that Peter's decision to "go fishing" and thus return to his old life work, was understandable, even though it met with little success.

It is at this point that Jesus re-emerges to remind them and to re-establish them as his ambassadors on earth in the great mission of God.

It is an interesting point that not all the known disciples [even counting for Judas' abdication] are not mentioned, only Peter, Thomas, James and John 'and two others')

From this point on the focus is on the workers, the stewards of the Kingdom, their integrity and motivation.

This is expressed in Jesus' dialogue with Peter when he asks him, "*Do you love me?*" Jesus' motivation was the love of God. Love was an essential element in Jesus' ministry and love for God and for each other were to be the distinguishing features in their ministration.

On profession of an affirmative response Peter is again commissioned to "*Feed my lambs, feed my sheep*". Yet, over the three askings, a different Greek word is used starting with 'agape' (true love) to 'philo' (love and devotion) suggesting that, at this point, Peter's devotion and commitment were not at their optimum.

That is a challenge for us as we examine our own devotional commitment. Is it less than the best, with some way to go before we can say, "Love so amazing, so divine, **demand**s – and **get**s – my soul, my life, my **all**?"

Throughout the Gospel there have been traces of a kind of rivalry between Peter and John who sometimes refers to himself as "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" while recording a number of situations where he is favoured. Not surprisingly impulsive Peter – a totally different personality – is wondering, "*What shall this man do*". In response Jesus makes it that each individual is different and has a different role. That teaching is vital to the key NT teaching referring to the church – the conglomeration of disciples – as a single body with many complementary parts.

The work – in whatever form or context – for each one is "*to believe on Him whom God has sent*" And to be faithful witnesses in the outworking of that mission