

Rivers of Living Water

Jesus said 'rivers of living water' would flow from those who believe in him. He was referring to the Holy Spirit. That much is plain from reading John's Gospel chapter 7, verses 37-39. So the first question would should ask might probably be, 'Do we believe in him?' Then, if the answer if 'yes', we might go on to ask whether Jesus' promise is indeed our present experience or not.

The material that follows is meant to provide assistance in answering the questions, not by provoking responses so much as by working through the sections of John's Gospel which give background to and explanation of Jesus' promise. Because the promise stands and if it is true, then where faith is alive something must be happening.

In all this I am assuming that John's Gospel is far more than a collection of stories about Jesus, what he did and what he said. It is a story and it does contain teaching, but, if I can say this without being misunderstood, it is also a work of art, with themes being followed, some quite subtly too, and with information about topics being given in such a way that we have to read through the entire work before we can get the full picture.

So it is with John's teaching about the Holy Spirit, about the flow of rivers of living water. I have taken sections of John's Gospel which more obviously relate to the topic and have dealt with them, so that what follows is not a commentary though I have made use of a number of works by others in coming to my (sometimes tentative) conclusions. But basically, I have tried to see in what way all the sections of the Gospel are, in fact, parts of the whole.

At the same time, this material was first produced for use as teaching 'papers' for interested Christian people. Occasionally we might spend a long time just enjoying the implications of what we read in a section of the Gospel, while at other times we just learned to deal with the truth as it was presented in the Scriptures and to have our preconceived ideas modified.

I have to admit that what follows did not necessarily fit anyone's preconceived ideas. So I offer this in the hope that it may stimulate readers to work on understanding the revelation God has given, but most especially that it may stimulate us to ongoing faith in the one who promised that 'rivers of living water' will flow from those who do believe in him.

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INTRODUCTION

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John 1:14 RSV)

The glory of God is not some static phenomenon. God does not ‘have’ glory as one would have a possession. His glory is the fulness of his being, God in himself. His name, *Yahweh*, the LORD, then ‘Father’, expresses and delineates his glory, though the name of Father is only known through the Son who opens up the truths of the Father to us (John 1:18).¹ As Jesus put it:

All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Matt. 11:27)

But to receive the revelation of the Father through the Son is far more than to receive information; it to be confronted with the revelation of who God is and so what he is about. More, this revelation comes to us as ‘person to person’, because God communicates himself to us² and that communication relates to all that a human being is and was created to be. Revelation is, therefore, propositional, in so far as we have it written down in Scripture, but it can be written because it is first personal and transforming.

It is God’s glory, the fulness of his being, constantly to move out in holy love to the whole of his creation in order that the creation may function in the fulness of God. The truth of all creation is that ‘In him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28) and unless God moves out to us we cannot live in him. So then, the Word becoming flesh was the action of glory and not only the means by which we see the glory.

So what is the goal of glory? Why did the glory of God express itself in the action of the incarnation of the Word? And when Jesus ‘revealed his glory’, what was he intending, for this was no mindless meandering. Jesus had expressly said that

the Son can do nothing of his own accord but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. (5:19)

¹ From this point references will be given without the identifying book when referring to John’s Gospel.

² Colloquially, we could say it is an ‘in your face’ meeting, where one person demands and gains the full response of another. It is to be forced, by ‘angel wings’, into knowing the Father. See Geoffrey Bingham, ‘Angel Wings’ in the *New Creation Hymn Book*, N° 65.

THE INTENTION OF THE GOSPEL WRITER³

John has told us his purpose in writing the Gospel.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (20:30-31)

But we must remember that this statement comes at the conclusion of the Gospel,⁴ and so it assumes all that has gone before. John has written his Gospel so that the full being of Jesus might be presented to the reader and so that the reader might be led to the inescapable conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ).⁵ But John is at pains to show that this involves more than simply some dispassionate, even intellectualist evaluation of the evidence. Rather, to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God' means that a human being comes into life. Believing, therefore, is far more than cognitive activity, though it is, undoubtedly, also that. Believing involves the total transformation of a human being. So how does that occur?

To answer that question we must examine those things that have led John to write this conclusion.

(i) John 1:10-13

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

There is a deep mystery in evil. Here is 'the world', which in John's Gospel refers to the whole of created humanity, utterly dependent on the creating power of the Word yet which does not know him. Although not specified here, the reason the world did not know him soon becomes obvious; the world's ignorance is culpable because the Word comes as light to the world, and the world loves darkness rather than light (3:19). In John's Gospel, 'the world' generally has negative connotations. Carson's conclusion is that

³ This may appear somewhat simplistic, given the vast amount of material available in commentaries and other works. However, seeing that much of that is educated speculation concerning the supposed background etc, I expect that we may still glean much from the text of Scripture as we have it. It is, of course, possible that the Gospel was written with more than one goal in mind.

⁴ It is often said that John 21 is an appendix, and that the Gospel was intended to conclude with 20:31. I tend to agree with that opinion. However, on the broader front, it has been said that 'In recent years discussions of the purpose of John's Gospel have largely ignored John 20:30-31' (D. A Carson, 'The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:30-31 Reconsidered', *JBL* 108 (1987), p. 639).

⁵ It is interesting that we cannot be certain whether John was directing this to non-Christians or to those who were already believers. Some manuscripts have 'that you may come to believe', as with *NRSV* (πιστεύσητε), while others have 'that you may continue to believe' (πιστεύητε), obscured by the more general form of 'that you may believe'. In the long run, of course, it is probably unimportant for us, whatever the original intention may have been. See Carson 'Purpose', p. 640f.

[t]here are no unambiguously positive occurrences [of the word 'world' in the Gospel of John]. The 'world', or frequently 'this world', is not the universe, but the created order (especially of human beings and human affairs) in rebellion against its Maker.⁶

But far from setting out to condemn the world, God sent his Son into the world to save it (3:17). So the Word was in the world and came to 'what was his own',⁷ meaning Israel, God's treasured possession out of all the peoples (Ex. 19:5).

This phrase 'what was his own', therefore, sets God's action squarely in what is called 'salvation history'. God's choice of Israel as the place where his name is to be revealed was with the salvation of the nations in view but also involved Israel in great privileges (cf. Rom. 3:1-2). The right of God to receive appropriate fruitfulness from Israel was expressed in the prophets, as in Jeremiah 8:13 and Isaiah 5:1-7 (and as used by Jesus in Mark 12:1-12). So when the Word came to what was his own, he had every right to expect the stewards of the vineyard to receive him cordially and with due honor. But his own people did not receive him. Far from mediating the truth of God to the rebellious nations, Israel had become one with them.

However, not all were like that. As in Israel of old, so there was a 'remnant' who did receive him, that is, they believed in his name,⁸ and to them was given the right to become children⁹ of God. Once again, no details are provided at this point, but the allusion to Israel under the old covenant is obvious, as in Exodus 4:22 and Deuteronomy 14:1.

The point of greatest significance is that becoming a child of God involves a birth which, unlike all human births, is not through physical descent (literally, 'not of bloods'), nor driven by human desires (literally, 'the will of the flesh'), nor by any role of a human father. It is entirely the work of God.¹⁰

(ii) John 1:29-34

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'³¹ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."³² And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him."³³ I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, InterVarsity Press, Leicester, 1991, p. 122f. (supporting biblical references omitted).

⁷ 'to what was his own' (NRSV), 'to his own home' (RSV) 'to that which was his own' (NIV), as distinct from the ambiguous AV 'He came unto *his own*, and *his own* received him not', demonstrates the distinction made by John between those *things* (τὰ ἴδια) which belonged to the Word and the *people* (οἱ ἴδιοι) who constituted Israel. Under the Old Covenant, God had made his dwelling place, his 'tabernacle', particularly in Israel.

⁸ For the significance of 'the name' see the April 2004 study, *The Father and his Sons*.

⁹ Unlike Paul, John never calls believers 'sons of God'. For John, that title belongs to Jesus alone.

¹⁰ Though this anticipates the discussion with Nicodemus in chapter 3, for the moment the implications for this are not given, so we should allow John to present his Gospel in his own sequence. The comment by C. K. Barrett (*The Gospel According to John*, S.P.C.K. London, 1958, p. 76), however, might be helpful: '[I]t must be acknowledged that a simple consecutiveness of thought is not to be looked for in John's writing. His habit it to view a subject successively from a number of different standpoints.'

John has been ‘baptising’; while there are no parallels to this in the Old Testament, there may have been some in the more recent life of Israel. In particular, there was what is known as ‘Proselyte Baptism’. This was one of the practices when a person wished to become a full member of Judaism. Evidently it was self-administered and it indicated that by being baptised the person was now being fully submissive to the Law of Moses, that is, a practicing member of the covenant community. What was unusual with the baptism administered by John was that he baptised ‘the people of Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region along the Jordan’ (Matt. 3:5) and severely castigated those who professed to have ‘Abraham as our ancestor’ while remaining unfruitful in the things of God (Matt. 3:7-11). John was saying that it was as if they were not God’s people and, in the light of the coming of the kingdom of God, they must repent and confess their sins in order that when the kingdom comes they will not be judged but be forgiven.¹¹

But John’s focus was not on the judgement but on the coming of the kingdom. As we have seen, God’s purpose was not the judgement of the world but its salvation and John came ‘to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him’ (1:7). His activities put him into the ‘messianic’ category but he staunchly denied that he was either Messiah, Elijah or ‘the Prophet’ (1:20-21). He understood himself in terms of the promise of Isaiah 40:3, as preparing the way of the Lord and all he could say was:

I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal. (1:26-27)

Although the Gospel has not mentioned the content of John’s preaching concerning forgiveness, the first thing John recognised when he saw Jesus was that *he* would be the one to take away the sins of the world. What is more, this great act of cleansing would take place as it always had, through sacrifice: Jesus is ‘the Lamb of God’ (1:29; cf. Isa. 53:7).¹²

John knew (then?) that by baptising with water he was to be the means by which Jesus would be revealed to Israel. God’s purposes for the whole world were to be worked out through the descendants of Abraham and Paul wrote that the promises were made to Abraham’s and his offspring, meaning ‘one person, who is Christ’ (Messiah). John was not the Messiah, Jesus was, and though the full meaning of that could not be comprehended at this point,¹³ nonetheless, Jesus was now clearly on the stage.

It is the way by which John recognised Jesus that is so significant. ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it¹⁴ remained on him’ (1:32). John had been told beforehand, by God (1:6), that he would see the Spirit descend and remain on someone and that that person would be the one to baptise with the Holy Spirit (1:33). The Holy Spirit descending *and remaining* is significant. There were many Old Testament examples of the

¹¹ I think that the context points to forgiveness being granted at the coming of the kingdom of God and also that the phrase εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν carries the implication of looking forward to forgiveness. See also 3:3-5. For a more detailed examination of the baptism of John, see Ian Pennicook, *The Baptism of John: Its Significance for the Understanding of Christian Baptism*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1987.

¹² Questions concerning which Old Testament sacrifice is being referred to generally receive no satisfactory answer. I suspect that the best solution would be to say that *all* the sacrifices which God gave in the Torah find their fulfilment and climax in Jesus’ great work of atonement, cf.. Isa. 17:11. However, the Passover lamb is prominent in the details of Jesus’ death; see p.55f.

¹³ See Matt. 16:13-20, 21ff., also Acts 2:36. Whatever ‘Messiah’ may have meant to the crowds then, no one, other than Jesus himself (Matt. 16:21 etc; Heb. 12:2), could have comprehended the truth of the Messiah and his work until Pentecost.

¹⁴ The Greek word for ‘spirit’, πνεῦμα, is neuter gender, so that ‘it’ for the Holy Spirit is grammatically correct.

spirit of God coming upon people, often for specific tasks. But the primary point in all those occurrences is that there is no one who has the spirit of God remain on them forever; indeed that is an aspect of the curse on humanity.

Then the LORD said, “My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.” (Gen. 6:3)

This verse has a number of difficulties,¹⁵ but we can still reasonably conclude that the sin has caused the spirit of God to be withdrawn from permanently abiding in humanity. Although it is hard to be dogmatic, it seems that the reason lies in the fact that humanity is ‘flesh’.¹⁶ At this point, all we can do is speculate as to whether John the Baptist’s comment may be an allusion to this statement in Genesis. In Genesis man is deprived of the spirit forever because he is flesh; now, however, the Word has become flesh and the Spirit remains on him.

There are two areas which emerge when we ask why the Spirit descended and remained on Jesus. The first area concerns the whole truth of a human being. Men and women are created to live in and by the Holy Spirit,¹⁷ that is, we are not truly human while ever we attempt to be independent beings. At the same time we cannot live apart from the presence of God and his working in us (as in Ps. 104:29-30). It is the dilemma of humanity that we are constantly suppressing the truth of God and so the truth of ourselves (Rom. 1:18ff.), with the personal and corporate existential guilt, and its consequent *Angst* and dislocation, which ensues. Unwilling to live by the Spirit, humanity cannot live entirely from its own resources so must draw on the resources of its counterfeit gods, the ‘idols’.

In Jesus, the whole process commenced by Adam has been stopped. Now there is a man in whom the Spirit has come and remained. To say, therefore, that the Word has become flesh is not to imply that he has become ‘sinful flesh’. That is Paul’s point in Romans 8:3: God sent ‘his own Son in *the likeness of* sinful flesh’. Jesus is not merely *a* true man but *the* true man. He is the one in whom the whole ‘new humanity’ begins.¹⁸

The second area to emerge flows on from the Adam-Christ contrast. Christ not only stops Adam in his tracks, indeed he crucifies him (Rom. 6:6¹⁹), but his work is to undo all that Adam has done. Thus:

for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. (1 Cor. 15:22)

Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. (Rom. 5:18)

So John was told that he upon whom he sees the Spirit descend and remain, is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit. In Paul’s words, ‘the Spirit is life because of righteousness’ (Rom. 8:10). Here is ‘the last Adam’ who passes, not death, but the Holy Spirit on to those in him.

¹⁵ The difficulties lie in mainly in the Hebrew text, though the context is also problematical. However, the text itself is clear in the LXX; interestingly, Calvin ascribes that translation to an error of judgement.

¹⁶ There seems to be no Old Testament use of the word ‘flesh’ which parallels the sometimes negative aspects of ‘flesh’ in the New Testament.

¹⁷ See Geoffrey Bingham, *The Day of the Spirit*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1985 for a full treatment.

¹⁸ This opens up a whole range of material which we cannot deal with here but which is of great significance. On many occasions the New Testament either directly compares Adam and Jesus, as in Rom. 5:12ff. and 1 Cor. 15:21ff., or it quotes or alludes to passages such as Psalm 8, indicating that Jesus is the one in whom the truth of created man is seen. To be ‘*in* Christ’ is, therefore, quite distinct from merely being associated with him.

¹⁹ Most modern translations obscure Paul’s argument when they write that ‘our old *self* was crucified with [Christ]’. Paul wrote ‘our old *man* was crucified with him’. Similar obscurities occur elsewhere.

Jesus will be the one to baptise ‘with the Holy Spirit’. We should note that, at this point, the phrase has not been defined by John. But what is clear is that there are sufficient promises of the restoration of the spirit in the Old Testament for us to have some idea of what is in mind. The actual phrase ‘holy spirit’ is rare in the Old Testament, occurring on only three occasions, at Psalm 51:11 and Isaiah 63:10 and 11. The more common phrases are ‘the spirit of the LORD’ or ‘The spirit of God’ or variants of them, such as ‘my spirit’ and so on. But always they refer to the powerful presence of God. Likewise, promises of the restoration of the spirit also relate to the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Such passages as Ezekiel 36:16–37:28 and Joel 2:25–3:1 emphasise this strongly. So language about the Spirit and the kingdom of God fit well together in John 3 as well as in Acts 1:1-8.

The phrase, ‘baptizes (which includes the variants ‘baptize’ and ‘baptized’) with the Holy Spirit’ causes some puzzlement, but it need not. To begin with, on the lips of John the Baptist, the phrase is intended to point to the parallel between what he did with water and what Jesus would do with the Holy Spirit, so I suggest that the phrase, ‘baptism with the Holy Spirit’, may have been coined by John the Baptist himself. In fact, whenever the phrase occurs in the New Testament the reference is either to John or back to his promise.

When John baptised with water, what happened? The answer is that he probably immersed people in the river Jordan. The Greek word for ‘to baptise’ (*baptizein*) comes from a word (*bapto*) meaning ‘to dip in or under’.²⁰ So we really do not have any definite indication of exactly what John’s method was, but the point was that, by John, water was ‘washed over’ people who had repented so that they could look forward with confidence to the coming kingdom of God. But that was only an anticipation of what was to come. Men and women would be ‘washed over’ with the Holy Spirit by this man who himself had already received the Spirit to a totally different degree from all previous humanity.

While as yet there is little detail, we can at least begin the process of seeing how life comes to those who believe. The believer is washed over by the Holy Spirit or, possibly, immersed *in* the Holy Spirit, though ‘in’ is not the only way that the Greek preposition *ἐν* (*en*) can be translated. But, in the long run, that can become nit-picking. John the Baptist was announcing an event of immense significance, as the later story reveals.

²⁰ A. Oepke, ‘βάπτω κτλ’ in TDNT, I, p. 529. Βαπτίζω is an intensive of βάπτω and occurs ‘in the sense of “to immerse” from early on (p. 530). However, ‘the later Jewish period ... βαπτίζεῖν became [a technical] term for washings to cleanse from Levitical impurity’ (p. 535), though the stress is on the meaning, with the method assumed, so that details of the method are not given. W. F. Flemington (‘Baptism’ in IDB, I, p. 348) says: ‘In many NT passages, the use of βαπτίζω and its cognates clearly implies immersion, but Luke 11:38 shows that this meaning is not demanded.’

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While later we will examine the implications of it, the question we are addressing, initially, is this: how does life come to men and women who believe that Jesus is the Messiah? To answer that question we are seeing the way that the Gospel of John has prepared us for that conclusion and we have seen thus far that those who receive Jesus become children of God entirely because of the action of God himself. John has made it absolutely clear that we are born ‘not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God’ (1:13).

We then saw that Jesus was introduced to Israel (1:31) by John the Baptist and that John made two major points when he recognised Jesus. The first was that Jesus was ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (1:29) and the second that Jesus is the one who, as Son of God, ‘baptises with the Holy Spirit’ (1:33-34).

The title ‘Son’ has already been used of Jesus in John 1:14²¹ and Jesus’ sonship is a major issue throughout the Gospel of John. But why should Jesus *as Son of God* be the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit? Put another way, the question becomes, who is this Son of God? Even though the matter of Jesus the Son is developed throughout the Gospel, there are certain issues which might be expected to have been already plain to the readers. Consider the following:

The language of divine sonship and divinity was in widespread and varied use in the ancient world and would have been familiar to the contemporaries of Jesus, Paul and John in a wide range of applications. When used in reference to individual human beings it could denote anything from a righteous or pious man, one who lived in close accord with the divine, to a heavenly or semi-heavenly being, including on the way particularly kings and rulers and especially wise or gifted or inspired men. ...Our own modern speech is familiar with the wide and sometimes casual application of a description like ‘godly’ or ‘divine’ (‘he was absolutely divine’). But centuries of Christianity have made us hesitate to be quite so free in our use of ‘son of God, or ‘god’ when speaking of other men. What we must try to reckon with is the fact that the contemporaries of the first Christians were not so inhibited. In the first century AD ‘son of God’ and ‘god’ were used much more widely in reference to particular individuals than is the case today.²²

Dunn adds that there were also distinctions in the ways that ‘son of god’ was understood, by the simple uneducated and by the more sophisticated, as well as by Jews and Gentiles. He continues:

Talk of divine sonship and divinity could be taken quite literally by some, and by others as a sophisticated metaphor or an idle tale unworthy of respect. ... Jewish writings tend to be more scrupulous and less free in their attribution of divine sonship and divinity to men.²³

In the wider world and within the Old Testament itself, then, there are references to people as the sons of God,²⁴ but John the Baptist was saying something else, perhaps more

²¹ Contra NRSV.

²² James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, SCM, London, 1989, p.17f. (emphasis his).

²³ Dunn. *Christology*, p. 18 (emphasis his).

²⁴ The reference to Adam being the son of God in the genealogy of Jesus (Lu. 3:38) is evidently unique within Jewish documents; see, John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20* WBC 35a, Word, Dallas, 1989, p. 173.

than he himself understood. He did, after all, misunderstand the identification of himself with the promised Elijah (see 1:21; Matt. 11:4, even in spite of Lu. 1:17). John's promise that the one on whom the Spirit descended and remained would baptise with the Holy Spirit is also notable from his own point of experience. Luke records both Elizabeth and Zechariah, his parents, as being filled with the Holy Spirit for their particular utterances (Lu. 1:41f., 67) and John himself (Lu. 1:15). But John was promising something quite beyond any previous experience of himself or others: the Son of God, the Lamb of God, would take away the sins of the whole world and would pour out the Spirit of God to an unheard of degree. Men and women would be immersed in, be overwhelmed by, be baptised with the Holy Spirit.

(iii) John 1:47-51

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you."⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"⁵⁰ Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these."⁵¹ And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Nathanael was evidently deeply amazed that Jesus knew he had been 'under the fig tree'. Far from it suggesting that there was anything improper happening, Jesus announced that Nathanael was 'an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' This accolade was another way of saying that Nathanael was a genuine man of faith and purity. The title was intended to remind of the great transformation of Jacob, the deceiver, who became Israel, 'The one who strives with God' (Gen. 32:28). But it also set Nathanael in distinction from those who ought to have accepted Jesus but did not (1:11), those who loved darkness rather than light (3:19).

Given the Gospel's conclusion, Nathanael seems already there. Even without seeing signs (contrast 2:23-3:3) Nathanael recognised Jesus as 'the Son of God' (1:49). Whatever the amazement of Nathanael, Jesus promised him an even greater revelation: 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man' (1:51).

The reference to Jacob is again clear. According to Genesis 28:11-12, Jacob 'dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it'. The angels, messengers of God, are those beings through whom the purposes of God are effected in history. These purposes relate to the promise made to Abraham, hence that promise was immediately repeated to Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15). But what Nathanael was told was that the very means by which the angels could do their task was none other than the Son of Man, Jesus himself.²⁵ All of history is dependent upon him!

This is the first time Jesus used 'Son of Man' in John's Gospel but it is used over eighty times in the New Testament, eleven in John's Gospel, and always as a reference to Jesus, and almost always by Jesus himself. Within the Old Testament the phrase is used in two distinct

²⁵ For discussion on 'The Son of Man' in this passage, see Douglas R. A. Hare. *The Son of Man Tradition*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1990, p.82ff. Cf. also Robert Maddox, 'The Function of the Son of Man According to the Synoptic Gospels', *New Testament Studies*, No. 15, pp. 45-74.

yet related ways. The first is as a poetic way of saying ‘man’, as in the parallelism of Psalm 8:4,

what is *man* that thou art mindful of him,
and *the son of man* that thou dost care for him?

(See also Num. 23:19; Job 16:21; 25:6; 35:8; Ps. 80:17; 144:3; Isa. 51:12; 56:2; Jer. 49:18; 50:40; 51:43). The other way is a means of address by God to a person, mostly to the prophet Ezekiel (ninety three times). In Daniel 8:17, Daniel, too, is addressed this way.

The exception to both these uses is in Daniel 7:13-14.²⁶ In that section of Daniel, Daniel saw four fearsome beasts, presented as wreaking havoc, with the fourth more terrible than the others. But Daniel saw also the great court of heaven, with God, the Ancient of Days, seated on his judgement throne, giving judgement against the arrogance of the fourth beast who was handed over to destruction.

As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like *a son of man*²⁷ coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. ¹⁴To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed. (Dan. 7:13-14).

This ‘son of man’ is more than a mere mortal, since he is given kingship and everlasting dominion. If the phrase does mean ‘a human being’ then this human being seems more like ‘the son of man’ of Psalm 8:4ff, who is given dominion over all God’s creation (cf. Gen. 1:26-28). He is Adam, the representative man.²⁸ Man will have the dominion restored.

But there is more, for there is the added, ‘that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him’. And then there is the explanatory statement,

But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever — forever and ever.

(See also verse 22). The holy ones, ‘the saints’, those set apart for the Most High, will also receive and possess forever the kingdom.

The title Son of Man would, then, be more than a reference to mortality. It would be a reference to the one who would be given total dominion and who would reign forever, but in whose reign the saints of the most high would be participants (cf. Lu. 12:32; Acts 1:6 etc). So then, if that is the significance of the title, when Jesus used it for himself, and here claimed that he was the one upon whom the purposes of God are worked out, it would be small wonder that there were those among the Jewish leadership who took strong exception to him (Mark 14:61-64).

(iv) John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to

²⁶ The place of 1 Enoch in the discussion is significant; questions concerning the dating of Daniel may be related.

²⁷ The NRSV has ‘one like a human being’ which, while consistent with all the other uses of the phrase in the Old Testament, nonetheless obscures any possible relationship with the New Testament uses of the phrase..

²⁸ The Aramaic phrase is ܩܒܪ ܐܢܫܐ (LXX υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου), whereas in Ps. 8:4(5) the Hebrew has ‘what is ܐܢܫܐ ... or the ܩܒܪ ܐܢܫܐ’ (LXX τί ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος ... ἢ υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου).

him, "They have no wine."⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim.⁸ He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it.⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

The story of the changing of water into wine is well known and John has linked it with the events of the cleansing of the temple (2:13-22) and placed both at the beginning of his Gospel ('the first of his signs' 2:11). As a 'sign', this is one of the series of items recorded in order to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (20:31).

Superficially, this may seem like 'a nice domestic miracle', where Jesus, as no doubt was the case, showed deep compassion for the potentially humiliated bridegroom.

The failure of wine at a wedding would have been acutely felt in a culture where unsatisfied wedding guests could expect in later reciprocating invitations to their weddings to receive not only gifts but an additional compensatory payment. Further, there would have been a loss of prestige for the bridegroom.²⁹

But, given John's stated intention, far more was at stake. So, how could this demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah? Once again, the background of expectations provide answers.

First there was the large water jars: they were for the Jewish rites of purification (2:6). Mark's Gospel provides some idea of what was involved.

For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders;⁴ and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles. (Mark 7:3-4)

While these actions may have had some basis in the *Torah*, they were actually drawn from that growing body of material, which provided explanatory details and application of Jewish law, which later became enshrined in the *Mishnah* and later the *Talmuds*.³⁰ Mark identified it as 'the tradition of the elders', 'human precepts' (Mk. 7:7)

Next there was the occasion of a wedding. Marriage was part of the language used to define the relationship between the LORD and Israel, as in Jeremiah 31:32, 'a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD'. It also was used to define the hope which God had given.

You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married.⁵ For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. (Isaiah 62:4-5)

I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered your nakedness: I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine....⁶² I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD,⁶³ in order that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your

²⁹ Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, IVP, Downers Grove, 1999, p. 194.

³⁰ See Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to Mark*, (Tyndale), IVP, London, 1961,

mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord GOD. (Ezek. 16:8, 62-63)

Then there was the amazing supply of wine. A dearth of wine was part of the description of God's judgment on Israel, as in Isaiah 24: 7 and 11.

The wine dries up, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh. ... ¹¹There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine; all joy has reached its eventide; the gladness of the earth is banished.

Against that there is the promise of Isaiah 25:6-9, which points to the great restoration of Jerusalem in terms an extravagant banquet, and the associated removal of the curse of death upon the nations.

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. ⁷And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. ⁸Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. ⁹It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

The restoration of the kingdom through the Son of Man is now presented as the transformation of the Jewish rites with the new wine of the kingdom, as the bride of the LORD is transformed to her true position and function.

This sign declares the action of the glory. God will bless the nations and will do so through an extraordinary transformation of the defunct Jewish rites, so far from the grace of law, into the new wine of the messianic banquet.

While this all may seem theologically correct, we should not overlook the amazing implications of this action of Jesus. In particular, the linking of the changing of the water into wine with the cleansing of the temple (2:13-22) shows the dimensions of the work still to be done. There will be no genuine transformation or blessing which does not deal with the corruption that has eaten into the national soul. The temple, in which so many trusted (cf. Jer. 7:1-4), the symbol of national identity, had become a marketplace (2:16; Jer. 7:11). For the transformation to be effective, 'this temple' must be completely destroyed and rebuilt. But, as he explains later, in 4:22-24, the true focus of worship is *Jesus himself*. He is the temple, where true worship is to take place and the sins of the whole world will be so exposed and stimulated to the utmost of evil by his presence that he will be destroyed. In Jesus' words:

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. (John 15:22)

And for worship to be completely renewed³¹ that same temple must be rebuilt, though it would not be until Jesus was raised from the dead that the meaning of both the Scriptures and the words of Jesus made any sense to the disciples. Then they believed both.

In the meantime, following the miracle in Cana, they had 'believed in him', though we are quickly reminded that a question mark remains over the true nature of the belief. 'Many believed' in him when they saw the signs which he did (2:23) but there was no reciprocation by Jesus.

³¹ See Malachi 3:1-4. We should not forget the place of worship within the first creation, where Adam was the high-priest set to lead the whole of creation in worship, nor the worship in the new earth, in Rev. 21:22ff. Also, Heb. 9:14 and the whole argument in that letter concerning Jesus, the priest forever after the order of Melchizedek..

When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone. (John 2:23-25)

Literally this is, ‘many believed in his name ... but Jesus on his part did not believe himself to them’. We might say, thus far, because he knew what was in them, he did not ‘trust’ their ‘faith’. A far deeper work yet needed to be done.

3

(v) John 3:1-15

John chapter 3 is really a continuation of the matter raised in 2:23-25, where it was made clear that a belief in Jesus based on merely seeing the signs which he did, or perhaps even experiencing them (cf. 5:2-15?), was not what was intended. Chapter 3:1-15³² covers the visit of Nicodemus to Jesus.

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and he was a ruler of the Jews, meaning that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council. In this section of John’s Gospel, Nicodemus appears as a representative of those who are impressed by Jesus because he, too, has seen the signs which Jesus did (3:2).³³ Later in this Gospel, Nicodemus reappears; while here is exposed in his unbelief, in 7:50-51 he is shown as a man with, at least, a concern for righteous behavior by the Sanhedrin and in 19:38-39 he is associated with Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, in the removal of the body of Jesus from the cross and the subsequent interment.

As a Pharisee, Nicodemus was a member of a distinct party within Judaism. They are usually presented in the Synoptic Gospels as hostile towards Jesus, and usually on the basis of their avowed adherence to the requirements of the law *as developed within their traditions*. Their name seems derived from a word meaning ‘separatists’³⁴ and they may have developed, probably in Maccabean times, out of an awareness that the Babylonian exile had been God’s judgment on Israel’s disregard for the law and their consequent determination to withdraw from all that was in any way law-less. Their sense of outrage when their piety was apparently

³² There is no certainty where the discussion with Nicodemus concludes. Some editors close the quote at verse 15, others at verse 21.

³³ The introductory ‘Now’ in the translations gives the impression of a new section beginning, though the Gk δὲ probably carries the thought of ‘and’. If it retains ‘its more usual adversative force (‘but’)', Carson has suggested that it may imply that Nicodemus is *mildly* contrasted with those in the previous section; Carson, *John*, p. 185f.

³⁴ S. Westerholm, ‘Pharisees’ in Joel B. Green *Et al* (Eds), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1992, p. 610. See also J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, SCM, London, 1969, pp. 246-267, though James Dunn (*The Partings of the Ways*, SCM, London, 1991, p. 13) suggests that Jeremias ‘fell into the trap’ of failing to see that rabbinic traditions are much later than the time of Jesus.

ignored is seen in the way they designated others as ‘sinners’³⁵ (see Luke 5:30 etc). Probably, the Pharisees saw that the ritual purity required of the priests in the *Torah* ought to extend to all Israel and anyone who did not accept that premise was not a true member of the people of God. Thus, the use of the word ‘sinner’ in John³⁶ was when the man born blind used (ironically?) the Pharisees’ own word when he said ‘We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will’.

In John’s Gospel, the opponents of Jesus are called ‘the Jews’, a usage which is not immediately clear to us today because of its apparent anti-Semitic overtones. But John is not anti-Semitic: it seems more likely that the leaders of Israel were a body of people in which the Pharisees had a dominating presence³⁷ and John identifies this body as ‘the Jews’. So why does he specify Nicodemus as a Pharisee? We have to guess, but it is possibly because John is focussing on the arrogant attitude of the Pharisees who claimed to be able to discern the deep issues of life and to be set up to teach others what really mattered while not doing it themselves (cf. John 9:16, 40; Matt. 23:2-3).

Such a claim to discernment was immediately rejected by Jesus: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above ... Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” If Nicodemus had come to Jesus claiming that he was one who could discern the real issues of the kingdom of God (that is, of membership of the people of God) then he was in fact demonstrating the opposite. Had he even recalled Israel’s history then he ought to have known that demonstrations of the miraculous proved nothing. The magicians of Egypt had shown that (Ex. 7:11-12; 22; 8:7). To see what the signs pointed to required a momentous action by God and Nicodemus quickly shows that he does not comprehend what Jesus is saying.

That momentous action was nothing less than ‘re-birth’. Familiarity with the phrase ‘born-again’ ought not be permitted to blind us to the implications of what God must do. Plainly it does not mean that a person must go through human birth processes again (3:4). The issue is far greater than that. A person must be born from above³⁸, that is, of water and the Spirit (3:5).

The meaning of ‘by water and the Spirit’ has provoked a lot of discussion but little agreement. Among many suggestions, ‘water’ is taken to refer to natural birth processes, to which birth from the Spirit must be added, it is taken to refer to Christian baptism with water, or to John’s baptism of repentance.

To these I would add another. First, the phrase, ‘by water and spirit’ in verse 5 seems to point to a single event and not to two.³⁹ Also, the word ‘and’ (καί, *kai*) could also be translated as ‘even’, making ‘spirit’ explanatory of ‘water’. Certainly there is the plain use of water to refer to the Holy Spirit in 7:37-39. But at this point it might be better to look back in

³⁵ Various approaches to the way the word ‘sinner’ is used in the Gospels are listed by M. J. Wilkins, ‘Sinners’ in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* p. 757-760, but I would ask whether his distinction between Jeremias’ and Sanders’ positions, for example, needs to be so exclusive.

³⁶ The only place in John where the word occurs, (cf.. 9:16, 24,25, 31).

³⁷ Not, perhaps, because of their massive numbers but because the general population saw them as significant because of their open piety.

³⁸ The Gk ἀνωθεν can mean ‘again’ (Gal. 4:9) but more commonly means ‘from above’ as in Matt. 27:51 where the veil of the temple was torn from *above* to below. Carson suggests that 3:4 shows Nicodemus’ crassly literalistic interpretation of what Jesus had said: ‘[Nicodemus’] decision to take *anōthen* (v. 3) mean ‘again’ or a *second time* may be part of that determined literalism’ (*John* p. 191).

³⁹ There is only one preposition ἐξ governing both ‘water’ and ‘spirit’.

John's Gospel to the prologue, where the word's initial creating role was spelled out (1:1-3). It is the creating word that becomes flesh (1:14). Furthermore, the reference to Genesis 1:1, *In the beginning*, leads me to ask whether the following verse might not also be in mind: 'the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a spirit from God swept over the face of the waters' (Gen. 1:2). So while there may still be unanswered questions, could it be that to be born from above, of water and spirit, refers to the work of re-creation?⁴⁰ Without re-creation, the work of Word and Spirit, there can be no entry into the kingdom of God. Anything less would result only in 'flesh', so it is hardly surprising that Jesus should say that 'You all⁴¹ must be born from above' (3:7).

Verses 8-10 are usually taken to mean that humanity has no capacity to control the work of God and that Nicodemus ought to have understood that. But there is more. There is an obvious play on words here, the Greek word for 'wind' being the same as that for 'spirit'. Also, there is the often unnoticed,⁴² but I would think strong, allusion to Ecclesiastes 11:5, 'Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything'. So Nicodemus' question, 'How can these things be', naturally provokes Jesus' response, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?' Nicodemus does not even know his own Scriptures (3:10). And any teacher in Israel ought to be aware that the promise of the new covenant in Israel is described by Ezekiel as the result of the sprinkling with water and the gift of the Spirit (Ezek. 36:25-27).⁴³ Is there a possible similarity with Jesus' criticism of the two on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:25, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!'

Jesus, on the other hand, speaks out of an intimate knowledge:

'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?' (3:11-12)

The earthly things are probably those things in the Scriptures to which Nicodemus already had access; the heavenly things would be those which Jesus knows out of his intimacy with the Father (cf. 1:18). Verse 13 explains why Jesus is able to speak authoritatively: he has entered the heavenly court and knows heavenly things because he has descended from heaven. No one else has ever ascended to heaven.

The phrase, 'The Son of Man' (3:13), which we observed above on 1:51, here does not necessarily mean that Jesus is saying that the Son of Man descended from heaven. Rather, I take it that the Word became flesh and, *as incarnate*, was the Son of Man, the one in whom all humanity will be restored. But Jesus' point is more precise. If the Son of Man lives in such intimacy with the Father that he can speak of heavenly things, then it would seem that coming to him and learning from him would accord him due honor. But that is not the case:

... just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (3:14-15)

⁴⁰ I will argue later that John 20:22 is a deliberate recollection of Gen. 2:7, so this statement in John 3:5 would likewise have the new creation in mind.

⁴¹ the word for 'you', ὑμεῖς, is plural.

⁴² See the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament, for a note of the allusion (4th Ed, p. 321, 896, though the note is as early as the 1st Ed).

⁴³ See William Dumbrell, 'The Spirit in John's Gospel' in B. G. Webb (General Editor) *Spirit of the Living God: Part One*, Lancer, Homebush West, 1991, p. 80.

The Son of Man will be lifted up, he will be exalted, but not in the way Nicodemus seems to understand. He will be exalted in the same way that the serpent in the wilderness was lifted up by Moses, described in Numbers 21:4-9. The serpent was seen then as the expression of God's judgment and that is how the Son of Man will be seen. To look to the serpent was to accept that God's judgment on Israel was just. For the Son of Man to reveal heavenly things must mean also that he will be lifted up as God's judgment. To believe on him, in contrast to merely being impressed by his signs, is to see him as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world'.

This imagery is not pleasant. Here is an exaltation that will be disgusting to those not 'born from above':

See, my servant shall prosper;
he shall be exalted and lifted up,
and shall be very high.
¹⁴Just as there were many who were astonished at him
—so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of mortals— (Isa. 52:13-14)

And later in John 12:31-33 Jesus made a similar prediction:

'Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

There can be no life, no flow of living water, apart from believing in the distorted, sin removing, Son of Man.

4

(vi) John 3:31-36

The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. ³²He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. ³³Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. ³⁴He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. ³⁶Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.

In the discussion with Nicodemus, Jesus had said that he spoke of what he knew because of his intimacy with the Father. It may be somewhat of a mystery to us, but the solution is not found in asserting that Jesus' intimacy was because he is God.

From early in the history of the church, the creeds have asserted that Jesus Christ is 'true God from true God', 'of one substance with the Father' and so on. That is not in dispute but neither is it the issue here. Jesus located his intimacy with the Father in his identity as 'the Son of Man' (1:51; 3:13f.), a phrase which specifically denotes him as fully human. We have already noted the Old Testament background for the use of the term and at no time did it ever refer to a non-human, or to a super-human being.⁴⁴ When the Word became flesh he became fully human (see Hebrews 2:14; 5:7; 1 John 4:2 etc).

This is the answer to the question concerning Jesus' intimacy with the Father. As true Man his intimacy is by no means exceptional. It is what every true human being ought to know. It could be argued that it is what Adam knew and which he violated and lost. But the intimacy is always a gift, so that it can never be presumed to be a possession. That is why Jesus received the Spirit. As a human being he was totally dependent on God for everything including the breath he breathed. But that dependence was far more than physical: As was

⁴⁴ That does not mean that others do not understanding the phrase differently. Consider the following:

When we ask what the title 'Son of Man' meant in Jewish terminology of the first century A.D., the first and most obvious answer is that the Son of Man is a heavenly, superhuman figure whose primary concern is with eschatological judgement. This is emphatically and vividly set forth in the Similitudes of I Enoch. If, as many believe, the Similitudes were a pre-Christian Jewish product, there is good reason to suppose that they provide evidence of a background of speculation and piety that prompted Jesus to use this title to express his own intention and function; if, as others hold, they were written early in the Christian era and under the influence of Christian ideas, they at least bear testimony that the author or authors understood the Christian title to carry just this signification. We cannot enter here into a detailed discussion of the Similitudes of I Enoch. But it should be noted that even in the Old Testament, as in the Similitudes, the expression 'Son of Man' is usually associated in some way with judgement. In Dan. vii. 13ff. the 'one like a son of man' is not himself said to be a judge; God alone conducts the court and pronounces judgement on the beasts. But the Son of Man-figure immediately appears on the scene and receives the sovereign power previously exercised by the beasts. If the Son of Man is not explicitly the eschatological judge, at least the whole atmosphere of this tableau is like that of the Similitudes of I Enoch. The other main Old Testament locus of the term 'Son of Man', Ezekiel, is also heavy with judgement. Ezekiel is not a heavenly judge in the sense that the Elect One/Son of Man of the Similitudes is. But he occupies a peculiar, intermediate position between the human and the divine, and mediates to the world of men the pronouncements of God's judgement. (Robert Maddox, 'Son of Man', p. 47f.)

I would assert that, whatever I Enoch may imply, according to John's Gospel, Jesus is the Word become flesh. I also disagree with Maddox's evaluation of Ezekiel. Ezekiel is a *human* prophet. The New Testament strongly presents the full humanity of Jesus, both by means of direct comments and by quotations and allusions to passages such as Psalm 8. Direct references to his deity are limited, though two, possibly three, of the possible statements are found in John's Gospel (1:1, 18; 20:28), but his deity is far more assumed than argued. However, the issue of salvation is that all that Adam, Man, lost, Jesus, the last Adam, the second Man restored. The full humanity of Christ is a vital element to the biblical presentation of the salvation of the whole world and the title 'Son of Man' expresses that full humanity.

Adam, so Jesus was intended to relate on the level of Spirit (see 4:23-24 below). The whole picture of Jesus is that he was a man totally filled with the Holy Spirit at all times and for all things. While this was seen in 1:32-33, it is also the way Jesus' whole life is described throughout all the New Testament — thus Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35; 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18; Matthew 12:28; Hebrews 9:14; (possibly) 1 Timothy 3:16⁴⁵; 1 Peter 3:18⁴⁶ and Acts 1:2.

Jesus, then, spoke the words of God for he who gave the Spirit gave without measure. Jesus was a man, *the* man, who was completely at one with the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism was not to make up any deficiency but rather that from that moment Jesus would be enabled to speak the words of God, and to function in a way not previously required of him. Whether we say that Jesus became the Christ/Messiah ('anointed one' cf. Acts 10:38) at his baptism or at his resurrection (Acts 2:36⁴⁷), the gift of the Spirit to Jesus was with a view to him 'fulfilling all righteousness' (Matt. 3:15) by means of the cross, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost.

(vii) John 4:7-26, 28-30, 39-42

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet.²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called

⁴⁵ This verse seems incomplete, as if the readers were aware of who made Christ known and who vindicated him but we have not been told. Probably the reference is to God (the Father?). A possible translation might be 'He was made known [by the Father] by means of flesh, vindicated by means of Spirit'. This latter phrase would then accord with Rom. 1:4. Thus AV and NIV. Cf. George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1992, p. 184f.

⁴⁶ Although the NRSV RSV and ASV have 'he was put to death in the flesh, but made alive *in* the spirit', I cannot see that that makes any sense. Jesus was also made alive in the flesh! However, if we take the datives as 'instrumentals' we could translate sensibly as 'he was put to death *by* flesh [a problem to be faced by Peter's readers?] and made alive *by* the Spirit'. Cf. Rom. 8:13, 'if by the Spirit (πνεύματι) you put to death the deeds of the body'. Thus AV and NIV.

⁴⁷ I would think it possible that the resurrection rather vindicated Jesus as *genuinely* the Messiah, over against those claimants who died and were unable to deliver Israel.

Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

...²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,²⁹ “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

...³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.”⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word.⁴² They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

These sections of chapter 4 of John’s Gospel present a picture of the rivers of living water being both promised and flowing.

Most of the issues of the disagreement between Samaritans and Jews are known. In this context, though, the deepest concern is that of competing centres and focuses of worship (4:20). The Samaritans had their centre on Mount Gerizim and the Jews in Jerusalem. The issues between the two groups were, therefore, not merely historical but deeply religious. As far as the Jews were concerned, the Samaritans were heretical, a group that exemplified the causes of Israel’s exile and subsequent bondage.⁴⁸ The attack made on Jesus in 8:48 is in line with this: ‘Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?’

The woman’s surprise that Jesus should have asked for a drink reveals an attitude by the Jews towards all Samaritan women: ‘the daughters of the Samaritans are menstruants from their cradle’.⁴⁹ This would have meant that for Jesus to have used a cup touched by this woman would have rendered him unclean, unable to enter into Israel’s worship. This made Jesus touching lepers and others so significant.

This story shows that these Jewish constraints were all coming to an end. No longer would the issue be one of whether one became ritually impure or not.

If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water ... Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. (4:10, 13-14)

This gift of God is not new, it is the way things were created to be and the gift is the restoration of creation. For instance, we should see Psalm 36:7-9:

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
⁸They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
⁹For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.

‘The river of your delights’ is literally ‘the river of your Eden’, and those who take refuge in God know the continuous supply and the fulness of life which was in Eden. This is the life of God himself: ‘For with you is the fountain of life’, which we might compare with Jeremiah

⁴⁸ See Craig A. Evans, ‘Jesus & the Continuing Exile of Israel’ in Carey C. Newman (Ed), *Jesus & the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment Of N. T. Wright’s ‘Jesus and the Victory of God’*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1999.

⁴⁹ H. G. M. Williamson, ‘Samaritans’ in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 728. Williamson suggests that the woman may not have been referring to this specifically, as the comment reflects a ruling made, possibly, in the mid-first century and so later than this event. However, the ruling may simply express an existing attitude.

2:13, where God is ‘the fountain of living waters’. Jesus’ statement to the woman seems a direct allusion to this statement from Psalm 36,⁵⁰ with the modification that in the Psalm it is God who gives while here it Jesus himself.

The woman is intrigued by Jesus’ offer and asks him for ‘living water’. Although he claimed that the water that he would give would ‘become ... a spring of water gushing up to eternal life’, she evidently regarded ‘living water’ as ‘flowing water’,⁵¹ spring water, in distinction from rain water which has been collected. The laborious task of collecting water from the deep well (4:11) was one she would happily avoid.

Verses 16–26 are sometimes taken to show the woman avoiding issues by changing the subject, but I doubt that this is the case. She was evidently shocked by Jesus’ knowledge of her various relationships (4:17-18), though they would hardly have been a secret to her neighbours (cf. 4:29). Her conclusion that Jesus must be a prophet, that is, that God had told him of her life, means that he will be able to answer the great question of life, and certainly one of the defining questions of Samaritan identity, that of true worship.

The answer which Jesus gave is consistent with the changing of water into wine. He is not about maintaining old patterns with their, at best, temporary validity and, at worst, degeneration into a suppression of the truth of God (cf. Mark 7:9 etc). He is concerned that the truth of creation be fully restored, and that restoration is taking place in him now.

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (4:21-24)

The role of Jerusalem is finishing. The worship of the Samaritans was never valid of itself, since God had plainly chosen to bring salvation to the world through the Jews. But the dramatic element is that the coming end of Israel's role is *personally* standing there. In place of the temple in Jerusalem is the temple of Jesus himself (cf. 2:19, 21). *He* is the true worshipper, who worships ‘in spirit (Spirit?⁵²) and truth’. In this, of course, to use Paul’s language, Jesus is the last Adam, the second Man’ (1 Cor. 15:45, 47). The Man of the Spirit now is one with God who is spirit, that is, not a physical being.

Put one way, this can sound so theologically correct, but the impact on the woman was immense! She sensed that this man may be the promised Messiah himself, the one who will announce all things. To her suggestion, Jesus replied: ‘I am, the one speaking to you’.

While Jesus’ answer may only mean that he agrees with the woman, the way he expressed himself leads us to wonder whether more is meant. ‘I am’ is ἐγώ εἰμι (*egō eimi*) and is an emphatic way of saying what could otherwise be stated simply by εἰμι alone. The man born blind used it of himself in 9:9. But behind this is the Old Testament use of ἐγώ εἰμι, and C. K. Barrett, commenting on 8:24, says:

⁵⁰ See Geoffrey C. Bingham, *The River of God*, NCPI, Blackwood, 2001. Cf. also G. K. Beale, *The Book of the Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1999, p. 1103ff. This theme is quite prominent in the Scriptures but seems surprisingly neglected.

⁵¹ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, S.P.C.K., London, 1967, p. 195.

⁵² Given the previous use of ‘in spirit’ (ἐν πνεύματι), actually the only other use in this Gospel, is in 1:33, where it is undeniably the Holy Spirit who is referred to, and given also the discussion above on 3:34, it would seem certain to me that this would mean that true worship is in the Holy Spirit.

We may say then that ἐγώ εἰμι ... (i) indicates the eternal being of Jesus; (ii) thereby, and in itself, places Jesus on a level with God (ἐγώ εἰμι usually is found in the LXX on the lips of God himself...)⁵³

For those who read their Scriptures in Greek, the language of Exodus 3:14 would be quickly in mind:

God said to Moses, 'I AM [ἐγώ εἰμι] WHO I AM.'⁵⁴ He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM'⁵⁵ has sent me to you.'

How does a person respond to a revelation like this? The woman had been told that from Jesus' gift comes living water which bubbles up to eternal life and, without every detail being spelled out, she had been deeply moved by him, so much so that whatever shame she may have had over her many relationships was now not an issue to be hidden. She simply had to speak of Jesus to others. 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!' She was now drinking 'living water' and it was a gushing spring within her.

The effect of that gushing spring was profound. Obviously impressed by the transformation in the woman and *her* word of testimony (4:39), realising that Jesus had been the cause, many of her fellow Samaritans came to Jesus and believed in him because of *his* word (4:41). Their own testimony was now not unlike that of the woman. She had said, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done' (4:29); they said, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world' (4:42).

Without doubt the woman's behavior had been sinful; the Samaritans recognised that he was the Savior of the world. But John the Baptist had introduced Jesus as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world' (1:29), so if they recognised him as the world's Savior it could only have been because the forgiveness of sins had come to them as it had come to her, albeit in anticipation of the great sin-bearing of the Cross. But the forgiveness would have no less real than that of any person of faith who preceded them. Thus David:

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

²Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. (Ps. 32:1-2 *NIV*)

Here was a belief which was far greater than any which was just impressed by seeing signs. It was a faith evoked by Jesus' word, and later the principle was plainly put that 'if you continue in my word you will know the truth and the truth will set you free ... every one who commits sin is a slave to sin ... if the Son sets you free you are free indeed' (8:32, 34, 36).

⁵³ *John*, p. 283. There are also seven uses of ἐγώ εἰμι in John where there is a predicate added: 6:35 'the bread of life' (cf. 6:48; also 6:41 and 51); 8:12 'the light of the world'; 10:7, 9 'I am the door'; 10:11, 14 'I am the good shepherd'; 11:25 'I am the resurrection and the life'; 14:6 'I am the way, the truth and the life'; and 15:1, 5 'I am the vine'. (See also similar language in 8:18 and 23.) Uses without the predicate are at 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8.

⁵⁴ The LXX reads Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὄν

⁵⁵ Ὁ ὄν

5

(viii) John 6:60-63

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?”⁶¹ But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you?⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?⁶³ It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

The teaching which the disciples found so difficult was occasioned by Jesus feeding the five thousand (6:1-13). Seeing the sign, the crowd has responded by concluding that Jesus was ‘indeed the prophet who is to come into the world’ (6:14). Their conclusion was not surprising; Moses had ‘fed’ the people with manna in the wilderness, something they evidently recognised as similar to what Jesus had done (6:30-31), and Moses had also promised that a prophet like him would arise to whom the people must submit themselves (Deut. 18:15-19).

What was significant was that the people had, in fact, not read the story correctly; it was not Moses at all but the LORD who gave the bread from heaven (Ex. 16:4; Ps. 105:40). As he had done before, Jesus identified the LORD of Israel as ‘my Father’ (6:32; cf. 2:16; 5:17, 43⁵⁶). Jesus gave the ‘bread’, not because of his likeness to Moses but because of his likeness to the Father. He then went further by asserting that the true bread from heaven does more than the manna ever could do: it ‘gives life to the world’ (6:33). And just as the woman of Samaria has responded by asking for ‘living water’ so this crowd responded by asking for the life giving bread (6:34).

The Father who gave bread in the wilderness has already given the living bread — it is Jesus himself (6:35). The problem lies not with any unwillingness on the Father’s part to provide the bread of life but in the unbelief of those who are merely fixated on signs (6:36). However, while unbelief is certainly a problem, as we have already been shown, there are those who believe, or who will, and they will most certainly receive authority to be children of God.⁵⁷ The reason they will believe does not lie in their own capacity to change; it lies solely in the gift and call of the Father:

Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away;³⁸ for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. (6:37-39)

No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. (6:44-45)

The final resurrection (of Israel?⁵⁸) will be for those who have come⁵⁹ to Jesus. *He* will raise them up. The assumption of the prerogative of God is again to be noted if not expounded. But

⁵⁶ John records Jesus using the phrase ‘my Father’ on twenty-five occasions.

⁵⁷ In the Johannine writings, ‘Son’ is a title reserved for Jesus, while in the Pauline material its use is extended to include Christians.

⁵⁸ While we think of ‘the resurrection of the body’, within the Old Testament resurrection, as distinct from the temporary raising of the dead, is a corporate thing; cf.. Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14. With the possible exception of Daniel 12:2, the

the only ones who can come to Jesus are those whom the Father draws. It is the Father who seeks (4:23) and without birth from above none can enter the kingdom (3:3, 5).

To be taught by God (cf. Isa. 54:13) is to come to Jesus and to eat the bread of life. This eating the bread of life, however, is presented by Jesus in a most stark way. Extending the reference to the way God sustained his people in the wilderness to include the provision of the water, Jesus bluntly identifies his body and blood as the elements to be consumed (6:51-56).

To suggest that this seems to be a reference to the Lord's Supper would not be unreasonable, given the language in the other Gospels and in 1 Corinthians 11, but John does not make that connection. It is assumed by those who want to argue that the writer has somehow 'hidden' the sacrament in this discussion, rather than explicitly dealing with it in the account of the last supper.⁶⁰ Jesus' intention was quite different from any focus on physical eating as verses 60ff. disclose.

Nonetheless, 'many of his disciples' were put off by what Jesus said. The NRSV translation above of 6:60, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' seems to me to be a bit weak, as if the issue was one of understanding. A more literal translation puts it: 'This is a hard word, who is able to hear it?' In other words, they do not want to *hear* this word rather than they cannot accept it (cf. Zech. 7:11; Acts 7:57). They were offended, scandalised,⁶¹ by what Jesus said and did not want to hear it (6:61). They were quite content to be his disciples, but not when it involved this!

'But what if you were to see the Son of man ascending to where he was before?' If they were offended by Jesus' talk of eating his body and blood, how would they respond to seeing the Son of man returning to the Father who sent him?⁶² The answer to this question has puzzled scholars. Would seeing the Son of Man ascending help or hinder those now scandalised? Actually Jesus seems to answer his own question in the next verse (6:63, the word *sarx* meaning 'flesh'):

...beholding the ascent of the Son of man would be of no help in overcoming the scandal, if this were a merely human beholding, that is *kata sarx* (cf. 2 Cor. 5:16). It must necessarily remain a human beholding, however, unless it is informed by the Spirit that is conveyed by Jesus.⁶³

Jesus' reference to the spirit giving life is probably meaningless unless it is a reference to the Holy Spirit (capital 'S') and not merely to 'spiritual' (small 's') realities, as in 3:5-8. The

expectation of personal resurrection from the dead developed much later, as in 2 Macc. 7:9, 11, 14, 22-23. Of course, the resurrection of the dead is by no means outside the view of the Old Testament scriptures, and when Jesus was raised from the dead, people of faith ought to have recognised it as part of the thrust of the prophetic scriptures; cf. also 1 Cor. 15:5. However, prior to his own resurrection, the only 'biblical proof' offered by Jesus for the expectation was in response to the hypothetical proposal by the Sadducees and was his reference to Moses in Luke 20:37-38. See John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:54* (WBC 35c), Word, Dallas, 1993, p. 966f.

⁵⁹ "Ἐρχεσθαι is used frequently in the Gospel of John as a metaphor for faith in Jesus"; Michael A. Daise, 'If anyone thirsts, let that one come to me and drink: The Literary Texture of John 7:37b-38a', *JBL* 122/4 (2003) 698.

⁶⁰ Neither Luther nor his Swiss contemporaries, occupied as they often were with controversy concerning the sacraments, saw in John 6 any discussion of sacramental eating and drinking of Christ's flesh and blood. 'Eating and drinking in this section was understood to be a metaphor for believing in Christ' (Gerhard Krodel, 'John 6:63', *Interpretation* 37.3 (July 1983), p. 285).

⁶¹ The Greek is σκανδαλίζει (skandalizei) and this response is like that of 1 Cor. 1:23, where the preaching of the cross is a 'scandal' (σκάνδαλον) to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles'.

⁶² Hare, *Son of Man Tradition*, p. 101. The discussion that follows is indebted to Hare.

⁶³ Hare, *Son of Man Tradition*, p. 101. In the same place Hare refers to Schweitzer who said: 'to behold *kata sarx* is to see only the *sarx*—but the *sarx* cannot save'.

discipleship that is only on the level of flesh cannot ever see or enter the kingdom of God; only the action of the Spirit can effect that discipleship which is vibrant with the life of God. And here is the issue: only the words (τα ῥήματα, *rhemata*) that Jesus himself has spoken are spirit and life because they are the utterances (ῥήματα) of God himself (3:34).

[This is not to be understood as implying that the words of Jesus (in red?) are somehow more potent than those of, say, the later apostles. Nor would it mean that just quoting the words of Jesus will have some power (perhaps cf. Acts 19:13-15). The point is that unless the utterance is by Jesus himself there is no work of the Spirit. This principle is later borne out in the two similar commands of Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16. To be filled with the Spirit is to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. The word of Christ is not now locked into the stories and discourses of the Gospels, whereas once they were heard with physical ears in Israel. In Ephesians 4:21, Paul addresses the Christians with, ‘surely you have heard him’⁶⁴ (not ‘*about* him’ or ‘*of* him’ as in most translations). Of course the words of Jesus are recorded in the text of the New Testament and they are definitive for our knowledge of God, though no less so than the words of the apostles whom he authorised, but it would be quite peculiar to suggest that Jesus has ceased speaking.]

(ix) John 7:37-39

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”³⁹ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.⁶⁵

As it stands, this passage requires a little preliminary examination. First, it is possible that it could be phrased, ‘...he cried out, “let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink” as the scripture has said.’ If that were the case, then the ‘as the scripture has said’ could be a reference to Isaiah 55:1.⁶⁶ Otherwise, it is difficult to specify which ‘scripture’ is in mind when Jesus said ‘out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water’. Of course, it could be a composite statement, one which takes up and summarises many statements in the Old Testament, but the use of the singular, ‘scripture’ would be a little unusual if that were the case (contrast 1 Cor. 15:3, 4).

Then there is the strange statement of verse 39, ‘as yet there was no Spirit’. Whatever else, that cannot mean that the Spirit was not in existence yet since, quite plainly, John the Baptist saw the Spirit descend and remain on Jesus (1:32) and there is the obvious presence of ‘the spirit of the Lord’ in the Old Testament prophets etc. However it is also almost certainly what John wrote.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ εἴ γε αὐτὸν ἠκούσατε; cf. AV, ASV.

⁶⁵ This is the text of the NRSV; following the order of the Greek, for verses 37b-38 we would have ‘If any [man] thirst, let [him] come to me and drink. ³⁸The one who believes in me, as the scripture said, out of his inner man/belly shall flow rivers of living water’.

⁶⁶ See Daise, ‘If anyone thirsts, let that one come to me and drink: The Literary Texture of John 7:37b–38a’, for a thorough discussion, also Barrett, *John*, p. 270.

⁶⁷ This is found in the majority of manuscripts. Some manuscripts, after the word ‘Spirit’, have δεδομένον (*dedomenon*), ‘having been given’, but this seems obviously an attempt to improve on what is at first sight a difficult phrase. There are other variant readings, too, but all with the same intention. Needless to say, these variants have understood the intention of the Gospel.

Given these questions, the passage still confronts us with a most powerful revelation of what it means to be drinking at the fountain of living waters.

The 'last day of the feast' was the final day of the feast of Tabernacles, or the feast of Booths.⁶⁸ A tabernacle is a temporary dwelling and the feast commemorated the time that Israel spent in temporary dwellings in the wilderness after coming out of Egypt (Lev. 23:43). Also:

It was a 'farmer's feast, the feast of the Ingathering, when all the produce of the fields (Ex. 23:16), and all the produce of the threshing-floor and of the presses (Deut. 16:13), had been gathered in. When all the fruits of the earth had been gathered, and the olives and the grapes had been pressed, the farmers assembled to give thanks to God. It was a joyful feast, and Eli's suspicion that Anna was tipsy (1 Sam. 1:14-15) shows that heavy drinking of the new wine was not unknown.⁶⁹

R. K. Harrison adds:

By NT times it had become a custom on that feast for a procession to visit the Pool of Siloam and return with water, which was then poured out as a libation of thanksgiving to God. It may well have been as a result of witnessing this ceremony that Jesus was prompted to make His observations about living water and eternal life (Jn. 7:37-39).⁷⁰

'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.' This language has been used before in 4:10-14 and 6:35, but this is more than a theme being repeated. There is a thirst which is within human beings and which cannot be slaked by anything of 'flesh' (6:63). That thirst, which cannot be fully comprehended in all its fearfulness until we are able to see Jesus himself deliberately enduring it (19:28; 10:17-18; Ps. 69:3), derives from the deliberate failure of men and women to find their springs in God (Ps. 87:7). Geoffrey Bingham has put it:

The River of God is His whole nature flowing through His whole creation, and the nature of the river of Man is true Man flowing out to creation what God has flowed into him.⁷¹

Failure to drink from the river of God has enormous consequences for humanity. It is not that there is any deficiency in God's supply (Ps. 65:9, 'The river of God is full of water') but the refusal to drink from God is the expression of great evil, as it leads to the construction of supposedly alternate supplies, which cannot satisfy because God will never permit them to do so. Many human efforts to replicate the supply which only comes from God are patently stupid and are quickly demonstrated as such. Others are highly sophisticated and seem to meet so much of human need, so simplistic evaluations would not be helpful. But there is a bottom line, namely that *God has said* that those things are 'cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water' (Jer. 2:13).

The consequence for men and women, while it ought not be caricatured, ought not be understated either. Mankind is diminished by its evil. Far from being a 'sub-source' of the issues of life (Prov. 4:23), those who choose the alternative become 'a muddied spring or a polluted fountain' (and 'the righteous who give way before the wicked' become like them,

⁶⁸ For a discussion concerning this feast, also known as *Sukkôth*, see Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1973, pp. 495-502. de Vaux highlights the complex nature of the feast and its development, so that not all would have identified any element as central.

⁶⁹ De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 496.

⁷⁰ 'Booths, Feast of', in Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Ed), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. One A-D, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 535.

⁷¹ *The River of God*, p. 2

Prov. 25:26). So who could know that they have a thirst? The answer would have to be, those whom the Father seeks and draws to the Son (4:23; 6:44), those who see beyond the signs into the reality to which they point.

However the paragraph of John 7:37-38 may be punctuated, the call of Isaiah 55 ought to be noted.

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
³Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David. (Isa. 55:1-3)

To come to the waters and drink is simply to come to the LORD and listen to him and to know the whole life of God. *There* is the deep satisfaction which nothing else can provide. Of course, one cannot have the life of God and continue in sin. But the key lies not in any personal ability to improve but in the great gift of forgiveness.

Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
⁷let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
¹⁰For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
¹¹so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.(Isa. 55:6-11)

God is in action to fulfil his purposes—‘my Father is working still’ (5:17)—and he does all things by his word. So to ‘drink’ is far more than to have one’s personal satisfaction restored. It is to be caught up again into all that humanity was intended to know and to be and to do.

Again there is the difference from the Old Testament promise in that it is not ‘the LORD’ who now is the source of the supply: Jesus said ‘If any [man] thirst, *let [him] come to me and drink.* ³⁸The one who *believes in me...*’ This is another of those statements which indicates

that language used of God in the Old Testament can appropriately be used of Jesus, that Jesus is God in the flesh.

It is Jesus who is the fountain of living water but those who drink from him, who believe in him, will have those rivers of living water flow from within them. A description of the flow of living water is in Ezekiel 47:1-12. Flowing from the throne of God (the Temple) is a stream of water which gradually becomes deeper and wider as it makes its way towards the Dead Sea. The significance of the flow is especially clear when the barrenness of the Dead Sea area is known. The Dead Sea, in which nothing can live becomes a sea filled with many kinds of fish and the surrounding area, so harsh and unproductive, becomes a place where trees grow in rich proliferation: the fruit of the trees are for food while the leaves are for healing, 'because the water for them flows from the sanctuary' (Ezek. 47:12). This is the restoration of creation, where in Eden there was a river which watered the garden (Gen. 2:10). And just as Adam was commanded to fill the earth, to expand the sanctuary of Eden, so this living water from the LORD, from Jesus (1 Cor. 8:6), now flows from those who believe in him.

The implications of this are immense. To drink is to have the rivers of living water flow but, more, the effects of that flow have vast dimensions. Believers are to be engaged in the restoration and transformation of the creation. That is why John added:

Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Keeping in mind that Jesus, having received the Spirit for his own ministry, is the one who is to baptise with the Holy Spirit (1:33), this statement adds to the picture. Those who are to be baptised with the Spirit are those who believe in him. But Jesus cannot baptise with the Spirit until he has been glorified, so, as yet, there is no Spirit *in the way anticipated in 1:33*.

The issue is, then, the glorification of Jesus. His glorification is not merely when he is honoured in a human way; it is when he is glorified by his being 'lifted up' on the cross, thus taking away the sins of the world (12:32-33; 1:29). That is the glory of the Son of God. So the gift of the Spirit is related directly to the forgiveness of sins. It has been said that the cross was with a view to Pentecost and Pentecost with a view to the cross. In other words, the cross, by dealing with sin, opens up the goal of the gift of the Spirit, while Pentecost means that the whole work of the cross is brought to full fruition in those who are baptised with the Spirit.

The matter cannot just be left there, for we believers are now living in the gift of the Spirit. The question for us must be, are we living in the faith by which we began so that we can know the rivers of living water flowing through us? It is not that some may have gone 'deeper' than others since there is nothing deeper than the work of the cross. It is that all who are in Christ *must* know the fulness of Christ's gift. What this may mean in individual experience will certainly differ, but that is because the one body of Christ has many distinct members but all those members are still part of the one body, so it can also be said that, if the rivers of living water are flowing, questions of comparison with other people become an irrelevance (thus 1 Cor. 12).

There is no technique for knowing the flow. There is only faith. So the question is, simply, are we genuinely people of faith, people who are determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified, not just as a doctrinal formula but as the ongoing reality in which alone we can know the fulness of the Spirit whom our glorified Savior has given?

6

(x) John 8:30-55

As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

³¹Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” ³³They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free?’” ³⁴Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. ³⁸I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.”

³⁹They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did, ⁴⁰but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹You are indeed doing what your father does.” They said to him, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.” ⁴²Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. ⁴³Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. ⁴⁴You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God.”

⁴⁸The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?”

⁴⁹Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the judge. ⁵¹Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.” ⁵²The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’

⁵³Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?” ⁵⁴Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, ‘He is our God,’ ⁵⁵though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word.

This large section of John’s Gospel makes no mention of the Holy Spirit, but is nonetheless highly significant for our discussion of things concerning the flowing of rivers of living water. This is because this section highlights what we might call ‘the anti-flow’, the perverse rejection of the purpose of God for creation which is also a deep bondage.

It is sometimes assumed that human beings have an inbuilt capacity to hear the word of God and to make rational responses to it. For instance, the people, having seen Jesus’ great ‘signs’, might be expected to have perceived that to which the signs pointed. Instead, they very quickly demonstrated a deep and vicious hostility to Jesus in whom they had ‘believed’ (8:30). They actually wanted to kill him! In another context such a change in attitude and behavior may seem irrational, but in the sphere of Christian experience now it is more often the Christians who are presented as the irrational ones. Likewise, the ones who wanted to kill Jesus accused *him* of having a demon (8:48, 52). So how do we explain all this?

God the Revealer

When we begin to look at this topic, we sometimes find that we are dealing with a subject to be discussed, a ‘doctrine’ for consideration and clarification. The doctrine of revelation is certainly an element of Christian understanding and it is soon plain that there has been, not just discussion, but a vast amount of often heated controversy involved over the centuries. Some of that has been important, too, especially as various heresies have arisen, sometimes threatening the very life of the church. But we must not start there, as if doctrine is all that it is.

The place to start, I suggest, is with the biblical data concern God himself and we have canvassed much of that before (as in the 2004 Study ‘The Word’). The fundamental point, though, is that from creation it has been God himself, and not only information about God, who has confronted men and women. It was God who came to Adam at the time of the evening breeze. What is more, God has not ceased being personally present to his creation, which implies that such statements as Psalm 19:1, ‘The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork’, must mean *more* than just that God has left clues to his character within the things that have been made. Certainly Romans 1:19-20 says this:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.⁷² Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.

There are some things that cannot be known about God: ‘The secret things belong to the LORD our God’ (Deut. 29:29). But that which can be known he reveals. ‘To them’ (v. 19) expresses two different constructions⁷² and it is not clear whether the same thing is meant (NRSV, NIV, ESV) or that it should be translated as ‘that which may be known of God is manifest *in* them; for God hath shewed [it] unto them’ (AV, cf. RV, AV⁷³ — the NASB has ‘*within* them...to them’). One commentator suggests that the first phrase should be ‘in their midst’,⁷⁴ adding that ‘in their midst and all around them and also in their own creaturely existence (including of course what is inward as well as what is external) God is objectively manifest: His whole creation declares Him’.

This means that from the moment of creation every created thing declares the truth of the creator and they do so not independently of God but because God himself speaks through each one of them. He continues to declare himself. The final purpose of this revelation is communion. Acts 17:26-28 says that made all the nations and set them within his creation *in order that* they would search for God and find him. It is not that God is distant from them and needs to be ‘discovered; quite the opposite: ‘In him we live and move and have our being’. To ‘find’ God is, then, to come to a clear awareness of the nature of humanity. We are created for intimate communion with God.

⁷² διότι τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς· ὁ θεὸς γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἐφάνερωσεν. The first phrase uses ἐν plus the dative, while the second uses only the simple dative. ἐν is a very common preposition and it is impossible to demand that it be understood the same way every time it is used.

⁷³ Paul Barnett (*Romans: The Revelation of God’s Righteousness*, Christian Focus Fearn, 2003, p. 45) says “the knowledge of God” is “evident” in two respects. First it is “evident” “in” them, that is, in their moral sense, reflected in the Gentiles’ ethical values and virtues (1:32; 2:14-15). Second, it is “evident” to them, in the creation...’.

⁷⁴ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC, Volume I, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1975, p. 113f.

In order for humanity to know communion with God, we must recognise the amazing nature of humanity's creation. We are 'in the image of God'. This does not mean that we somehow, passively, reflect God, as in a mirror we see our own 'reflection', but that as the image of God we are created to correspond to all that God is and does. God did not intend anything less than a full love relationship with his image. Imagine, on the other hand, having a relationship with one's mirror reflection! Given that, the non-human part of creation should be seen as the handiwork of the creator, existing for the image to enjoy and in order that humanity might exercise a love-dominion over it. To know the creator would be to see his handiwork in all that exists, ourselves included.

To be in God's image means that we are to resonate with all that God is. If he is the fount of love then we are to love. If he is holy then we are to be holy. If he is the giver of all things then we are to be grateful receivers — and givers. If he is the one with eternal power and 'godness' (delineating our creatureliness), then we ought to worship him, honouring *him* as God. If he is the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13), then we ought to keep our hearts with all vigilance for from them flow the springs of life (Prov. 4:23). In other words, to see a human being would be to see God's being richly revealed in his image. It would be to see a participant in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

Waterless Springs

The statement of Genesis 1:26, 'Let us make humankind [Man] in our image, according to our likeness' is fundamental for understanding humanity. Warning against the danger of a careless use of the tongue, James wrote:

With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God.

¹⁰From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.

¹¹Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? (James 3:9-11)

James' word for 'likeness'⁷⁵ is the same one used in Genesis 1:26. In fact that is the only occasion the word is used in the New Testament. On other occasions in the New Testament a similar word is used with the same meaning.⁷⁶ Thus when Paul continues his argument in Romans 1, he says:

So they are without excuse; ²¹for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools; ²³and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. (Rom. 1:20-23)

In Greek, 'images resembling' (v. 23) is a phrase using the words 'image' and 'likeness',⁷⁷ I suggest, indicating humanity's deliberate rejection of Genesis 1:26. Instead of actively *being* the image and so being the glory of God,⁷⁸ rebellious humanity has chosen to reject the glory of God and rather than be the image of the *immortal* God has chosen to make images of *mortal* man, or of other created things. Paul has identified this as 'suppressing' the truth (Rom. 1:18) though that word may suggest that humanity has been successful. The ASV

⁷⁵ ὁμοίωσις

⁷⁶ ὁμοίωμα. Technically ὁμοίωμα refers to the *result* of ὁμοίωσις, the action of making something like.

⁷⁷ ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνας

⁷⁸ In 1 Cor. 1:7 Paul says that the man is 'the image and glory of God'. *NRSV* 'image and reflection' is not adequate.

translates this as ‘hindering the truth’ and the AV as ‘holding the truth in unrighteousness’. We would say that the truth is there, because God is there, speaking and revealing himself in all his moral glory, and that that revelation is a torment to fallen men and women. Since they cannot remove God from their thinking (see Rom. 1:28) they are forced to continually attempt to hold down the truth and to try to deny that its moral demands are the great issues of life. The way to hold down the demands for rich moral purity is by actions which deny that that is the truth of a person. As David observed, ‘From the wicked comes wickedness’ (1 Sam. 24:13). In contrast, the writer of Ecclesiastes concluded that the ‘whole of man is to fear God and keep his commandments’ (Eccles. 12:13). A person has true being, is substantial as a human being, when he or she is one with God’s substantiality, his fulness of divine being. The alternative is what the Preacher called ‘vanity of vanities’ (Eccles. 1:2), utter emptiness. While claiming to be wise men and women have become fools, with minds that are senseless and thinking that is futile.

All the time, of course, humanity remains richly endowed with the abilities which God has given to his image. Here is the contradiction and the battle. Great abilities in men and women are seen and appreciated but all without essential gratitude and worship. So by the old phrase ‘total depravity’ is not meant that people are corrupt in all their attitudes and behavior, though that is occasionally and sadly seen, but that every attitude and action is affected in some way. That is at least one of the reasons why the list in Romans 1:24-32 of sinful expressions of humanity’s holding down the truth is as broad as it is.

But there is an even darker aspect to all this. Ephesians 2:1-3 sets this out:

You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

Paul sets out the awful predicament faced by men and women. Apart from the regenerating mercy of God, they are dead in sin. They lived in those sins because they could do nothing else (see Mark 7:21)! They are *culpably caught*. In other words, while men and women may have been enslaved by the evil one, the ruler of the power of the air, it is totally because of human sin and guilt before God that that is so. Were there no guilt, Satan and his forces would have no power. As it is, though, the whole world lies in the evil one (1 John 5:19), the counterfeit deity, ‘the god of this world’ (2 Cor. 4:4).

Revelation 12:15-16 uses a significant picture to describe the activity of Satan, the dragon which is attempting to thwart the work of God.

Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. ¹⁶But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.

Satan mimics God and so if there is a genuine, life giving flow of the river of God then Satan will and does have his own river which is deadly.

What, then, would we expect from those who have been captured by the devil ‘to do his will’ (2 Tim. 2:26)? At this point the account in John 8 comes into focus. The context was established in John 1:1-18; the life of all people, the light of all, was coming into the world. It was shining brightly in the darkness and the darkness could not overcome it, to destroy its work (so NRSV). Neither did the light make sense to the darkness (so NIV). Even though the

world belonged to the Word, it is his by right of creation, when he came to his own people⁷⁹, who ought to have been men and women of faith and so received him wholeheartedly, they refused him. Later John put it that Jesus' presence was a judgment, for:

the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and so not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. (3:19-20)

So when 'many believed in him' (8:30), Jesus, who knew what was in everyone' (2:25), exposed the dimensions of their bondage. To be his disciple means continuing in his word (recall the distress they felt when Jesus explained the nature of true life in 6:52ff). Only then could they know the truth and so be liberated by the truth. At that point these people who claimed to be alive as the people of God, as Abraham's descendants, flew into a rage. Their response was quite mindless. 'We have never been slaves to anyone' was patent nonsense. Nationally Israel had been slaves of many nations, and many had even been enslaved within Israel. Their own scriptures testified to this. Isaiah wrote: "O LORD our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us' (Isa. 26:13). Jesus' point, though, was that the real bondage was sin (8:34), and the real freedom could only come from continuing in his word because he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29).

In reality, these people hated Jesus and wanted to kill him. While ever he simply healed or performed other 'miracles' all was well. Those who prophesy 'smooth things' (Isa. 30:10) rarely encounter much hostile opposition. But when Jesus declared what he had seen in the Father's presence (8:38) his life was in immediate danger. That was because these, while claiming to have Abraham as their father, were actually doing the will of their father the devil (8:44). If Satan was a liar, then the truth, namely God himself in all that he is and does and purposes (cf. 14:6) would infuriate them. And if they wanted to kill him, it was because the devil has been a murderer from the beginning, meaning from creation. Satan's lie to Eve, 'You shall not die' (Gen. 3:4) was in order to kill those to whom God had given life. God had breathed into the man the breath of his own life and the serpent was set to undo that great work. Indeed he comes only to steal and kill and destroy (10:10a).

The Restoration of the Flow

'If the son makes you free you will be free indeed' (8:36), therefore, means that the Son, by taking away the sins of the world, liberates men and women who receive him, who believe in his name, from the bondage of their guilt and from the destructive power of the evil one. This implies far more than a statistical change, as if it only a change in our legal status is meant, and it certainly implies far more than a change of allegiance on our part. Apart from the liberating work of the Son, men and women remain in deep, deforming bondage. Mere appeal to the will of people, urging them to change, is totally ineffective. Their will is at the heart of the problem. They have been captured by the devil to do his will and their wills are now one with his — 'you choose to do your father's desires'. So the work of liberation must go to the very depths of men and women and not just make forgiveness possible but actually effect forgiveness in them. If all he does is make forgiveness possible then the assumption remains that it is up to us to 'appropriate' it. On the contrary, forgiveness of sins is to be

⁷⁹ See p. 3, n. 7

proclaimed in his name (Luke 24:47), with the understanding that in the proclamation forgiveness actually comes to men and women. Thus Jesus said to the disciples: 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained' (20:23).

Paul wrote that faith is a gift (Eph. 2:8-9) and when people 'believe' in Jesus, that is when they are captured by his love and so know the whole of God, then the rivers of living water will again break out. The anti-flow is consumed and destroyed in the holy judgment of the Cross and the new creation is present in those in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

The anti-flow, while perhaps appearing so attractive at times, is really totally ugly, hideous in its source and in its effects. On the other hand, Jesus said, 'I came that [you] may have life, and have it abundantly' (10:10b) and that is the way it is when the rivers of living water again flow in men and women of faith.

7

Working through the topic in the way we are doing may tend to deprive us of the powerful sense of anticipation that the Gospel of John engenders. That is perhaps unavoidable to some extent, but we ought to begin this section by reminding ourselves of the amazing expectations that this Gospel has presented.

First there is the Prologue (1:1-18). John has provided this as an introduction to the themes of what follows, though in a way that is quite different from a mere survey of the contents to come. He says that the Word, God himself, by whom every thing was created, the light of the world, was actually, really coming into the world! Of course, as the Word he was already in the world⁸⁰: the world had come into being through him, even though it had equally rejected him and substituted its own self-generated life and light (1:10-11), which our previous section has shown to be totally deadly. Though the world had rejected him, the purposes of God would not be frustrated. There are those who will believe in him, and they will have authority to be children of God, but this will not be because of their own choices nor because of their heritage:⁸¹ they become children of God because God has caused that great transformation to take place (1:13; cf. 6:70; 15:16).

Now the Word becomes flesh! Here is the *man* Jesus, while certainly the Messiah of Israel with all that means in terms of God's purposes within history, who reveals the whole truth of God as the Father. Just as Adam ought to have filled his role as the image of God, so now the Word incarnate (i.e. 'in flesh') does so in a way that is most dynamic, that is there is *authentic* action in who he is and what he does. His presence within the creation, at this point specifically within Israel, is with a view to restoring to men and women all that was lost and abdicated at the fall. That means he is about to 'take away the sins of the world' (1:29) and baptise with the Holy Spirit (1:33).

As the Gospel progresses, this announcement concerning the bestowal of the Holy Spirit is repeated, as we have seen. Thus there were Jesus' comments to Nicodemus, to the Samaritan woman and, somewhat climactically, at the feast of Tabernacles in chapter seven:

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."' ³⁹Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (7:37-39)

⁸⁰ Verse 10 says 'He was in the world, and the world came into being through him'. The word translated 'was' is ἦν, the imperfect tense of the verb to be, implying continuous action. So John would not be anticipating in verse 10 what he will say in verse 14. His point here is that the Word was always present in the world, as indeed he must be since 'the Word was God', but he was *not* present in the special saving, judging and revelatory way that would take place in the incarnation.

⁸¹ It has been argued that 'What this meant (v.12), is God gave to a definite community in whose life a profound change had occurred, the status that Israel held in the Old Testament (cf. Exod. 4:22) the right to become Sons of God. That is, God gave the right to become the true Israel' (W. J. Dumbrell, unpublished paper). It is certainly true that in God's choice of Israel he designated them as his 'sons' (John reserves that title for Jesus, preferring 'child/children' for believers), but it needs to be argued that John simply makes *only* that transfer and does not go further. Instead, since the Gospel of John commences with creation, we might well see that being designated 'children of God' indicates the renewal of the whole creation. Cf. Luke 3:38, where Adam is called 'the [son] of God' and also Paul's strong presentation of Jesus as the last Adam etc.

Instead of just seeing the ‘theology of the Holy Spirit’ developed within the Gospel, we might well understand that John is leading us (as his readers, cf. 20:30-31) to see that what is promised is about to happen within his account, and that this is what *has happened* to us who stand beyond these events, who have already believed in the name of Jesus. (Our own question ought to be, then, ‘have we, who are in Christ now, come to know what has been done as did, say, those described in the book of Acts?’ That means that it is one thing to give doctrinal assent to the notion of rivers of living water flowing from our inner being: it is quite another to know that that is actually happening as we believe in Christ.)

Far from being a story of obvious triumph, the account of Jesus is clothed in mystery. Jesus’ signs are not understood for what they are by the very people who should, given their heritage and the revelation which God had already provided through Moses and the prophets (Luke 16:29), the scriptures (5:39-47), see them and so believe what he says. Even the climactic sign, the raising of Lazarus out of the dead (cf. 5:25), becomes an offensive moment, inciting even deeper hatred towards Jesus (11:53) and those who have benefited from him (12:10; 15:18ff). When John said ‘we have seen his glory’ (1:14) we might, initially at least, have expected to see great splendour, or what we might humanly define as splendour. When some Greeks, evidently ‘God-fearers’, non-Jews who ‘displayed some sympathy with Jewish religion without actually converting to Judaism’,⁸² came to see Jesus, we might understand that to be the goal of history being achieved, non-Jews worshipping in Jerusalem and wanting to see Israel’s Messiah. But Jesus’ response involved more:

Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say— ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. (John 12:23-33)

If Jesus is to be glorified then he must die. If all people are to come to him, because he will draw them, then he must do so by being lifted up from the earth. That will be his true exaltation — his death.⁸³

Jesus found this deeply distressing yet there was no possibility that he would try to avoid the horror of what lay ahead (12:27; cf. Luke 12:50). So it was, then, that ‘knowing that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father’ (13:1), Jesus told the disciples what this departure involved. Chapters 13 – 17 of John’s Gospel focus on Jesus’ evening with the disciples immediately prior to his arrest and crucifixion. All that has been anticipated will now be spelled out in greater detail to them. The importance of this teaching is demonstrated

⁸² Paul F. Stuehnenberg, ‘Proselyte’ in David Noel Freedman (Ed.) *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 5, O-Sh, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p. 505. See also Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AB 31, Doubleday, New York, 1998, p. 449f. The title, ‘God-fearers’, does not occur in the New Testament. The closest would be in Acts 10:2, 22, 35.

⁸³ This principle has been already expressed, for example, at 1:29, ‘the Lamb of God’; 2:19, ‘Destroy this temple’; 3:14, ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up’; and 6:51, ‘the bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh’.

by the space devoted to it in the Gospel: chapters 1 – 12 cover the three or so years of Jesus' ministry while chapters 13 – 19 cover a period of twenty four hours.

The Upper Room

Chapter 13 is John's account of the final meal which Jesus had with the disciples, although there is no reference to what is elsewhere known as the Lord's Supper. Instead, the story commences with Jesus washing the feet of the disciples and then explaining the significance of what he had done. He was demonstrating the nature of his love for them. 'He loved them to the end' (13:1) and showed that by fully serving them. By taking the role of lowly slave and washing their feet, Jesus was acting out the washing which made them [all⁸⁴] totally clean (see 13:10). Not every one of them gained the benefit of that washing, however (13:11). As their Lord, he serves them utterly and therefore they should follow his example.

The departure of Judas set in motion the train of events which would lead inevitably to Jesus' death. That is why Jesus immediately declared his glorification (13:31). But when he told them he would be with the disciples only a little longer and that they could not go with him they were dismayed, with Peter's protestation of loyalty no doubt representative of them all (cf. Matt. 26:35).

(xi) John 14:1-7

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.' ⁵Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' ⁶Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.' (John 14:1-7)

This passage has sometimes, and popularly, been taken to refer to what is called Christ's 'second coming', but I doubt that that is John's intention, especially if what has already been examined is taken as a basis for chapters 14 – 20 of John's Gospel. There are, certainly, statements elsewhere in the Gospel which seem to point in some way towards the return of Christ at the end of present history, but they are by no means conspicuous nor always incontrovertible.⁸⁵

The translation of verses 1 and 2 is a little difficult, as a comparison with other versions will show. The command 'Believe in God' could equally be a statement (as with *AV*, 'ye believe in God, believe also in me') and the question in verse 2, 'If it were not so, would I have told you ...?' could also be a statement, '... I would have told you' (*AV*, *NIV*). Given

⁸⁴ 'You are all clean' (13:10) uses the plural for 'you' and refers to them all, with the proviso which followed indicating that his betrayer was not included.

⁸⁵ For instance, 5:25-29; 6:37-44. This is not to assume either that John was ignorant of that aspect of Christian hope or that he had written out of some sense of disappointment that the return of Christ had not yet taken place, leading him, instead, to restate hope in present terms. As part of the wider Christian community John would have been aware of the hope expressed by the other apostles. My suggestion is that John's intention was different and that his aim was to focus on the hope realised at Pentecost (though he does not mention that event in the way Luke does).

that Jesus has not said anything about ‘dwelling places’ or ‘rooms’ before this, the statement form seems to me to make more sense.

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled’ is appropriate in the context of the evening’s discussion; the disciples are faced with the imminent departure of Jesus, and they are no doubt conscious of the fierce hostility of the Jewish authorities. But instead of being in a state of dread, the disciples should believe/trust in/have faith⁸⁶ in God and they should also believe in Jesus. They should trust God to fulfil his promises and trust Jesus to do what he sees the Father doing (5:17, 19-20), and they should continue to trust.⁸⁷

The phrases ‘In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places’ (*NRSV*) or ‘many rooms’ (*RSV, NIV*) sound quite tame compared to the more familiar ‘many mansions’ of the *AV*. However, it is the word ‘mansion’ which has changed its meaning over time. The Greek word John used, μονή (*monē*) means a ‘staying, abiding’ and so a place where one stays, which is what mansion originally meant. The word occurs again in 14:23, ‘we will make our dwelling with him’ (*NIV*, ‘make our home...’). And the dwelling places are in the Father’s house. None of this need be understood spatially,⁸⁸ anymore than should entering the kingdom (3:5). And this does not need to be understood as a reference to ‘heaven’ as the future abode of believers, if for no other reason than that John and Peter both write of a new *earth* where believers will find their eternal future (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-2, drawing, of course, from Isa. 65:17; 66:22).⁸⁹ So Jesus may well be saying that there are *many* places for people within the household of God. At 10:16 Jesus said, ‘I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice’. Likewise 11:52 refers to ‘the dispersed children of God’, meaning that the purposes of God encompass a vast number of men and women, well beyond the number with Jesus during his ‘earthly ministry’.⁹⁰ Given the promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:5 cf. Rev. 7:9), that is hardly surprising.

‘If it were not so, I would have told you’ would mean that if God had changed his purpose Jesus would have made that known to them. But, as it is, Jesus is actually going to prepare a place for *them* so that they may be with him. While they may feel distraught because he says he is going away, whatever that may yet mean, Jesus provides the assurance that they will indeed be with him, secure in the Father’s house. He will come again and take them to himself. Again, we should ask why this must be understood spatially, especially in the light of all that will follow, especially in verses 18-23. In other words, when he takes them to himself, he will not necessarily be taking them to another *place*; he will be taking them to himself and if he *is*,⁹¹ not where he *will be*, in full, intimate communion with the Father, and that is exactly what they, too, will have.

Verse 4 focuses on the *way* Jesus will go. It is not only the destination but the route he must take which they know. There can be no achieving of that communion for the disciples unless he goes as it is ‘written of him’ (12:16) and since Jesus has spoken many things they

⁸⁶ All being valid translation of πιστεύετε. Cf. 2:23-24.

⁸⁷ The Greek Present tense implying a *continuous* action.

⁸⁸ The word ‘house’ used here, οἰκία and its synonym οἶκος, can refer to a building but also to a family unit.

⁸⁹ The use of the word ‘heaven’ for the hope of believers has become almost totally clichéd and really fails to do full justice to the biblical data. Our hope lies in the restoration and the fulfilment of the creation and not in an escape from it. And, if ‘heaven’ describes the dwelling place of God, then Rev. 21:3 describes God as present within the renewed creation; see also Rev. 21:22; 22:3.

⁹⁰ He is, of course, still having an ‘earthly ministry’, though not seen as it was then.

⁹¹ εἰμι.

should know that is the way of the exaltation of his death. He cannot raise again ‘this temple’ unless first it is destroyed (2:19⁹²). This is the same as Luke 24:25-27:

Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

For him the way was never optional. Neither is it for those who follow him. It has been said that suffering is not the cost of glory but the way of glory. Thus Mark 8:31-34:

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” ³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:31-34)

Of course that does not, and cannot, mean that we must copy or reproduce his suffering. The point is that it is *his* suffering that must be known (cf. 6:53-58). That is why Thomas’ bewildered question in 14:5 receives the answer it does. The way is totally Jesus: he is ‘the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [him]’. *He* is the way to the Father, *he* is the truth of the Father and *he* is the life of the Father. And the goal is communion with the Father (cf. 4:23-24)! That is why *he* will baptise with the Spirit, why the water that *he* will give is a spring of water welling up to eternal life and why the rivers of living water will flow when we believe in *him*.

⁹² Cf. 2:16-17 where the issue is ‘my Father’s house’ (οἶκος).

8

As we examine the substance of John chapters 14-16, my basic premise is that, when Jesus said he would go away and prepare a place for the disciples and then return and take them to himself (14:3), Jesus was referring to him returning in the person of the Holy Spirit.⁹³ This is not to deny that one day every eye will see him, including those who pierced him (Rev. 1:7)⁹⁴ nor that John was aware that this lay ahead in the plan of God (cf. 16:13). However, I suggest that John's primary focus in these chapters is on the way that men and women would be recreated in Christ through the gift of the Spirit. In this way, they will know intimacy with the Father and the Son who will abide in them; through that they will know peace in the midst of hatred directed towards Jesus, fruitfulness in living and certainty in their direct communication with the Father.

(xii) John 14:8-14

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. ¹²Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

Although there are five 'sections' in this part of John's Gospel which have been called 'Paraclete passages' (14:16-17; 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11; 16:12-15),⁹⁵ simply to extract them from what is a single passage seems to be strange. We cannot read the text as if John had not intended us to read the discussion in the upper room as a consistent whole, Jesus explaining something of utmost seriousness, and not, as some suggest, a series of isolated paragraphs.⁹⁶

If we recall that Jesus had promised that out of the inner being of those who believe in him would flow rivers of living water, and that that was a reference to the Holy Spirit who would be given when he was glorified, and that he would be glorified at the cross, then why should not chapter 14 be a continuation of that theme? In verse 1 he urges the disciples to believe in him because he will come to them and take them to himself. He is the way to the Father. He is not suggesting that the Father is distant but saying, 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me' (14:11); that is why you cannot go to the Father and bypass the Son. And the

⁹³ This is by no means a majority view. It is based, though, on the overall progression throughout the Gospel which we have been examining and not only on an analysis of these chapters alone.

⁹⁴ This alludes to Zech. 12:10, and in Revelation John applies to the day when Jesus will return in triumph. However, in John 19:37 the same passage is used to refer to Jesus on the cross, which may cause us to ponder whether *rigid* views of the fulfilment of prophecy are always valid. See, Adrio König, *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology*, Eerdmans, 1989/ NCPI, 2003, p. 17ff.

⁹⁵ D. A. Carson, *John*, p. 498.

⁹⁶ This is admittedly an oversimplification, but even some commentaries which hold to the truth of the written word concentrate their attention on the trees and miss the wood.

disciples ought to have believed that (14:1), given all that has been revealed in Jesus. For instance, in 2:11, John told us that at the wedding feast Jesus ‘revealed his glory’ which, according to 1:14, was the glory as of the only son of the Father. Now if they had indeed believed in him, then that intimacy with the Father is exactly what they should have seen.

Furthermore, 14:12 builds on this: ‘Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father’. This is the rivers of living water flowing. But they flow because of the relationship which the believers have with Jesus, again a principle established in the Prologue (1:12), which means that their prayer will be as potent as his (14:13-14)! Without wanting to minimise that potency, it should, however, be noted that the potency of Jesus’ prayer was not determined by his own independent perceptions but by his awareness of and oneness with all that the Father was doing (see 1:18; 3:34-5; 5:17-20; 8:38; 10:17-18; 12:27f).

(xiii) John 14:15-17

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

The sentence, ‘If you love me you will keep⁹⁷ my commandments’ is a ‘sensible’ thing to say given what has preceded it. It is exactly the way Jesus responds to the Father, and although that is yet to be stated as such, it has obviously been implied. In the whole of John’s Gospel there is only one reference to Jesus loving the Father (14:31) while there are eight direct statements saying that the Father loves Jesus (3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9,10; 17:23, 24, 26). In 15:10 it is made clear that obedience is at the heart of the response to love: ‘If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.’

John wrote that ‘love is of God’ (1 John 4:7) and ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8, 16). There is a principle that, unless the context makes it impossible, references to God within the New Testament are references to the Father and that is what we see in this Gospel. It is the Father who loves his Son, it is the Father who loves the world and so gives his Son (3:16) in order that the world may be saved. Hence there is the statement in 10:17: ‘For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again.’ Calvin has the following comment:

Therefore doth the Father love me. There is, of course, another higher reason why the Father loves the Son. For the voice from heaven was not meaningless. ‘This is the beloved Son, in whom dwells the good pleasure of God’ (Matt. 3.17). But as He became man for our sakes and the Father loved Him to the end that He might reconcile us to Himself, it is not surprising that He says that He is loved, since our salvation is dearer to Him than His own life. Here is a wonderful commendation of the divine goodness to us which should ravish our whole souls into admiration, that God not only extends to us the love due to the only-begotten, but ascribes it to us as the final cause. And indeed there was no need

⁹⁷ AV has the imperative, ‘keep my commandments’, based on some MSS which have the aorist imperative τηρήσατε and although that is well attested, most other translations are based on the future tense, τηρήσετε, occurring in other MSS, particularly because it accords better with the future tense ἐρωτήσω which follows in verse 16 (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 245).

for Christ to put on our flesh, in which He was beloved, except that it might be the pledge of His fatherly mercy in redeeming us.⁹⁸

Were we to be simply analytical we would surely miss having our souls ‘ravished’ by the divine goodness. Yet I would also suggest that that is what true analysis would reveal. The intimacy of the Father and the Son is what Jesus is saying will come to and flow through those who believe in him. And it will flow because his departure will not mean that the flow of love and life from the Father to the Son and then to the disciples will cease; rather, Jesus will ask the Father and the Father will give ‘another Advocate’ who will never depart.

The phrase ‘another Advocate’ requires comment. First, the word ‘another’ translates the Greek ἄλλος (*allos*) which means another of the same sort. The Advocate to come will be *as Jesus* to the disciples. The word ‘Advocate’, Greek παράκλητος (*paraklētos*, hence the use, sometimes, simply of ‘Paraclete’) has been translated as Advocate, Counsellor, Comforter and Helper etc.⁹⁹ While the word can have all these meanings in different contexts, those who first heard or read it would have recognised the area of meaning appropriate to this context. We, on the other hand, when faced with the need to express ourselves in English find ourselves with a difficulty and, to avoid it, some have chosen just to use the word ‘Paraclete’.

Whatever word we may need to use, the meaning is actually determined by Jesus himself. As I said, the Advocate to come will be *as Jesus* to the disciples. He will be another of the same sort as Jesus. But whereas Jesus is going away (14:2-3), the Advocate who comes will be with the disciples forever. Later Jesus made it plain that his going away was actually for the benefit of the disciples, for if he were not to go the Advocate would not come (16:7). If

⁹⁸ *The Gospel according to St John 1-10*, Trans. T. H. L. Parker, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1959, p. 268.

⁹⁹ For a discussion see Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Volume 2 XIII-XXI, AB, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1966, pp. 1135-1144. Brown provides the following summary (p. 1135):

- (a) The coming of the Paraclete and the Paraclete's relation to the Father and the Son
 - The Paraclete will come (but only if Jesus departs) xv 26, xvi 7, 8, 13
 - The Paraclete comes forth from the Father xv 26
 - The Father will give the Paraclete at Jesus' request xiv 16
 - The Father will send the Paraclete in Jesus' name xiv 26
 - Jesus, when he goes away, will send the Paraclete from the Father xv 26, xvi 7
- (b) The identification of the Paraclete
 - He is called "another Paraclete" xiv 16
 - He is the Spirit of Truth xiv 17, xv 26, xvi 13
 - He is the Holy Spirit xiv 26
- (c) The role the Paraclete plays in relation to the disciples
 - The disciples recognize him xiv 17
 - He will be within the disciples and remain with them xiv 17
 - He will teach the disciples everything xiv 26
 - He will guide the disciples along the way of all truth xvi 13
 - He will take what belongs to Jesus to declare to the disciples xvi 14
 - He will glorify Jesus xvi 14
 - He will bear witness on Jesus' behalf, and the disciples too must bear witness xv 26-27
 - He will remind the disciples of all that Jesus told them xiv 26
 - He will speak only what he hears and nothing on his own xvi 13
- (d) The role the Paraclete plays in relation to the world
 - The world cannot accept the Paraclete xiv 17
 - The world neither sees nor recognizes the Paraclete xiv 17
 - He will bear witness to Jesus against the background of the world's hatred for and persecution of the disciples xv 26 (cf xv 18-25)
 - He will prove the world wrong about sin, justice, and judgment xvi 8-11

we recall the discussion on John 1:29-34, where it was noted that the reason for Jesus being the one to baptise with the Holy Spirit lay in the whole nature of humanity as created to be filled with and to live in the Holy Spirit while requiring the removal of sin for that to be a reality, then we can now see how this passage is an exposition of that earlier promise.

The Holy Spirit is called ‘the Spirit of truth’ (v. 17), but we should also recall that Jesus said that he is ‘the truth’ in 14:6, as the truth of the Father. Again, this was stated in 1:14. Later, when standing before Pilate, Jesus announced that he had come into the world ‘to testify to the truth’ adding that ‘everyone who belongs to the truth’ hears his voice (18:37). Pilate’s cynical response was to ask ‘What is truth?’ (18:38), to which he received no reply. For the readers, that question has already been settled. Jesus is full of the grace and truth of the Father and, as such, he is the truth and the Spirit, who will come as Jesus to the disciples, is likewise truth. The whole truth of God the Father is as much in the person of the Spirit as it is in the Son.

This means that truth is far more than merely propositions, which we have seen cannot be understood by men and women who do not have the Spirit.¹⁰⁰ That point is re-enforced by the next statement, in 14:17: ‘the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you’. The world cannot receive the promised Holy Spirit because it does not function in the truth — it neither sees the Spirit of truth nor knows him. The disciples, whatever their weaknesses, have been with Jesus and so were living and acting in the context of all that God is about. Therefore, they do know the Spirit and for them the promise stands: ‘he will be in you’. All that the Son came to do (1:33) will happen!

¹⁰⁰ See above on 8:30-55.

9

(xiv) John 14:18-24

‘I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.’¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.’²²Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?’²³Jesus answered him, ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.’²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.’

‘Orphaned’ is a word which we have taken into English from Greek. It means ‘without parents’,¹⁰¹ though in this passage it can hardly have that literal sense. Instead, it refers us back to the deep sense of impending loss confronted in 14:1. But any dread the disciples may have will go, since Jesus then told the disciples that while the world will no longer see him, they will! He ‘is coming’ to them, the same word used in 14:3 (and 14:28¹⁰²), though without the addition of ‘again’. This can refer to the time when they met him after his resurrection, described in John 20:11-29 and 21:1-22, or it may refer to a sight which transcends their present experience. The reason for this latter suggestion lies in the words which follow: ‘because I live, you also will live’. I take it this means that when Jesus comes (again) it will be in the person of the Holy Spirit,¹⁰³ and that coming will transform the disciples totally; they will live. When he comes, the life of the Father will be effected in them. We might recall the conversation which Jesus had with the crowd in 6:33-35:

‘...the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’³⁴They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’³⁵Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life.’

On that day, when they live, they will know that Jesus is in the Father. Whatever their misunderstandings now (14:10-11), on that day it will all be as clear to the disciples as it is now to him.¹⁰⁴ But Jesus continued by adding another element: ‘and you in me and I in you’ (14:20). He would repeat this in the prayer of chapter 17, in 17:20-23, but for the moment he returned to the substance of 14:15, this time adding that those who love him will be loved by the Father, and that he himself would love them and reveal himself to them (14:21).

The language used in verse 21 is significant: ‘They who *have* my commandments and keep them...’. It is easy to simply make the jump from Jesus’ instructions here to an application to us, but perhaps that is too easy. There is another element to be considered, one which will again appear in chapter 15. We should ask who it is who has his commandments and keeps them. At least we should look at the matter of *having* his commandments.

¹⁰¹ ὀρφανός -ή, -όν τν Liddell & Scott, *A Greek English Lexicon*, Oxford University Press, London, 9th Ed’n 1940, p. 1257f.

¹⁰² The word is ἐρχομαι *erchomai*; the present tense, ‘I am coming’, is perhaps being used as a future ‘I will come’.

¹⁰³ Again, it must be stressed that this does not call into question any doctrine of the bodily return of Christ at the climax of history. It is the phrase ‘coming again’ which possible has been given too limited a meaning.

¹⁰⁴ The Greek stresses the ‘you’ in ‘you will know’: γνώσεσθε ὑμεῖς *gnōsesthe humeis*.

In Romans 2:14 Paul wrote that Gentiles ‘do not *have* the law’, whereas, in contrast, Israel certainly did have the commandments of God. Paul added that

...you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God¹⁸ and know his will and determine what is best because you are instructed in the law,¹⁹ and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,²⁰ a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, ... (Romans 2:17-20)

Having and keeping the commandments, especially those concerning dietary laws, circumcision and Sabbath observance, was a mark of Jewish identity. This can be seen in the way that the early church was forced to take a clear stand concerning salvation by grace over against demands for observance of Jewish legal issues (so, Acts 15 and the letter to the Galatians etc.).

In the frequent clashes between Jesus and the Pharisees, Jesus told them that they were in fact rejecting the commandments of God, in favor of their traditions, a fault identified by Isaiah (see Mark 7:1-9, especially verses 6-8). But he also went further, telling his hearers that

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. (Matt. 7:21)

then adding

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock... (Matt. 7:24)

It is ‘the will of my Father in heaven’, but it is also ‘these words of *mine*’! Perhaps, following Jesus’ statement in 14:10, ‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father’, this same equation is being made. Likewise, a true member of the people of God will love the LORD their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 22:37), but that means that they will love Jesus, the Word become flesh. Thus 1 Cor. 13:1-3, ‘Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord’, and Paul identifies Jesus as the Lord in the next sentence, ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you’ (1 Cor. 16:21; cf. 1 Cor. 8:6).

I conclude that this reference to the disciples having his commandments and loving him is a contrast to the fundamental unbelief of physical Israel. The disciples are the true Israel, the continuing Israel, since they have and keep the commandments of the Lord and love him. It is from them, therefore, that the rivers of living water will flow giving life to the world. There will be those who believe in him ‘through their word’ (17:20) and the rivers will flow through them also, but first these men must live, must come to full life.

‘Those who love me will keep my word’ is a statement which makes full sense when speaking of the true people of God, and the contrast, verse 24, flows logically from it. What is notable, though, is the second half of verse 23: ‘we will come to them and make our home with them’. We have already seen the way Jesus said that there are many ‘dwelling places’ in his Father’s house, and the same notion appears here. In 14:2, the word *μονή* (*monē*), ‘staying, abiding’ and so a place where one stays, was used and it appears again here, only this time it is the Father and Jesus who will come and make their *μονή* (NRSV, ‘home’) in the disciples.

Since the continuing reference is to the coming of Jesus to the disciples, in the person of the Holy Spirit, then this statement is opening further the dimensions of the transformation, perhaps ‘restoration’ would be a better word, about to take place. The disciples will be ‘in God’ and God will be ‘in them’ (so, verse 17).

Chronologically later, irrespective of when the Gospels were put into their final (present) form, the apostles were to use such phrases as ‘in Christ’, ‘in the Spirit’, ‘in God the Father’, and Peter wrote of being ‘participants (‘fellowshippers’¹⁰⁵) in the divine nature’ (2 Pet. 1:4). The opening paragraph of 1 John has a similar thrust:

we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship¹⁰⁶ with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:3-4)

We have already referred to Jesus prayer: ‘As you Father are in me, and I am in you, may they also be in us’ (17:21), and while such language may be conceptually difficult, the reality is that as men and women were created for intimacy, reflected in the anticipatory expression of the ‘one flesh’ of male and female (Gen. 2:24), so here Jesus is saying that that intimacy is about to be restored.

(xv) John 14:25-29

I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. ²⁸You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

Verses 25 and 29 are similar, not merely because they say the same sort of thing but because both seem to echo the word of the LORD in Isaiah 44:8 (and 48:5 etc?)

Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one.

It is the prerogative of the LORD to declare beforehand what he will do (as in Amos 3:7-8). It is also the nature of the evil one to counterfeit such revelation and of fallen humanity to desire such knowledge without the knowledge of God.

The Advocate, the Paraclete, will teach the disciples everything and remind them of all that Jesus has said. That meant that all that the disciples as apostles required for their unique role in the plan of God would not come as a result of their high intellectual capacities but through the direct gift of the Holy Spirit. That would explain why Jesus so often instructed the disciples not to speak of what they had seen, as for example in Matthew 17:9. Had they spoken of the events on the Mount of Transfiguration, it would have been without the awareness of what the vision actually meant.

What *we* need is the reminder that Jesus was not talking about propositional knowledge so much as a revelation of the truth (see above on 14:6 etc.) which grants the man or woman who has received the Spirit entry into and participation in the deep things of God himself. The person who has an anointing by the Holy One does indeed know all things, because they have been given access to the council of the Lord himself. Jesus, plainly, did not refer to propositional knowledge (that is, knowledge of all that facts) since Jesus quite explicitly

¹⁰⁵ κοινωνοὶ *koinōnoi*

¹⁰⁶ κοινωνία *koinōnia*

denied having that himself (as in Mark 13:32, ‘But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father) and since one of the gifts to the church is that of ‘pastor *teacher*’ (Eph. 4:11). What is given is personal intimacy with God in all his being so that the believer ought to be living in the truth of God himself. The Corinthian church, for instance, was being fascinated by the offer of ‘wisdom’, an access into the mysteries which had all the elements of pandering to the ego, but which also resulted in a divisiveness within the ‘one body’ into which the ‘one Spirit’ had brought them (1 Cor. 12:13). To this situation Paul replied that he, indeed, preached the wisdom of God, and it was ‘in a mystery’, and that the wonders of that mystery, the cross of Christ’ were all fully available to those who were men and women of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:6-7). He wrote:

But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’ — ¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (1 Corinthians 2:9-10)

The words ‘God has revealed’ refer, technically, to one great action which has taken place.¹⁰⁷ But since that great action was the gift of the Spirit, with all that Jesus has been saying in John 14-16 being involved, our translations rightly show that the revelation is still present to be known and ‘lived-in’. Likewise, in the passage in 1 John to which I have alluded there is this:

But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge. ²¹I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and you know that no lie comes from the truth. ... ²⁴Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. ... ²⁶I write these things to you concerning those who would deceive you. ²⁷As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him [*or* ‘it’, i.e. the anointing]. (1 John 2:20-27)

This matter of staying fully active in the revelation that has been given, the older word ‘abide’ being used, leads us to the next passage in John 15:1-10

(xvi) John 15:1-10¹⁰⁸

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. ⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. (John 15:1-10)

¹⁰⁷ The Greek ἀπεκάλυψεν ὁ θεός, *apekalupsen ho theos*, uses the Aorist tense.

¹⁰⁸ This section is taken from my paper, ‘The Community Cleansed and Kept Clean by the Word’ in the 2005 Ministry School notes, *Christ’s Prophetic Community*, NCPI, Blackwood, 2005.

This passage appears to answer the question concerning how the disciples are to survive the fierce attacks of the evil one (John 14:30) and of the Jews (15:18-25). However, it should be noted that there are a couple of questions which need to be addressed before we make any direct application of it to ourselves.¹⁰⁹ The questions are also those raised in the discussion above on 14:21.

The first question concerns the security of believers. What does 'He removes every branch *in me*' mean (v. 2)? By this point most commentators seem to have moved from the pre-crucifixion context in which the discourse takes place to that of the post-Pentecost church. For instance, C. K. Barrett, after canvassing a possible background to John's thought, says 'his primary thought was of apostate Christians'.¹¹⁰ George Beasley-Murray gets around the issue by assuming that John chapters 15-16 'were composed from material left by the evangelist [after he composed chapters 13-14] and form an amplification of the original discourse'.¹¹¹ Carson says: 'The transparent purpose of the verse is to insist that there are no true Christians without some measure of fruit...'¹¹²

But how can we apply the discourse, especially as parts, at least, look to the future, to Christians? That is, how can verse 3, for example, look back to the Cross, the only place where cleansing is to be found, while other parts, such as the promise of the Spirit, look forward? Brown notes: 'Some of the Latin witnesses read these verbs in the future to conform the parable to the futuristic outlook appropriate in the Last Discourse.'¹¹³ He also argues that 15:1-6 originally belonged to another context, being put here perhaps through the process of preaching.¹¹⁴ But Brown is clear: 'John is speaking of Christians who have already been converted and are in Jesus but are now dead'¹¹⁵.

Surely the first task is to analyse the text as we have it (and that means, too, not just cutting it up in to manageable chunks for a commentary). So is there a way of understanding this passage within the whole context of John's Gospel, indeed within the context of the whole of Scripture?

Psalm 80:7-8, 14-17 has:

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved. ⁸You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. ...¹⁴Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, ¹⁵the stock that your right hand planted. ¹⁶They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance. ¹⁷But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself.

¹⁰⁹ There is also the presence of a play on words in verses 2-3, which cannot be easily reproduced in English: 'He removes (*αἶρει* *airei*) every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes (*καθαίρει* *kathairei*) to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed (*καθαροί* *katharoi*) by the word'. The three words are not the same but *αἶρει* relates to *καθαίρει* which relates to *καθαροί*.

¹¹⁰ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, SPCK, London, 1967, p. 395.

¹¹¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36, Word, Waco, 1987, p. 269 (cf. pp. 223-224). There is no textual evidence to support this, unlike the question of John 7:53-8:11.

¹¹² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1991, p. 515.

¹¹³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Volume 2 XIII-XXI, Anchor Bible, Geoffrey Chapman, London, p. 660.

¹¹⁴ Brown, *John*, p. 666f.

¹¹⁵ Brown, *John*, p. 675.

Here the vine is Israel. But against that, Jesus said, ‘I am the true vine’.¹¹⁶ Shortly John will recount Jesus’ warning to the disciples concerning their coming rejection by Israel,¹¹⁷ just as Jesus had been rejected, so the question could be, ‘what is the relationship of these disciples to Israel?’ The answer is, Jesus is the genuine Israel! If that is the case, then the disciples need to stay in him. The others, the ‘his own people’ of John 1:11, by rejecting him, and by being fruitless in their role as the prophetic community charged with being the fountain from which the word of the LORD, would flow to the nations (Isaiah 2:3), have been cut off. In the plan of God, they had been in him, but were rejecting their own identity.

The disciples, on the other hand, were in him and had already been made clean by the word¹¹⁸ which Jesus had spoken (John 15:3). By this means the life of the vine can adequately flow through them. As those in him, the disciples are the genuine prophetic community. In Carson’s words:

The cleansing power of the word Jesus has spoken to his disciples, then, is equivalent to the life of the vine pulsating through the branches.¹¹⁹

The result, as Bill Dumbrell notes, is that

In v. 3 the disciples whose life is to grow out from Jesus, are able to bear fruit as clean, but not as sinless.¹²⁰

Whether or not, though, we want to go so far as to identify the whole multi-ethnic church with (the new) Israel, the general point remains that only by the disciples remaining in Christ can true fruitfulness result. Fruitfulness, however, is not to be taken merely as good works and a virtuous way of life so much as the whole life of Christ issuing through in love and action, which are both of a one. The promised rivers of living water *will* flow. The word flowing through the apostles will *effect* the forgiveness of sins (John 20:23; cf. Luke 24:46-47), as it will bring about judgment on those who do not accept it. Such is the prophetic gospel.

¹¹⁶ Perhaps this is another example of the ἐγώ (*egō*) of ἐγώ εἰμι (*egō eimi*) indicating special emphasis and not merely or only repeating the divine name of Ex. 3:14.

¹¹⁷ John 15:18 says the ‘world’ will hate them, though verse 22 amplifies this by adding ‘If I had not come and spoken to them’, a clear reference to Israel. Other than to the Samaritan woman, he has not spoken to non-Jews. In 16:1ff. the reference is plainly to Jews.

¹¹⁸ Verse 3 uses λόγος (*logos*) which refers to Jesus’ whole teaching, though in v. 7 Jesus used ῥήματα (*rēmata*) utterances. Brown says: ‘It is dubious that the plural “words” (*rēmata*) is to be distinguished from the singular “word” (*logos*) of 3’ (*John* p. 662).

¹¹⁹ *John*, p. 515.

¹²⁰ William J. Dumbrell, *Reworking of John’s Gospel* unpublished, 2005 (electronic version).

10

(xvii) John 15:26–27

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. ²⁷You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

The immediate context for this section is that of the hatred of the disciples by ‘the world’ (15:18), by which the hatred of the world against Jesus is expressed. The reason the world hates Jesus is that he came and spoke to them (15:22), his words being the words which the Father had given him and through which the Father is in action (14:10). Likewise, because Jesus did his unique works, those works which testify of the Father because they are done in the Father’s name (10:25), the works are also an occasion for vicious and unjustified opposition (15:24-25).

The use of ‘the world’ here has already been noted¹²¹, but, again, it is clear that the world and the Jews are really one.¹²² Jesus himself is the genuine Israel, who hears the words of the Father and speaks them. Acts 4:25ff., in quoting Psalm 2, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage’, actually includes ‘the peoples’¹²³ of Israel with Herod, Pontius Pilate and the Gentiles. So John continues, in 16:1-2, by saying that the disciples will be put ‘out of the synagogues’.

While the world may hate Jesus and the disciples, because it is unwilling to ‘hear my word’ (8:43), that certainly will not silence the testimony. The Paraclete (see 14:16) will continue the testimony on Jesus’ behalf (14:26). We must keep in mind that Jesus, the incarnate Word and unique Son is the revealer (1:18). The Spirit, the Paraclete, is ‘another’ such as Jesus. But there is more to it, for, as he will be in them (14:17) the Paraclete will also cause the disciples to testify. They have been with him from the beginning, not that there is anything especially virtuous in that; the point has already been made that the disciples are with Jesus entirely because of his choice (1:12-13; 6:44 etc.): ‘You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last’ (15:16). Since Jesus is the vine, then the fruitfulness of the disciples, through their testimony, will be entirely the life of the vine through the branches and not something which the disciples must accomplish of themselves.¹²⁴ The rivers of living water will, indeed, flow through them.

(xviii) John 16:4-11

I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶But because I have said these

¹²¹ See note 117.

¹²² ‘unbelieving Israel, the manifestation and representative of the world in John’s Gospel, and beyond’ (Dumbrell, *Reworking of John’s Gospel*).

¹²³ λαοίς (*laois*) is plural, possibly because the text of the LXX of Psalm 2:1 is being used?

¹²⁴ We might compare Gal. 5:22, where the fruit of the Spirit is the outworking of the Spirit’s presence in those who walk by the Spirit because they live by the Spirit.

things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. ⁷Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; ¹¹about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. (John 16:4-11)

We can hardly fail to notice that, as Carson says, ‘the formal contradiction between [verse 5] and 13:36; 14:5 is so flagrant’.¹²⁵ The solutions are varied, but none is finally fully satisfying. Given the intricacy of John’s Gospel, we can only conclude that what was written was what was intended and that it made complete sense in the author’s mind. In other words, the contradiction is only ‘formal’. Possibly, Hendricksen’s comment may be a little helpful:

Shortly previous to this, when as yet Jesus had not fully explained the purpose of his departure, there had been many questions with respect to his leaving. Peter had asked, “Lord, where art thou going?” (13:36) and Thomas had asked something similar (14:5). But these questions issued from a crudely literal conception of Christ’s departure. Then Jesus had given a full explanation. He had clearly indicated that he was not leaving for some other place on earth but was going to the Father (14:28), that this return to the Father should have filled their hearts with rejoicing (also 14:28), and that from there he would send another Helper, namely, the Spirit of truth (14:16, 17, 26; 15:26). This was the proper moment for questions, questions as to what that return to the Father would mean for *him*, and for *them*. But there were no questions. There was not even a request that he repeat that very instructive information about the place where he was going. In this failure to ask questions there was an element of selfishness. So deeply concerned were these men the thought of their own impending loss that this sorrow had crowded out every other consideration. Bitterly Jesus complains, And none of you asks me, “Where art thou going?”¹²⁶

What ought to be plain, however, is that their sorrow is completely unwarranted. Jesus’ departure, far from being a tragedy will be the source of their greatest benefit. The Paraclete cannot be sent until Jesus is glorified (7:37-39). Put another way, the Holy Spirit will not be poured out on men and women who still have their sin (1:29, 33). That would be a complete contradiction of God himself. The truth is that, if Jesus does not go, then he cannot send the Paraclete. It is Acts 2:33 which reflects on this:

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear.

Only when the Son has conquered can he pour out the Spirit.

The issue of the testimony of the disciples is still in focus. The Paraclete will testify on Jesus’ behalf and it is that testimony that will be the effective element in the disciples’ testimony. Just as the world would have no sin (in the matter of the recognition of the special revelation of the Father in the Son) had Jesus not spoken to it, so now the action of the Spirit will convincingly highlight that.

‘He will prove the world wrong about sin, and righteousness and judgment’ (16:8). The Greek verb translated here by ‘prove wrong’ is ἐλέγκω (*elengkō*). The range of translations offered is perhaps not as daunting as it seems — *NRSV* ‘prove wrong’; *RSV*, *NLB*, ‘convince’; *AV*, ‘reprove’; *ASV*, *NIV*, *NASB*, *ESV*, ‘convict’; *NEB*, ‘confute’ and ‘convict’; and *JB*, ‘show how wrong — though it does demonstrate that to translate the word into English is difficult. Given the context of 15:18-27, we might say that the meaning is ‘to show

¹²⁵ Carson, *John*, p. 532.

¹²⁶ William Hendricksen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John (Two Volumes Complete and Unabridged in One)*, Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1964, Volume 2, p. 322.

someone his sin and to summon him to repentance’, ‘not merely “to display”, but “to show to be evil”, so that we do best to keep the rendering “to correct”, especially as the deeds and doers are closely related.’¹²⁷ Taking a different stance, Bill Dumbrell has commented: ‘When [the Spirit] comes (v.8), he will put the world on trial as the legal metaphor of Jesus’ ministry is proceeded with and secure a conviction on the score of sin and righteousness and judgment....Condemnation alone awaits the world’.¹²⁸ This, however, seems to leave such statements as 1:29 and 3:17 out of the equation. It also seems that the author of the Gospel is progressively providing the details of what will take place and there remains more to be said yet. If I may anticipate, 20:21-23 spells out the promised witness of the disciples. The sending of the disciples is stated, the Spirit is breathed out and with that the declaration that through them sins will be *either* retained or forgiven. While ‘the world’ is certainly judged (12:31), it would appear that ‘condemnation *alone*’ is not the conclusion.

The first item, ‘sin’, has already been mentioned by Jesus; in that the world has rejected Jesus’ words and deeds, the Holy Spirit will ensure that the rejection is not successful. It is the basis for the Spirit’s work which we must examine: ‘because they do not believe in me’ (16:9). If we work from the context, namely of Jesus’ rejection by the world, and in particular by the Jewish leaders, then this would mean that the coming of the Holy Spirit will expose that rejection and finally expose those who did reject him as indeed without excuse (cf. 15:25).

The second item, ‘righteousness’, is a word used only here in this Gospel. While the traditional and general understanding of this word as legal correctness is certainly true, it does not fully supply the demands of this context. Rather, we need to understand the attitude of the Jews then towards their own status before God. Mention of this has already been made.¹²⁹ It is obvious from the New Testament documents that, at that time, the Jews regarded themselves as God’s covenant people and that that was understood by their being people of the law, the Torah. The three elements of circumcision, dietary regulations and Sabbath observance were prominent as defining their position in the covenant. (Later, those three elements were to be a stumbling block for many Jewish Christians when Gentiles became believers and so were declared righteous without the need for any legal observance of them.) Also, we have seen how Jesus himself is the genuine Israel; by rejecting him, those who claimed to be the covenant people actually rejected their former status. They saw Jesus as outside the covenant: as a demon possessed Samaritan (8:48).

The coming of the Holy Spirit will expose their fatal error: The Spirit will come because it is *Jesus* who asks the Father to send him (14:15), it is *Jesus* who sends him from the Father (15:26) and so the Father will send him in *Jesus* name (14:26). Therefore the coming of the Spirit will show that Jesus is in fact the one in whom righteousness is to be found. True covenant membership lies in abiding in *him* and keeping *his* commandments (14:15, 21, 23; 15:4ff.) and not in mere legal observances. The Paraclete will prove the world wrong about ‘righteousness, for the covenantal rights of the case will lie with Jesus whom God will have vindicated (cf. ‘because I go to my Father v. 10).’¹³⁰ His going to the Father and sending the Spirit sets him in final distinction from those who are of their father the devil (8:44).

¹²⁷ Friedrich Büschel, ‘ἐλέγκω κτλ.’ in TDNT, II, p. 474 and n. 8.

¹²⁸ *Reworking of John’s Gospel*. Dumbrell also argues that ‘[t]he world in John is the Jews, I think, as representatives of the more general world.’ (private communication). If the contention concerning righteousness (below) is correct, then his position would seem to be affirmed, though there are occasions when ‘world’ is used for other than the Jews, as in 17:5, 24.

¹²⁹ See p. 45 above.

¹³⁰ Dumbrell, *Reworking of John’s Gospel*.

The third item is ‘judgment’. The current evaluation of judgment was that God would surely judge Israel’s enemies. But instead, the death of Jesus, at their hands, will be the judgement of the ruler of this world, and so the judgment of the world which they represent (12:31). His death, which will take place within a few hours only, will be the action¹³¹ which defeats the ruler of this world, and the coming of the Paraclete will demonstrate unequivocally that the ruler of the world has indeed come under the judgment and condemnation of God.

¹³¹ κρίσις (*krisis*), here, is the action of judgment.

11

(xix) John 16:12-15

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The disciples must wait for the revelation which is to come. It is not because the content is in any way complicated, but that, at this point, they are not able to bear the full weight of glory which it involves. John is at pains to emphasise the distress which the disciples are experiencing. Mere information, even from Jesus himself, would be quite insufficient. However, when the Spirit of truth comes, the revelation he brings will be far more than information — he will guide these men in all the truth.

The translations have ‘into all the truth’, though ‘in all the truth’ is probably more accurate.¹³² The Greek word ἐν (*en*)¹³³ implies more than just the disciples coming to know the truth as facts; rather they will know the Spirit’s guidance ‘in the whole sphere of truth’.¹³⁴ That is the freedom which comes from continuing in Jesus’ word (8:32), freedom *from* sin (1:29; 8:34) which issues in freedom *for* participation in the whole truth, which is God himself (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4). Hence the Spirit leads ‘into’ the truth in order that all of life may once again be ‘in’ the truth.

As we have seen, the Spirit is the one who will bring the fulness of Father and Son to the one who receives him (14:23). This is what Jesus now says will take place. The Spirit, like Jesus himself, does and says nothing independently, He only speaks what he hears, that is, what he is told. And he will tell the disciples ‘the things that are to come’ (16:13). What we must remember is that this Gospel is moving towards a great climax. The inability of the disciples to bear the full revelation at that moment is evidence of the extraordinary tension of the final hours before Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion. Their hearts are indeed troubled (14:1), though that ought not be so, and sorrow has filled their hearts (16:6). The question, then, of what is meant by ‘the things that are to come’ should first¹³⁵ be answered by reference to the disciples in the upper room. There are things about to take place within the next few hours

¹³² There is some manuscript support for εἰς τὴν ἀλήθειαν πᾶσαν though the most support is for ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάσῃ. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 247; Barrett, *John*, p. 407f. There is no single English word which captures the wide range of meaning and usage of ἐν.

¹³³ C. F. D. Moule (*An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968) writes: ‘This “maid of all work” (M.M. 209) is said to be the most frequent of all N.T. prepositions... is even more versatile than the English *in*... is further complicated by its overlapping with εἰς... and sometimes with the use of the simple dative. Most English prepositions, except such as *from* and *beside*, will have to be requisitioned at one time or another to translate it’ (p. 75). See above on John 1:29-34.

¹³⁴ Barrett, *John*, p. 407.

¹³⁵ It is, of course, possible that what is also in view is the ‘hope’ that the coming of the Spirit will bring (cf. John 3:5 and 1 Pet. 1:3; see Barrett, *John*, p. 408). I have argued, though, that is not the way the story is being presented.

which cannot be humanly understood. But when the Spirit comes, he will guide the disciples into the whole truth of what is about to take place and of its consequences.

For the Spirit to glorify Jesus means he will reveal the whole of who he is and what he is about. John, the author, has already said ‘we have seen his glory, as of the only son of the Father’ (1:14); he could say that only because the Spirit has done his work. But the reality lies in truly seeing Jesus as the Son and so becoming a participant in his sonship. Hence when the Spirit of truth comes he leads into and guides in the whole reality, viz. that God is the Father. If the Spirit does not draw attention to himself, in the long run neither does the Son. The fundamental and joint purpose of the Son and the Spirit is that the disciples (and those who believe through their word, 17:20) might come to the Father (14:6) and know the Father, the only true God (17:1, 3). And to know the Father is to know his love:

Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. ²⁰I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them. (17:25-26)

What is more, it will be to function in that love as does Jesus himself. This is not some mystical experience or a life of special ascetic qualities. It will be nothing more or less than the day to day life of communion which Jesus himself knew (5:20; 14:23).

(xx) John 20:19-23

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’

Chapters 18-19 have detailed the events of the crucifixion of Jesus. The time spent in the upper room¹³⁶ was completed and now Jesus had indeed ‘gone away’. The earlier distress of the disciples was evidently still present, as ‘the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews’ (20:19).

John records three statements by Jesus while he was on the cross. The first was addressed to Mary and to the disciple whom Jesus loved (19:26), the second was the cry ‘I am thirsty’ (19:28). The third statement, only one word in the Greek text, *τετέλεσται* (*tetelestai*), was ‘It is finished’ (19:30).¹³⁷ Actually, the significance of the cry is greater when we note that the previous ‘I am thirsty’ was said ‘when Jesus knew that all was now finished’, using the same word, *τετέλεσται*. So this was not a cry of defeated resignation but a recognition that all that was to be accomplished had been done. ‘All’ can be ‘all things’, ‘everything’. This is the climax towards which all things had been moving.

This sense of fulfilment is re-enforced by the information that Jesus said ‘I am thirsty’ in order to fulfil the scripture’, referring to Psalm 69:21. Then, after Jesus deliberately ‘gave up his spirit’, the account of the soldier piercing Jesus’ side with the spear also shows that the scriptures are being fulfilled. Two references are given for this, Exodus 12:46 which requires that no bones of the Passover lamb be broken, showing that Jesus was indeed the lamb of

¹³⁶ Although I have used it previously, John does not supply that detail; it is only in Mark. 14:15 and Luke 22:12.

¹³⁷ The Greek Perfect tense here implies that what has been completed remains completed. Cf. the Aorist in 17:4.

God (1:29) and also that Jesus was being crucified at the same time as the Passover lambs were being slaughtered.¹³⁸ The other reference is to Zechariah 12:10, here focussing on the piercing, while later it was used to anticipate the last day (Rev. 1:7).

So what remains? The Gospel, to my mind, concludes with chapter 20, chapter 21 being an addendum, possibly by another author. So in what way does chapter 20 bring to a conclusion those things we have been examining? That it does deliberately conclude matters seems obvious. The Gospel is not a mere history, though it is clearly historical. It is the unique interweaving of theology and history that stands out and which makes John distinct from the Synoptic Gospels. While it cannot be stated as definite, I would note the parallel between the opening sentence of the Gospel and the commencement of chapter 20. 'In the beginning was the Word' and 'early on the first day of the week' may not seem to have much in common, but I suggest that there may be a common feature. That John 1:1 is a reference to Genesis 1:1 is well known, but Genesis 1:1, 'in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth', is the first item of what took place on the first day of the week of creation. Could it be, then, that John concludes his Gospel by implying that, now that all has been accomplished, the new creation is about to be formed? I think a case can be made out for that.

Also, John 1:12 stated that 'to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave authority to become children of God'; does not Jesus' command to Mary, in 20:17, say as much?

Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'

Now Jesus refers to the disciples as his 'brothers', and the words Mary is to use, while maintaining some sort distinction between Jesus and these men which, given that he is the only-begotten son, is not surprising, also declare that God is 'my Father' but also 'your Father'! He is 'my God' and he is 'your God'! The Jews do not know God, but now those in the true vine do.¹³⁹

It is the section 20:19-23 which fills this out. However, I cannot go further without first asking why it is that John's Gospel, at this point at least, must always be examined against the background of Luke's account of Pentecost. John refers to the giving of the Spirit, and so does Luke in Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:1ff. My question is, 'why cannot John tell his story his way and present this aspect within the context of his own structure?' Many commentators seem intent on taking Acts as the base and then attempting to slot John's account of the giving of the Holy Spirit into it, with the occasional result that John's giving of the Spirit is reduced to a sort of semi-giving, a proleptic giving.

¹³⁸ In the Synoptics, Jesus is recorded as eating the Passover with his disciples and instituting the Lord's Supper on that basis. John, as we have seen, makes no reference to the Lord's Supper, unless those who see it in John 6 are correct. Bultmann, argues that the blood and water which flowed from Jesus' side were John's way of showing 'that in the death of Jesus on the cross the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper have their foundation' (Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, (G. R. Beasley-Murray *et al* trans) Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1971, p. 679). I would add the further suggestion of C. H. Dodd, 'that at the moment of the death of Jesus on the cross all is accomplished, at that the life giving stream, which is the Spirit (vii.38), is now released (xix. 34) for the salvation of man'... 'that in dying He 'delivered' or bequeathed the Spirit to those he left behind' (*The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1953, p. 442 and *n. 1*). Given the way John interweaves history and theological awareness, such suggestions need not be too easily dismissed.

¹³⁹ Cf. Bultmann, *John*, p. 689.

The coming¹⁴⁰ of the resurrected Jesus to the disciples was to a group which was dreadfully afraid. His opening greeting to them was ‘Peace’, a conventional greeting, but it was much more since he had already promised to give them his own peace, which would be quite distinct from anything the world could offer (14:17). That peace would be associated with the Father sending the Spirit (14:26).

‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you’. The Father sending the Son into the world is clear from all that has preceded this. But in what way did the Father send the Son, so that his being sent might be a paradigm for the sending of the disciples? Returning to John 1, we note that Jesus was thrust into his ministry from his baptism by John the Baptist, but that that baptism was only the occasion of his receiving the Spirit with a view to his baptising with the Spirit, and so his being recognised as the Son (1:31-34). And, also, we have noted that for Jesus to baptise with the Spirit he must be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. I suggest that this is what is now happening. Jesus was sent as the unique Son, by being anointed with the Spirit and that is what was now happening to the disciples.

Jesus ‘breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit”’ (20:22). Questions of the relationship of this to Luke’s account should initially be ruled out of order. This is John’s Gospel and his conclusion to all that has gone before. Jesus, the one who received the Spirit and who promised the Spirit to those who believed in him now breathes on them and says ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’. What makes this so striking is John’s use of the word ‘breathed’. The verb is ἐμφυσᾶω (*emphusaō*) and this is the only occasion in which it is used in the New Testament. But, significantly, it is the word used in Genesis 2:7, where ‘the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being’. Elsewhere in the Old Testament ‘the breath of life’ of Genesis 2:7 is identified with the spirit (רוּחַ *ruach*, πνεῦμα *pneuma*) of God. So what is meant by John using a word unique to the New Testament here? I suggest that he is saying that, at this point, all that was anticipated, not only in this Gospel, but from the deprivation of the spirit through the sin of mankind, is being restored. Consistently, perhaps, with the double reference to the first day of the week (20:1, 19), what we are seeing is nothing less than ‘new creation’.

If Jesus has, by breathing out the Holy Spirit on the disciples, now baptised them with the Spirit,¹⁴¹ then what would we expect from these men (and from those who believe in Jesus through their word)? The answer is that rivers of living water will flow. Once again, the impartation of the Spirit is linked with a ministry like that of Jesus. He, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, now sends the disciples out to forgive or retain sins (20:23). Forgiveness of sins is his prerogative, but will be effected in others by the Spirit through the proclamation of the disciples (i.e. ‘through their word’, 17:20). At the same time, there will be those who reject them and hate them as they rejected and hated Jesus (15:18-25), so in that case the result, though not the desire (3:17) will be that men and women are locked into their sin. This, too, was anticipated in Jesus’ own ministry and his promise to the disciples in 16:8 etc.

This note of warning about the retention of sins is important, since the disciples need to be aware that their ministry will not be one of *worldly* triumph. But it will be triumphant, since the Spirit has now brought all the fulness of God into them. The detail of chapters 14-16 does not need to be repeated; it is simply the way it is. Jesus is with them as he promised

¹⁴⁰ The word used here is the Aorist tense of the same word used in 14:3, 18 (see the discussion).

¹⁴¹ This is no different, in the long run, from Acts 2:33.

(14:18). The dimensions of that transformation can now be known as the river of living water not only flow into them but through them.

So, if there is a final question to be asked, it must be this: are *we*, the recipients of the great apostolic witness, living as those who believe in Christ? It has all been accomplished; it is — and remains — finished. So there is no ‘extra’ on top of salvation to be received. On the contrary, our salvation is brim full and overflowing and it has all come to us. The one who believes — who goes on believing — in Jesus cannot but know the welling up and surging forth of the rivers of living water, the flow of the Holy Spirit himself.

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