

A lit candle with a bright flame against a dark background. The candle is white and has a jagged, melted top. The flame is bright yellow and orange, casting a warm glow on the surrounding wax. The background is solid black.

The light shines  
in the darkness,  
and the darkness  
has never put it out.  
John 1:5

# Meet Jesus

## Devotions on John

Louis Nel

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## Devotions on The Gospel according to John

Louis Nel

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## Preface

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" - so begins the Word of God in Genesis 1:1. Turn with us to John 1:1, and then we read what John writes about Jesus: "In the beginning was the Word," he writes, and then he goes on to tell that this very Word created everything. Jesus, Almighty God, is the creator of the universe.

Now keep your Bible open to both passages, because we read further in Genesis 1 that everything at the beginning was pitch dark and uninhabitable, but that the very first thing God created was light. Yes, even before the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon, and stars were created, He had already made light. But He went further and separated the light from the darkness.

Back to John 1, we see that there was life in Jesus, the Word, but also that this life was the light for the world. How incredibly important is light for all life!

Jesus is the Creator!

Jesus is God!

Jesus is life!

Jesus is Light!

These are the thoughts that John wants to emphasize - to proclaim so that everyone can hear.

So, I invite you to walk with me on the journey to meet the true Jesus.

Louis Nel

# **Meet Jesus!**

## **Introduction**

Who is God? This is a question that bothers many people, even many believers! For teenagers it is especially a very topical and at the same time confusing question. Gone are the days when everyone with you at school was a Christian and might have sat in the Sunday School class with you. Today, children are introduced to a myriad of different religions. Their peers are often Muslims, Hindus and adherents of the traditional African religion. Many are even churchless or non-religious. Which one of all these myriads of gods is the right one? Is there ever a God?

People look God in different places to satisfy this answer. Some seek Him in nature, others in the colourful images of the Hindu faith, some mysterious Oriental faith or even Satanism. Then there are those who, after an intense search, come to the conclusion that there is no God at all!

A few years ago, a pastor was dragged to court over a "discriminatory" billboard he had erected alongside the road. It read: "The fool says in his heart: There is no God." The complainant wanted to know: "Are us Atheists stupid fools then?"

If we come to the true answer about who God is, the second very important question is: Now who is Jesus then? And John gives a very clear answer to this in the very first verses. For some people, his answer is far too clear. It makes them feel uncomfortable. Jehovah's Witnesses feel so uncomfortable that they have changed the Bible to suit their views. They claim that Jesus is not God but only a god or a divine being! Almost a kind of exalted angel.

However, John does not only want to tell you who Jesus is. He also wants to introduce you to Him. He wants to take you to Jesus so that you can meet and get to know Him in person. If you are perhaps still hesitant about that encounter, then John tells you exactly why it

is so vital that you do experience that encounter. In the very famous conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in chapter 3, we clearly see that if you do not want to meet Jesus, you will certainly not escape the judgment of God. Jesus is the only guarantee of eternal life.

Perhaps we should also ask the question: "Who was this man, John, that he could write with so much authority about God and Jesus?"

John gained his knowledge of Jesus on a very personal level. He had the enviable privilege of being with Jesus every day for three full years as a young man and experiencing His presence. With his own eyes he saw the many miracles that Jesus performed. He was present when Jesus healed the sick and gave life to the dead. He helped distribute the food to the crowd of 5,000 whom Jesus fed with a handful of fish and bread. But more importantly, he was able to experience the wonderful love that

radiated from Jesus. He was able to learn first-hand, practically what it means to live out your love. John was one of Jesus' disciples, the "beloved disciple." He was one of the twelve emissaries or Apostles who had the task after Jesus' ascension to spread the Gospel to all the nations.

A very interesting question is: "How did John come to write the book?" Many people think that John sat down under a tree one day and started writing. No, that's not how it happened. Over a long period of time, John told the congregation about all the things that had happened. The wonderful words of Jesus remained fresh in his mind, and many of the conversations he could literally remember word for word. It was a period in his life that made a great impression on him. As different situations arose in the congregation, he went looking for answers in the things Jesus said and did, just as I often go and dig up anecdotes from my childhood to illustrate certain truths of faith. Finally,

many years later, he began to write these things down, and it was not until about 60 years after Jesus' crucifixion that the Gospel was finally fully written.

One of the many images that John uses so masterfully in this book is the image of light shining in the darkness and dispelling the darkness. This is such a fitting thought, because for many unbelievers, the world is truly a place of darkness. Someone looking for the truth usually wanders around in pitch darkness without being able to find the answer. Jesus is the true Light that shines in this darkness and dispels the darkness. He is the only true Light! And that is why the Gospel of John is such a special book to give to someone who is searching. This is the whole Gospel in a nutshell.

Come, fasten your seatbelt for a journey with me from the darkness to the Light that shines brightly!

Prayer:

Lord, You are the only true Light! I worship You, and bring to You all the glory. Thank you for an obedient John and this wonderful Gospel that he wrote so that many people could learn of the Light.

# Creator-God

## John 1: 1-5

Yesterday we asked the question: "Who is Jesus?" John gives the answer clearly and distinctly. He begins his book by answering the question in such a striking way that we will have absolutely no doubt as to exactly Who Jesus is. The dramatic hymn with which he begins his book grips you in such a way that you simply cannot put the book down - you just want to read more and more! "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God himself." In Greek it is written there: *Én àrché yn hò lògos, kai hò lògos yn pròs ton Øeòn, kai Øeòs yn hò lògos.* (I tried to render Greek in plain text.)

When we read these first verses, we cannot help but fall down in worship before Jesus, because His omnipotence, greatness and infinity are described here.

The first five verses of John take us back to

the beginning of everything, even long before the universe existed. When was that beginning? No one knows, and no one can ever determine it. The totally incomprehensible is that He existed from eternity. The astronomers' theory is that the universe as we know it originated 15 thousand million years ago. Yes, Jesus already existed long before that!

Even more impressive is the fact that Jesus was the One who was responsible for the creation of this very universe. The question has often been asked: How big is the universe really? If we can start with ourselves: I am only a tiny speck on the earth, but just as the earth is a small speck in the sky, totally dwarfed by the star around which we revolve, the sun. The sun, in turn, is one of 300,000 million stars in the Milky Way, a galaxy 100,000 light-years in diameter. The sun is only 8 light-minutes from us. Imagine for yourself how big this galaxy is! But the galaxy itself is just a tiny

speck in the universe! There are millions of similar galaxies in the universe, some even much larger than the Milky Way. And now some clever men want to claim that the universe may just be one of many universes!

I am giving this information only to make you realize once again how great and omnipotent the Creator of it all, Jesus, is. And the wonder is that even the smallest detail, a butterfly or a flower or a colourful tropical fish, has not been forgotten.

However, this is just the beginning! John also wants us to understand that Jesus is the One who gives life. Science has come a long way, and they can even create life from chemicals. The fact is, however, that only Jesus, the Creator of life, can give true, meaningful life. Man claims that he can also create, but to create something, you need material. For example, to be able to create a pot, you need clay. Jesus created everything out of nothing. He also created life from nothing!

But the life referred to here is not just

ordinary life, but it points to the eternal life that only Jesus can give.

In this concise history of the origin of everything, John also refers to one of the wonders of creation, namely Light. Yes, Jesus also gave light, and this Light shone in the darkness. The darkness to which John refers here is, of course, the darkness of the fall of man, which threatened to overwhelm the world.

Have you ever experienced true darkness? I was a young boy when one day we heard of a breathtaking cave somewhere in the Lowveld. Armed with flashlights, we climbed the mountain to reach the cave. It was impressive, and I was amazed at the huge halls we went through. I felt dwarfed by the impressive dripping artwork that looked like a large monster with a gaping mouth. The cave is named after this magnificent sculpture: "The Cave of the Screaming Monster." Years later it was developed and given the name: Sudwala Caves. We decide to turn off all our

flashlights. The pitch-black dark is overwhelming. Then someone turns on a dim flashlight, and suddenly all the darkness is driven away!

If one single little light bulb could dispel the darkness in that giant great hall, how much more so the bright light of Jesus! When the darkness of sin was at it's worst, Jesus' atonement on the cross suddenly changed everything, and the darkness was overcome forever. Yes, indeed the darkness is still there, but it can never extinguish the bright light of Jesus.

However, the word "extinguish" can also be translated differently: it can mean that the darkness could not accept the light. Yes, there are many people who see that light of Jesus but still do not want to accept it. "I'm not ready yet" or "I need to get better first!" From the first verses to the very end of this book of John comes the invitation to accept that wonderful light. Throughout the book, you hear Jesus knocking on the door of your

heart. You are the only one who can open that door and let Jesus in. If you have not already done so, now is the time to do so!

Prayer:

Lord, I worship You, for You are great and almighty, the Creator, the only true Light.

## **Make Your Choice**

### **John 1: 6-13**

Before we got a Lister generator, we used to rely on candles for light on our farm. In each room there was one and they had to soften the rock hard dark. However, in the dining-room, where we sat and talked around the table in the evenings and where everything happened, Grandma lit the Aladdin lamp. This lamp had a very delicate asbestos pouch that glowed, and gave a bright white light that illuminated everything around you. Now there was a real light for you!

John writes of John the Baptist. He was like a candle, now not exactly the true light but his purpose in life was to prepare the way for true Light that was on it's way. He had to come and testify and he did so with full devotion, so much so that it finally cost him his life!

You and I are indeed candles too. Our purpose is also to testify of the true Light.

The question, however, is what do we do with our candles? Do we let them shine or do we hide them?

But that's not what this section is about. Here it's about the true Light, that One who, like the Aladdin lamp, spreads His radiance brilliantly: Jesus!

Our old Aladdin lamp gave it's light in the dining-room where our family gathered in the evenings. You could respond to it in one of two ways: You could stay there in the gleam of the light, or you could walk out of the room, into the dark. The choice was yours. The world also reacted differently to the true Light, Jesus. Some simply turned their backs on Him and walked into the darkness. Others gladly accepted His light in the faith. And with that we come to one of the most important aspects of the Gospel, namely that you are forced to make a choice. Everyone whose path has crossed Jesus's simply had to make a decision. After that, you were never the same again. You can never make a neutral

choice. You cannot simply just ignore Him. You must decide for or against Him. This decision can change your total life forever.

In verses 10 and 11 John tells of a group of people who decided against Jesus. They did not want to accept Him as Saviour. The tragic and very strange thing is that these people are the property of the Word. He created them, but suddenly they did not want to know anything about Him. They did not want to acknowledge Him. Worse, they did not even want to know Him. If John says that they are His property, then it is not just a lifeless piece of property. The word actually indicates something of family, so it rather means that they are part of His family and that they were created in His image. If you were to walk up to a relative of yours for whom you care a lot, and the person gives you a dirty look, turns his back on you and walk away - how would you feel? Definitely offended! This is probably how Jesus must feel about everyone who rejects Him as the

## Messiah!

Fortunately, however, not everyone turned their backs on Him. John mentions some of those who accepted Him. What does it mean to accept Jesus? To believe in Him as your Saviour. It involves a personal relationship with Jesus where you place your total trust in Him and love Him unconditionally. From His side, He responds by including you in His family circle. You become a child of God and therefore part of the intimate family of Jesus. How do you become part of a family? By birth. When a baby is born, he is automatically part of the family. Does he have any share in this birth process? No! Mom does all the hard work. In the family of God, it is the Holy Spirit who gives you the new birth. Later, in chapter 3, we will see how Jesus explains to Nicodemus about this rebirth.

"But it does not make sense!", I hear someone say to me, "First you say I must accept Jesus, and then you say again God

does everything. Which one is right? ”

Have you ever stood on a train track and taken a good look at the tracks? Where do they meet? No, they cannot, because they run parallel to each other. But the fact is that they are going in exactly the same direction. But a train cannot run on only one track. He needs both. Likewise, these two thoughts are both true! Yes, God does all the work. And yes, I have to make that decision. These are two parallel lines that are both necessary for a person to become a child of God. If one is left out, your life train will definitely derail, because he can not walk on just one track either.

I know this morning that most people reading this daily passage are already part of the family of God. However, I also know that this morning there is someone reading this who has not yet made the decision to become part of the family. If this is you, then I want to plead with you to do it today. Your share in the "transaction" is very small. He does all

the rest! Feel free to Whatsapp me at 082 771 4925.

Prayer:

Lord, I pray this morning for everyone who has not yet made the decision to follow You. Please put the desire in their hearts to want to be Your children too.

# **The King Is Visiting!**

## **John 1: 14-18**

Does the date 27th May 1947 ring a bell? Probably not, but in the Kruger National Park it was a very special day. For a very long time there was preparation for this big day. In the Pretoriuskop rest camp there were even special huts, royal huts built for a very special visitor who would visit the game reserve that day and spend the night there, none other than the King of England, King George VI.

When the big day dawned, the gates of the game reserve were closed to all other visitors, and only the king and his entourage had the incredible privilege of having the entire Kruger National Park for themselves. The British government had a request: it would be very nice if King George and one of the princesses could each shoot a lion. Stevenson-Hamilton, the park chief, almost fell off his chair when he heard that request. No, it would not do, even if he were the king! George and his daughters had to leave their

hunting rifles at home. For a full day, this royal procession traversed the game reserve, and arrived dead tired at Pretoriuskop in the evening for a night in the African forest.

However, the organizers of the royal household decided that it would be too dangerous. The king might just have



contracted malaria! He had to be content to sleep in his train at Witrivier that night. So he never slept in the hut, which was built

especially for him!

Please look at this video clip of the Royal Visit in 1947.

If you think about it, this is actually an absurd story of a king for whom the world was not good enough. Remember, South Africa was then still a British colony, and therefore part of King George's Kingdom.

How wonderful, refreshingly different is the news that John came to give! The Word

(Jesus) is the King of all kings and the Owner and Creator of the whole universe! He became man and came to live among us. It literally says that He came to pitch a tent between us. We must read it in the context of the people of Israel, when they wandered through the wilderness as a nomadic people and lived in tents. The tent of the Lord (the tabernacle) was pitched among the people and there the Lord dwelt. So unlike King George, who was so exalted that no one else was allowed near him in the game park, Jesus became one of us and mixed with ordinary people, even tax collectors, Samaritans, sinners and fishermen! Unlike King George, for whom even a brand new, very special hut in Pretoriuskop was not even good enough, Jesus often slept outside in the field on the hard ground. After all, He was born in a dirty, smelly stable! He knew suffering, so diseases and dangerous situations did not deter him.

King George distanced himself from ordinary

people. After all, he was royal! King Jesus, on the other hand, was humanly accessible. Even children could come to Him with boldness, even if they were unclean and simply seen as property.

Look, we must not for one moment assume that Jesus was "ordinary"! John makes it very clear that we have witnessed His glory and grace. People were amazed at His power, wisdom, and majesty in all that He did during those three years of His ministry on earth. No miracle was too great for Him, and even the forces of nature obeyed Him. Heaven opened to Him during His baptism. He handed out grace in abundance. We see this when he forgives the woman who committed adultery. Also when He sends the Samaritan woman with the dark history to go and preach, and sends the mad man in the cemetery on a mission to spread the gospel.

In verse 18, John reaches the climax, the core of this beautiful song. He makes the claim that no one has ever seen God. But

then comes the surprising: Jesus came to introduce God to us. He is God himself, so the people of 2000 years ago had the unique privilege of seeing God in the flesh.

Today, the only thing that has changed is the fact that Jesus has a glorified body and that He is no longer physically visible to us. However, He still lives amongst us in the sense that He is omnipresent, and He is personally involved with each of us, no matter who or what you are. Jesus does not consider Himself to be exalted to be with you and talk to you, even though He is God Almighty, the Creator of the universe and King of all kings. Indeed, I still have to give Him the respect and honour that a King should receive with His stature, but at the same time I can also talk to Him with candour about my own needs and my sorrows. I can share my joys and joys with Him. He is not like any other king. Jesus is truly unique! There is only ONE like Him! Let us worship Him for that.

Prayer:

Jesus, we honour You, risen Lord, Prince of Life and King, You who triumph!

# God Amongst Us!

## John 1:19-28

There is a great expectation among the Jewish people. For many years they were oppressed by the Romans who had the whole world in their power. Is there ever hope? Is there ever an outcome in sight? In his visions, Daniel gave hope to the people that God is in control, no matter how bad it is, and no matter how great the tribulation. He also created in them the expectation that the outcome was on the way and that the Lord would send the Messiah.

Another prophet, Isaiah, also created an even greater expectation among the people. Around 530 BC the very famous Isa. 40 written in which the arrival of the King is described. At that time, the people were in exile, and the country was in a terrible state. Roads looked even worse than some of our roads look like today. Where once there was a highway, it was now a winding footpath, dotted with stones. On such a road could not

the King, who was on his way to Jerusalem, drive? Someone had to go ahead and roll away the stones and clear the way for the triumphant entry of the King into His capital. The holes had to be filled in and the road had to be made drivable and beautiful!

However, someone had to go ahead to announce the arrival of the king, because it would be a shame if the King arrived in Jerusalem after the exile, and there was no one to welcome him! Everyone should know that this is not just any old leader, but this King. And His reception had to be large and glorious. Everyone had to be there!

Now the scene shifts 560 years. That King of whom Daniel and Isaiah wrote was indeed on his way. The time was ripe, and the Messianic expectation among the Jews was high. For centuries the Jews had never seen a true prophet, and now suddenly there was someone in the land who acted very funny. He preached like the prophets of old and he was very different from anyone they were

used to. In addition, he baptized left and right everyone who came to listen to his sermons. You were not just baptized! This was something that was only done when someone from outside came to join the Jewish people. Baptism was then a kind of cleansing ritual in preparation for his incorporation. But John baptized at the foot all, even Jews. It did not make sense! What was going on? This made the church leaders wonder if he might not have been the Messiah?

A high delegation of clergy is sent to investigate. It is interesting to know that these people had honest intentions. They did not send a political delegation, but priests and Levites, the people who were engaged in spiritual things. Incidentally, the Levites were from the tribe of Levi, and they had to serve in the temple to help the priests with their duties and to make music in the temple.

When the men came to John, they wanted to know if he was the Messiah, and he

vehemently denied it. The Jews believed that a great prophet like Elijah would precede the Messiah. But even this John denies. He was merely "the voice calling," the one announcing the arrival of the King and preparing the way for the King to ride up.

Then John said the shocking thing: "Between you stands the Messiah and you do not recognize Him!"

How prophetic were these words of John! Indeed, shortly after this event, Jesus began to perform and perform the most breathtaking miracles, even on occasion openly declaring that He is the Messiah, the Son of God. But still the clergy did not recognize Him as the One they came looking for.

It is now two thousand years later and the Jews are still waiting in vain for the coming of the Messiah! We can only pray that their eyes will be opened before the second coming of the King. But we can thank the Lord that there are at least a handful of Jews who have already discovered Jesus.

But where does that leave us, you and me? First of all, I need to make sure that I have recognized Jesus, and that I have a personal relationship with Him. If this is the case, you and I, in a sense, have the same task as John, namely to announce the triumphant arrival of the King to all who do not yet know about Him. Yes, just as in John's time, all the signs are already there that Jesus' return is imminent. The time is heavy-pregnant!

But we also have the task of paving the way for Him. Time is short! We do not dare to sit on our laurels now and rest. Everyone whose path we cross must know about Jesus. Indeed, He is among us, with us. However, there are many people who do not recognize Him. It is our job to introduce Jesus to everyone we come in contact with. Let's do it!

Prayer:

Lord, this morning I worship You as the living Lord - the One who is among us. Give me the zeal to introduce You to everyone.

## **Behold: the Lamb of God**

### **John 1: 29-34**

When you hear of Handel's breathtaking Easter cantata, "The Messiah," then you automatically think only of the delightful Hallelujah Choir. The cantata, however, comprise a whole series of wonderful songs. This morning, one of the most moving passages from Handel's Messiah resounds in my mind: "Behold: The Lamb of God! Keep: The Lamb of God! " It echoes through my whole being. "There is the Lamb of God!"

What compelled John to make such a statement? Surely John must have known Jesus as a child and young man. After all, they were family. John must have had a suspicion who Jesus really was, because when we read the passage about Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3: 13-17, we see how John shrinks when Jesus asks him to baptize Him. He did not consider himself worthy to baptize Jesus. But the confirmation of his suspicion only came immediately after the

baptism, when the great miracle happened that shook John in his deepest being, the miracle of heaven that opened before his eyes and the Holy Spirit who descended on Jesus in the shape of a pigeon. And then that voice from heaven, the voice that can only belong to God: "This is My beloved Son. I rejoice in Him. "

Many people are under the impression that the Holy Spirit is mentioned only in the New Testament context. However, this is not true. In the first verses of the Bible, in Genesis 1: 2, we already see that the "Spirit of God" was involved in creation. We also see time and time again that the Holy Spirit has come upon important people with a specific task, such as kings, prophets and judges. In 1 Samuel 10:10 we read of Saul: "The Spirit of God was at work in him". It is often said that someone was anointed by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit then gave such people special power to complete their tasks. Very good examples of this are Gideon, Samson and

David.

So when the Holy Spirit comes on Jesus, He gets a special task that He had to perform, and for this the Spirit gives Him a special power. His public action or ministry began from this day and people were amazed at the things that happened through Him.

Three years later, however, the greatest miracle happened, when Jesus "gave" the Holy Spirit to all believers. Suddenly the power of the Holy Spirit was no longer limited to select, special people, but now it is available to everyone who is part of the family of Jesus.

It is these events that led John to say the prophetic words: "There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Whether John really realized the full extent of his words is doubtful. This "Lamb" to which John refers could also have one of several meanings: It could be the Passover lamb that was slaughtered in memory of Israel's deliverance from Egypt or the sacrificial lamb

that was sacrificed every day according to the instructions in Exodus 29: 38-42. has been sacrificed. However, it could also be the sheep or goat that was sent into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement to take away the sins of the people.

However, no matter which one of these possibilities we choose - the message remains exactly the same. Even though John did not realize and understand it at that time, Jesus was the Lamb who would be slaughtered / sacrificed in the true sense of the word. He would be cruelly "slaughtered" three years later as a final sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people. But this time not only for Israel's sins, but for the whole world's! As Easter lamb we can commemorate His slaughter today. Not about the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, but about our deliverance from the power of sin.

If we think carefully about the true meaning of these words, we can only fall in gratitude

before our Savior, for the price He paid is immeasurably great. The fact is that God is a just Judge, and that His holy Being is so clean and pure, that He can do nothing but give the heaviest punishment for sin. There is no place for sin in God's Kingdom, so the person who sins against Him must receive the punishment of hell, an eternal punishment, away from the face of God. However, as a Sacrificial Lamb, Jesus paid with His life, and took the punishment upon Himself so that you and I could be acquitted of that terrible punishment. However, there is one condition, one that John later spells out unequivocally: To establish your faith in Jesus.

That is why everyone who participates in that sacrifice of the Lamb today can rejoice and thank the Lord by living a life of gratitude. However, the "package" that Jesus offers is much bigger than just a life of gratitude, because as we have already seen, the Holy Spirit is part of this new life that He gives.

The Holy Spirit brings the Word of God to life for you and now the Bible is no longer just a history book full of beautiful stories and thoughts, but it becomes God's participation in you and His guideline for your entire life. As the Holy Spirit gave Jesus strength and equipped Him for His ministry and so later for the apostles, so He does for me and you today if we allow Him.

Prayer:

Thank You, Lord, for giving us the Holy Spirit.

# Andrew

## John 1: 35-42

An evangelist is someone who tells people about Jesus. Who was the very first evangelist? Maybe John the Baptist? He testified of Jesus! However, there was someone else before him who, with his very first encounter with Jesus, ran excitedly and went to fetch others to come to Jesus.

But now I'm jumping the story ahead!

John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing one day, as usual, when Jesus passed by. John looked closely at Jesus and for the second time he made the statement: "There is the Lamb of God."

One of his followers, Andrew, and his partner were immediately excited and immediately left their teacher right there and ran after Jesus.

For a rabbi, it would be a insult if your students left you like a hot potato to run after

another rabbi. For John, however, it was job satisfaction because he had achieved his goal. After all, that was what he was there for, to prepare the way for people to follow Jesus.

Let me give you an example: I run this internet ministry under the name of the Dutch Reformed Church in Ballito. If someone were to meet Jesus, and he joins the AFM, Baptists or any other Christian church through my ministry, I would rejoice and be glad, because I am not recruiting members for the Dutch Reformed Church, but I am recruiting followers for Jesus! John did exactly that too: recruiting followers for Jesus!

Jesus saw the two men sauntering along behind Him, then he turned around and asked what they were looking for? They were confused and then asked the first thing that came to their mind: "Where are you staying, Rabbi?" Jesus did not simply give them His business card. No, He invited them

enthusiastically: "Come along, then you will see!" What all was said that afternoon, we do not know. However, the two men listened so attentively to Jesus that they spent the whole afternoon there.

What Andrew experienced there made him so excited that he decided then and there that he simply had to share this Rabbi he met with others! He jumped up and ran to his brother, Simon, and told him all about the wonderful Rabbi he had discovered, and then he dragged Simon along to Jesus.

Does Jesus also make you so excited that you simply cannot keep Him to yourself? Is it also such an obsession for you to take other people to Jesus so that they can meet Him? I've heard several stories of someone with such an obsession, and then the person he leads to Jesus becomes a Billy Graham who recruits thousands of people for the Kingdom!

We do not hear much from Andrew in the New Testament. His name is mentioned only

twelve times as one of the disciples. Nowhere does he get recognition for something special he has done. Nevertheless, Andreas caused a great stir in the history of the church. The day he brought Simon to Jesus, the great cornerstone of the church - the rock that launched the church of Jesus - came into being.

Indeed, Simon was just a rugged, simple, hot-headed fisherman who often talked and acted before he thought. He was certainly a very unlikely candidate for the position of evangelist and much more unlikely than the leader of the entire Christian church! But Jesus saw through this hard shell when Andrew brought him there. He saw a jewel under the hard crust. "You are Simon the son of John," Jesus told him, looking intently at the awkward Peter. "You will be called Cephas!" Cephas is Aramaic for "Rock." In Greek it is translated as "Peter." His name is mentioned at least 160 times in the New Testament, next to Paul the name that

appears most often.

Peter's influence on the church was astronomical! It did take a full three years to get through that hard shell, but after Pentecost we see in Peter a fearless leader who takes thousands of people with him to build the triumphant church of Jesus!

But where did it all start? With Andrew who was excited about Jesus, and willing to lead someone else to Jesus. Andrew did not really have training to speak of at that time, he had only spent one single afternoon in Jesus' company! However, that was more than enough to make him an evangelist.

We often feel that we need to go through an EEIII course, Faithful Witnesses, Bible School, and a whole host of other training before we dare to talk to anyone about Jesus. It's a myth! All Jesus asks of you and me is to be willing! After all, Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to lead us in conversation! It is not the job of a pastor to lead people to Jesus. That task belongs to ordinary

believers, people like you and me! Andrew proved it, and the many new believers after the "Pentecostal explosion" proved it again when it was not the Apostles who spread the Gospel far and wide but ordinary people. Peter and his mates gave guidance only.

Prayer:

Lord, please make me willing to lead other people to Jesus like Andrew.

## **Jesus is God**

### **John 1: 43-51**

I grew up on a farm near the picturesque town of Waterval Boven. The residents were very patriotic towards this town, possibly because of the patriotism that radiated from a very special teacher, Uncle Fred Geysler. About 15 km. from Waterval Boven there is another, much smaller town, Machadodorp. We always spoke with contempt of this village and its inhabitants, and you spent as little time there as possible. Machadodorp was simply below our dignity. Even today, few people know about the existence of Machadodorp. Could anything good ever come from Machadodorp? Well, maybe it was pure jealousy that made us feel that way, because see, Machadodorp had the magistrate's office, and for every legal thing, even car and birth registrations, all the inhabitants of Waterval Boven had to drive there! In addition, Machadodorp had the honour of being the capital of the Transvaal

Republic for three months!

In the region of Galilee there was an insignificant village called Nazareth. I almost want to compare him to Machadodorp. In this very village Joseph worked as a carpenter and Jesus learned the trade from Joseph. Apparently not much was going on in the town, and even the people from the area looked down on the inhabitants of Nazareth. The church leaders were even less impressed with them, because according to the ringleaders, the people of Galilee did not live as the regulations strictly recommended. The inhabitants of Galilee, and especially Nazareth, were despised by them. And with this "Nazareth" sign around His neck, Jesus had to begin His ministry!

As Rabbi, Jesus already had two followers at that time, Andrew and his brother Cephas (Peter). Now He runs into Philip, and He invites him: "Follow Me". This invitation involved much more than it seems at first glance. This would mean that Philip would

have to leave everything and not only go with his new Teacher and listen to Him, but he would have to follow the example of his Rabbi. He would have to live as He lived and do as He did. Philip knew what it meant to follow a Rabbi, and he was willing to take the big step. Being a follower also means that you have to recruit other followers, and from day one Philip did this: he ran into Nathanael and told him about Jesus. It is interesting to know that Philip linked Jesus to the Old Testament. For Jews it was very important, because there their heritage as a people of God was secured. He therefore told Nathanael that they had received the One of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, in other words, the Messiah.

We are so inclined to put the Old Testament aside today and read only the New Testament. We often see the Old Testament as a writing full of horror stories of war, murder, betrayal and adultery. Add to that the endless archaic laws that mean absolutely

nothing to us today. However, if we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us through the books of the Old Testament, then we see the footsteps of God running from the first to the very last page. We see between all the bloodshed and killing of the people, the patience, grace, love and forgiveness of God running like a golden thread through the Old Testament. And if we look closely, we even discover Jesus there. Rev. Danie Haasbroek wrote a voluminous book entitled: "The miracle of Jesus in the Old Testament." The Old Testament is indeed an integral part of the Word of God, and the God of history still speaks to us through Jesus today, after thousands of years.

When Nathanael heard that Jesus was from Nazareth, he was amazed, because "can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Is it ever possible for the long-awaited Messiah to come from such an abominable town as Nazareth? At least he must have come from Jerusalem, where the temple is and where

the great King David reigned! Perhaps today we are just as surprised to learn that Jesus is also in the Old Testament!

However, when Nathanael came to Jesus, Jesus' Divinity clearly emerged when He revealed that He already knew Nathanael, even though He had never seen him. Nathanael could not believe his ears, because Jesus knew absolutely everything about him! He immediately recognized Jesus as the Son of God and King of Israel.

What Nathanael experienced there, however, was only the beginning. They would still "see heaven open" (v 51) and experience unprecedented miracles. They would see the true Deity of Jesus first hand! Jesus was on his way to Galilee, and there in the town of Cana, Nathanael's hometown, the first breathtaking miracle would take place at a wedding reception.

Have you discovered Jesus as Almighty God yet? Is Jesus really the King who sits on the throne and rules for you - the One before

whom we must bow down in worship? We forget too easily who Jesus really is. Yes, of course He is the One who is with us and holds our hand and comforts us. But we must never forget that at the same time He is also the Creator, and is exalted high above us insignificant people. To Him be all the honour, praise and worship!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I worship You today, and I want to bring You all my praise and gratitude.

# **The Wedding**

## **John 2: 1-11**

The new Rabbi, Jesus, and His handful of first disciples receive an invitation to a wedding. Now we know that a wedding in Israel was a very jolly and long drawn out affair that could easily last a week. We almost want to say to Jesus: "Lord, there is no time for such mundane trifles - time is short! You know that you only have three years to complete everything!" But then we hear Jesus' calm voice: "Come on, do not worry, this wedding is a very important milestone."

Let's walk with this group of men to this wedding this morning and go see what's going on. I'm quite curious!

From afar we hear all the music and laughter and merriment. This is a very jolly affair! When we get there my mouth hangs open as dancing and singing and celebrating lifts the roof! I secretly wonder why Jesus involved

Himself with such folly. Is not His ministry on earth then supposed to be something very serious? We make ourselves comfortable at one of the tables. "Hey, but it's Mary, Jesus' mother here at the table next to us!" She is glad to see Jesus and they sit down with her. The tables are overloaded with food and the atmosphere is one of great joy.

But soon we see that everything is not so kosher - I miss my red wine, which is so characteristic of a wedding! Then I see Mary leaning towards Jesus - she looks worried. I prick my ears to hear what she's saying above the noise. "The wine is up," is all I can make out. It's a disaster! What is Jesus going to do? We are disappointed when He shakes His head - no, He's not going to help! Then He decides again to help the poor bridegroom, who is supposed to provide the wine, out of his predicament. He signals something to Mary, and then she disappears. The next moment the waiters start carrying water to the large stone jugs used for the

cleansing rituals. All seven of them are filled to the brim. And then Jesus signals to the waiters to scoop out some water and give it to the master of ceremonies. We wonder what He is doing?

I see how the man's face brightens when he tastes the "water": It's not water - it's wine! Delicious wine! A full 700 litres of it! I peek in the direction of Jesus' disciples - they are in ecstasy! Now they know that their choice to follow Jesus was the right one.

"What is the significance of all these events?" you ask. I wonder about this myself. Then suddenly a light comes on for me. Jesus came to this wedding with a purpose! It was definitely not just to come and party! He symbolically came here to take over the duties of the groom by providing the wine. And then I remember that John wrote in Revelation 19 about the "wedding of the Lamb" where Jesus is described as the Bridegroom. As befits a good bridegroom, He provides in abundance! Who would ever

drink 700 litres of wine at a wedding?

But there is more: Amos prophesied of this wine that would flow so abundantly with the coming of the Messiah. Go and read that last chapter again (Amos 9: 13-14), where he says that the wine will drip from the mountains. Now that's abundance for you!

Suddenly things start to fall in place for me. I look at the stone jugs - there is something about them! Why did Jesus decide to make His wine in cleansing jugs? It does not make sense! Then a light comes on for me. Those jugs were used for cleansing rituals, as required by law. In other words, it is symbolic of the rigid Jewish law. What is Jesus doing? He turns it into something to celebrate. He turns the "law jugs" into "festival jugs!" Because Jesus is the true Bridegroom, we are no longer bound by the law, but we can celebrate with Him!

Something that made me wonder is why Jesus at first refused to comply with Mary's request, and then He did the miracle

anyway? I think Jesus maybe meant by that that He could not be told by people what to do, not even by His mother. But what He did was the will of His Father, and to that alone He was obedient.

I see Jesus' disciples looking at their Master in amazement. Today they learned that He is not just any Rabbi, but He has power and glory! Is He maybe really the Messiah?

How do you and I see Jesus? We tend to seek Him in the supernatural. Maybe we should open our eyes and seek Him in the ordinary, everyday things of life, even like a wedding! To recognize Jesus, we must be willing to notice the little miracles that happen every day in our lives and recognize Jesus in them in faith. But then we must also do the right thing, and give Him all the glory for these things. Praise Him with all your heart!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You are God and Lord - thank You for all Your miracles that I can

experience every day.

# Cleansing of the Temple

## John 2: 13-22

Jesus and His disciples went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. When exactly it fits into the chronology is not very certain. When we write history today, we make sure it is in the correct chronological order, but for the Jews it was not important. What was important, however, was to write the right message in the right place. According to other gospels, this event only took place right at the end of Jesus' ministry. We must not break our heads over the order - the message is the most important! John did not write history but he wanted to bring the message home!

Perhaps we need to first explain the background of the events in order to understand what really happened.

People travelled very far to sacrifice in the temple in Jerusalem. They had to ride on donkeys or often even get there on foot, and

then it often took a week or longer. Embarking on such a journey with a sheep or two, or perhaps a few pigeons, was anything but practical. And should you do so then these sacrificial animals looked bitterly drab at the end of your journey. And there the money changers saw a niche in the market. Drab and skinny animals were exchanged for healthy, fat animals that would be acceptable for sacrifice - at a price of course! Or you could buy yourself a little sacrifice right in the temple square.

Money was another question: Roman money was totally forbidden in the temple, because there was an image on it, namely that of the emperor and the law clearly states that you may not make a "carved image" for yourself. So it had to be exchanged for Jewish money - at a price, of course. And even with the Jewish money there was a problem, because the metal in the coins was not always so pure because the foundry's were primitive in those years. Only pure coins were acceptable to be

used as sacrificial money. So once again, the poor people had to pay up to exchange their coins!

Meanwhile, the money changers were getting rich from other people's problems. We can easily say that they only ran a business. The problem, however, was that money became their idol and that they exploited people in need. It would seem that they made excessive profits! They were people who worked in the temple, and as such were associated with God. For them, however, the emphasis had shifted from God to money. We must realize very clearly that ulterior motives have absolutely no place in your worship. If so, then you need to seriously reconsider your relationship with God.

That is why Jesus climbed in amongst them with a whip. He overturned their tables and chased their animals out of the temple. The Jews were furious about this and according to the other gospels, this incident was the last straw for the Jewish Council to capture

Jesus and have him crucified.

However, we can read much more in this act than just the physical things that happened that day. John describes a statement that Jesus made there about the temple that He would build in three days if it were demolished. We know, of course, that by the temple He meant His own body. If we then see Jesus' temple cleansing in this light, then there is a much deeper meaning in the act.

The Jews had to go to the temple to offer sacrifices. For that, they needed money or sacrificial animals. However, Jesus threw out the money and chased the sacrificial animals out of the temple. Now the Jews had nothing left to sacrifice because their entire sacrificial system was in jeopardy. It was like telling them, "You do not have to come to the Temple anymore!" We must realize that it was a symbolic act to show that Jesus would now become the new, perfect Temple. The temple was seen as the abode of God. So if you are with Jesus, you are with God (the

new Temple). With Him all these sacrifices are no longer necessary. They were served because Jesus had already brought the final sacrifice. All the Jewish customs and cult are therefore now superfluous.

Today we also often make a very big mistake, to want to see God in a church building. Often that building becomes sacred to us as the temple was sacred to the Jews. Are we not also making an idol of that building?

From what we have read above, we see that Jesus not only replaced the sacrifices, but also the temple. Where Jesus is, there is the temple. We also know that Jesus said in Matthew 28:20 that He is always with us. So we are at this Temple at all times and we can worship Him right where we are. It is not necessary for special times and special places and special circumstances. For example, many believers spend their morning commutes to work in conversation with Jesus, instead of complaining about

traffic.

Prayer:

Thank You, Lord, that I can start my morning in conversation with You, and that I can also know that You are my Conversation Partner all day long.

# Unbelieving Christians

## John 2: 23-25

According to Wikipedia, about 80% of South Africa's population of 60 million people are Christians. We are therefore an extremely blessed country! Or are we really? If there are so many Christians - why was the church so empty yesterday? Where were all the other people? But then we must also add that at the last huge rally of Uncle Angus there were a million people, ie 1.6% of the total population of South Africa! It gives one hope for the future - our country is not so bad a place as people make it out to be. Maybe we can even feel good about ourselves!

But there is a small problem: of the 48 million who claim to be Christians, only a small handful are true believers, or people who have accepted Jesus in the faith. And unfortunately, it is also the case that of these believers there is also only a small percentage who truly live out their faith through a living, personal relationship with

Jesus. It does not help if you attend a Mighty Men event, and two weeks later you are just back to your old self again. That wonderful uplifting opportunity should be the spark for you to start a true relationship with Jesus.

Chapter 3 of John - Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus - is probably one of the most read chapters in the whole Bible, and especially verse 16. Therefore, it was necessary for John to first write a brief introduction about it, so that we can understand this conversation better. In verse 23 John writes that large numbers of people came to faith in Jesus while He was in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, simply because they saw the miracles He performed. The question that immediately arises in your mind is what became of all these believers the day when Jesus was crucified? The great sadness is on that gloomy day many of them shouted together: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" How is this possible?

The answer to this is that the word "faith" was not always used by John for that kind of faith that describes a total surrender or personal relationship with Jesus. In other words, people who felt positive about Jesus, and who followed Him to see His miracles, were also called "believers" by John. The reality came as a huge shock to these same "believers", when Jesus detonated the bomb in John 8:44: "You are children of the devil!"

We must therefore be very careful in the first place of the context of certain words or thoughts. We must remember that it is extremely difficult to make an accurate translation from an ancient language such as Greek, and with a totally different background than the one in which we live today, which reflects exactly what the author's intention was.

But even more important is the fact that we must be very careful about what our "faith" entails, and that it is not just a miracle faith as those followers of Jesus had. As we have

already seen, there are millions of South Africans who have such a faith, and in Jesus' own words they are "children of the devil". The time has come for every Christian (including you and me) to ask himself the question, whether his faith is genuine and has the stamp of Jesus on it. If you are not sure about this, I would like to ask you to contact me immediately. You can just use the link below. Or talk to your pastor. This is of vital importance!

In verse 24 John says that Jesus "did not rely on them", referring to the people who came to believe in Him. It actually means that He did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew what was going on in their minds. This thought only becomes really clear when we read chapter 3, which deals with the conversation with Nicodemus. Jesus explained the rebirth to him, but Nicodemus was so caught up in his own reasoning that he did not really understand what it was all about. Maybe he did not want to understand,

or maybe he was afraid to understand, because then his Pharisee friends would reject him. But Nicodemus was not the only one who did not want to understand - these "believers" also just wanted to understand what suited them. All the miracles were beautiful, and their dream that Jesus, the Messiah, would save them from the tribulation of the Romans, made them become followers of Jesus. However, he was not excited about the attention he was receiving because he knew their inner mosts.

Yes, Jesus also knows my inner most, and He knows yours. Does He have reason to be excited about our discipleship? This question we must each ask ourselves.

Prayer:

Lord, I lay myself bare to You this morning. You know me through and through. I believe in You with all that is in me.

## Conversation in the Night

### John 3: 1-4

We can describe Nicodemus as a highly-educated teacher, one of the most respected leaders in his time. He was a Pharisee dedicated to the law of God and therefore a very important man. But he was also a member of the Jewish Council, where he had to make important decisions with the other leaders. John writes three times about Nicodemus. The first time he tells how Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, so that his fellow-councillors would not see him with Jesus. So despite all his great titles, we see that this leader was scared. Later, however, when Jesus experienced a great crisis and the church leaders wanted to capture Him, it was Nicodemus who tried to stand up for Jesus. And after Jesus' crucifixion, when all His disciples disappeared, it was again Nicodemus, the Pharisee and Jewish councillor who came forward and provided the necessary means to embalm Jesus'

body. So we see that not all the church leaders and Pharisees were corrupt and that help often comes from the most unexpected source!

But what happened that night?

Nicodemus heard of the new Rabbi who made so many headlines. The miracles he heard were strange to him. A small voice inside him kept telling him that there was much more in this Rabbi than he wanted to admit. At that time, however, Jesus was completely unknown in Israel and Nicodemus simply had to find out for himself what was going on. It was a bit of an embarrassment for him to go to Jesus openly, because how would it appear if a respected teacher wanted to light a candle for a Rabbi that no one had heard of yet? And then there were things he heard about this Man, that were not so kosher. What would his Pharisee friends say? No, he had to go to Him at night so that there would not be too many questions. And then, of course, he would have to choose his

words very carefully so as not to show his own uncertainty!

When Nicodemus then tracked down Jesus that night as He was discussing the day's events with His disciples, Nicodemus felt extremely uncomfortable amongst all the rough fishermen and ordinary people. At least he had to show that he was not just an old man here! Very arrogantly he begins his argument: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who came from God, because no one can perform these signs that you perform if God is not with him."

Nicodemus may have secretly hoped that Jesus would answer him and confirm that He is the Messiah - the One from whom he has read so much in the Scriptures, and about Whom he has taught his disciples so much. A tingle went through Nicodemus' body: now just say he had just discovered the Messiah!

However, Jesus saw throughout Nicodemus and saw his very deepest need, a need that Nicodemus himself did not even know. His

answer was not at all what Nicodemus expected. "I say unto you, unless a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The poor man was stunned! What kind of answer was this? This Rabbi speaks in riddles! You cannot be born again! What exactly did He mean by that?

Nicodemus was very serious about his encounter with Jesus. He chose his words very carefully and we can only assume that he was honest about the things he said. If it was just another superficial provocation as so often came from the Pharisees, he would have openly gone to Jesus in the day. Nicodemus therefore hoped to learn something from Jesus. And Nicodemus was certainly not disappointed!

Jesus' first answer did strike him, but Nicodemus could feel that a very deep conversation could take place here. Immediately he had to find out that Jesus was not only the Miracle Worker who could

turn water into wine, but that there was much more about Him. Nicodemus may have misunderstood Jesus' first answer - possibly even intentionally! When Jesus said that someone had to be born again, He used an ambiguous word, which can also mean "born from above", or that it is a birth from God.

Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus about being born again would change this man's entire life. This is the most important event in any person's life. Nicodemus' ears were pricked! He wanted to drink in every word of this conversation.

For you and me, this conversation is equally important and we need to read it repeatedly so that we can be reminded of that important event in our lives - the day when it felt like the sun was summersaulting with joy. So we can't help but pause for a moment with this conversation over the next few days.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that I can be excited with

Nicodemus about that new life that only You can give through the Holy Spirit.

# Water And Spirit

## John 3: 4-8

In Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus tells him that you must be born again. Nicodemus misunderstands this completely! He thinks that Jesus means that he now literally had to climb back into his mother's womb like an old man and that the birth process had to be repeated. That's absurd! With such a nonsensical statement, Jesus stimulates Nicodemus' curiosity and it gives Him the opportunity to take the conversation further. Jesus explains that you had to be born of "Water and Spirit".

What exactly did Jesus mean by these two words? "Spirit" is not a problem, we all understand that the Holy Spirit is involved in the rebirth. But what did He mean by "Water?" The significance of this has been much debated. One line of thinking says that it indicates baptism as an occasion when one enters into God's Kingdom. However, if we read further in chapter 4, we see that Jesus

refers to Himself as the "Living Water" towards the Samaritan woman.

Water plays a very important role in the symbolism of Jesus' salvation work and I think we can assume with reasonable certainty that Jesus is referring to Himself and the Holy Spirit when He says that you must be born of "Water and Spirit". In other words, you can only be saved when two things happen to you: Jesus must give you new life through His atonement and at the same time the Holy Spirit must come to live in you.

These things are very difficult to understand because we want to think in concrete, human terms. However, we are dealing here with a spirit world that is invisible to us. The great miracle happens the day of your rebirth. Then this spirit world becomes a reality to you for the simple reason that you become part of it. At the same time, you become sensitive to the spiritual things that are happening around you. So you become a

citizen of the spirit world. In fact, you have dual citizenship because you are still earthbound with a mortal body, but you are no longer limited to the earthly. This means that you can now rise above these oppressive earthly things.

Am I talking in riddles? For Nicodemus, this was also a mystery, and Jesus realized it all too well. Therefore, He uses the image of the wind to explain to Him. You cannot see the wind. You also cannot explain where it comes from and where it is going. Yet you know it's there! After all, you can feel the effect on your skin and see how it makes the leaves rustle. In a storm you can experience it's power where it is even able to uproot giant trees. However, you do not have to have answers to all the questions and you do not have to understand them to be sure that the wind is there.

It is the same with the Spirit. You do not have to understand everything about Him and have all the answers, such as how it is

possible that He can live in you. When we enter the spirit world, it is as if your mind is standing still, because everything is just so much bigger and more incomprehensible than the simple worlds we are used to. But just as with the wind, you also experience the effect of the Holy Spirit in a tangible way. You see how He works in people's lives and does wonderful things. Is it ever possible for an ordinary farmer to get a million people together to listen to a sermon without first having a rugby match involved? No! Very definitely not! Yet the absolutely impossible happens, and we can only attribute it to the powerful work of the Holy Spirit used by a simple farmer. I can cite numerous similar examples, which simply cannot be explained otherwise.

Someone asked me one day: "How do you hear God's voice? Many people hear Him speak to them, and I want to hear it too. " Your first reaction is to laugh at this question, but it is actually a very deep question. Yes, I

can also unequivocally say that I am one of those people who hears God speak. He talks to me every day! Have I ever physically heard His voice - like a voice from heaven? No! Now how does it work then?

The day the Holy Spirit comes into your life, He will open new doors for you. Where the Bible was once a book full of stories, laws and rituals, the same Bible now becomes a guide for your life and a book in which you see God's grace and love. If you allow Him to speak to you through the Word, it becomes a living Word, and you hear God's voice through what you read. In the same way, you experience His voice during a worship service when someone is preaching. You just know that it is the voice of God. How exactly do I know this? No, I cannot tell you that, and every person experiences it differently. The big secret is that we need to become sensitive to recognize His voice when He speaks. This can only happen when we are constantly working to live closer and closer to

Him.

Prayer:

Lord, I thank You that Your grace over me is so great that I can experience Your presence and Your voice.

## **Eternal Life**

### **John 3: 9-15**

Jesus explained so nicely to Nicodemus about the wind and the rebirth, but the wise teacher still does not understand! He was astounded: "But how can these things happen?"

The way Jesus reveals these wonderful truths to Nicodemus is absolutely brilliant. He says just enough to make the man think, but He says it in such a way that it makes Nicodemus have a burning desire to know more. It is not spelled out for him but almost in riddles Jesus makes him hungry to want to find out even more.

Yesterday we saw that it is about the birth from Above or the rebirth. However, that's only half the story. It is also about the way you should know God. To truly know Him, you must be spiritually sensitive - something that does happen when the Holy Spirit comes into you and intervenes in your life.

Nicodemus was the learned Pharisee who lived strictly according to the guidelines of the law and carefully observed every prescribed tradition in order to attain salvation and honour God. To him, this new idea was totally incomprehensible. Why then would he even need a new birth?

However, Jesus deepens the mystery even more! He mentions to Nicodemus about the “earthly and heavenly” things and then asks how these two come together and what they have to do with each other? With the earthly, Jesus probably refers to the new birth or rebirth that does take place here on earth. If Nicodemus has a problem with it or cannot understand it, how will he still be able to understand the wonderful things that happen after that? The miracles of eternal life, and the way the Holy Spirit totally changes human lives, is something that completely transcends your mind!

Actually, the earthly and heavenly things come together at the cross at Calvary. This is

where everything changed completely and where Jewish law and traditions were replaced with Jesus' reconciliation. Jesus uses the image of the copper serpent to explain it to Nicodemus. During the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, they again fell into one of their infamous whining and mourning sessions. It was the umpteenth time, and certainly the last straw. They got what they were looking for - the wrath of God! He sent serpents and many of the wailing Israelites were bitten and killed by them. But again, God's grace is far greater than His punishment. He commanded Moses to make an image of a serpent out of copper and mount it on a pole. Anyone who was bitten by a snake could only look at the copper snake for healing.

This was actually a wonderful prophetic act, because that copper serpent was a reference to Jesus, who would also hang on a pole. Just as those who looked at the copper serpent would continue to live, so the people

who "looked" at Jesus on the cross would continue to live. However, the copper serpent was a symbolic and very temporary solution, because people still died after that. However, the new dispensation brings something wonderful, because to believe in Jesus you not only stay alive, but you get ETERNAL LIFE! It is something that is radically different from the ordinary boring earthly life and its quality is indescribably much better. On top of that, it's something that will not happen only one day when you die, but it's something that already happens with your rebirth.

From that moment on, there is a very important difference. Now you no longer live alone, but God is with you. Now the Holy Spirit lives in you, and Jesus is with you from that moment on. In Philippians, Paul describes what kind of effect it has on the quality of your life. Because God is in you, you now have a bubbling joy that fills your life, even in the worst of conditions. This is what allowed Paul and Silas to sing jubilantly

as they were whipped mercilessly and chained in iron chains while lying in the stinking prison in Philippi. Their fellow prisoners could not understand why these two could manage to sing so cheerfully.

Today there are many believers who can testify to such a bubbly life filled with joy. It is one of the many wonderful gifts of everlasting life.

You may be asking this morning, "But why do I not have that joy in my life?" Maybe it's simply because you do not want to allow the Holy Spirit to fill and control your life in such a way that you can experience that joy.

Eternal Life has two phases, the earthly and the heavenly. During the earthly phase, it depends on yourself what you do with it. The closer to God you live and the more you allow Him to control your life, the more meaningful and joyful it will be. Everyone who believes in Jesus already has eternal life. Then live that eternal life to the fullest here on earth!

Prayer:

Lord, I can not thank You enough for the wonderful gift of eternal life that You also gave me. Thank you for the wonderful joy that comes with it.

## **What Is Love?**

### **John 3: 16-18**

John 3:16 can rightly be seen as the centre of the Bible - perhaps not geographically, but certainly in a spiritual sense. This single verse puts everything we read in the four gospels about Jesus in a divine perspective. God's love for the world is so great that He was willing to sacrifice His Son, Jesus, for it.

What does John mean by that word "love"? From all the different descriptions of it across a wide range of writings we can clearly deduce that love is not an emotional matter. For example, infatuation that struck each of us as teenagers was pure emotion, or perhaps our hormones that got in the way with us. Unfortunately, it is that same infatuation that often causes people to get married, and a year or two later, when the emotion has dried up, they part ways again.

True love can perhaps be better translated with the word "loyalty". What is it that keeps

two people happily together for fifty or sixty years, even through the hard times and the times when they can get angry with each other? It is an indescribable bond of love, of which intense loyalty is an integral part. This includes an obligation to each other, that they will take care of each other and that they will help and assist each other through thick and thin.

Perhaps we can see something of this in the love of God for man. He was willing to sacrifice everything to save us. In a love affair, however, there are two sides. God has already brought His side, and now it is man's turn to answer it. Your answer is not an emotional decision, but a sober decision to accept God's offer of love. That is all He asks of you. What follows is that the love relationship is built, as in any stable marital relationship. Of course, there is also emotion involved - in some people much more than others.

To make any love relationship succeed, there

is hard work involved. The two parties need to get to know each other thoroughly. God already knows me and now it's my turn. I get to know Him by studying the revelation written about Him - the Bible. Communication is of utmost importance in any relationship, so too in my relationship with God. He speaks to me through the Word, so I have to read it. I talk to Him again through prayer. So prayer is not just something that is obligatory for every Christian, but is your communication with God.

Love also means that two parties are willing to do things for each other. From God's side, the floodgates of heaven are open, with all that He does for me. What am I willing to do for Him?

But let's look at some of the things He is willing to do for me. In John 3:16 we read that if I believe in Jesus, I will not perish but have eternal life. To be lost means to be cut off from the presence of the Living God. This means that you have to do without His gifts

and His love. If we only think carefully about everything we received from Him, then the implications of this are too terrible to think about. However, if you decide to enter into a love relationship with Him, this possibility is completely ruled out. But the bonus is that on top of that you get the wonderful eternal life. This means that the earthly phase of your life is extended forever beyond the death of your old body, your temporary "tent dwelling" as Paul describes it. And in Revelation we get a small glimpse into the wonder of life beyond those gates. This is something that every believer looks forward to with great anticipation and excitement!

However, there is another aspect to this love affair: Judgment! We often get the idea that we should be afraid of God, especially when we read the Old Testament, where He is often described as Someone who punishes. Indeed, God cannot tolerate injustice, and unlike our own political system where corruption and injustice are often swept

under the rug, He is just, and it is punished. However, he does not want to bully us into heaven by threatening us with punishment. On the contrary: He wants to call us into His arms of love. Jesus was not sent to punish, but to save those who have already been condemned. I was doomed to eternal punishment, until I recognized Jesus' call, and answered by accepting His offer. For years He pleaded, but I kept a deaf ear to His voice. Until that wonderful day .....

Against the backdrop of the dark clouds of damnation and eternal damnation, the positive light of Jesus' mission to come and save people like you and me shines. It's like someone sacrificing his own life and jumping into the raging waves of a stormy sea to rescue doomed drowning people.

Prayer:

Lord, Your love for me is so indescribably great. I confess that my love for You is but scarce - please help me to live out my love to the fullest.

## **Evil Darkness**

### **John 3: 19-21**

Carefully I sneak up to the old "haunted house" with my two trembling cousens behind.

When I heard that the two were visiting, I decided to play a prank on the two scared girls. The old house, a short distance from our farmhouse was very neglected. There had been no more windows in for a long time already and the ceiling and walls were smoked pitch black by a leaking coal stove. I conjured up a ghostly figure out of newspaper to make this visit of the two girls one they would not soon forget. I had to use all my engineering skills to make a pulley system work, to give my ghost wings when I pull the string unnoticed.

I could not wait for it to get dark to take the two on a "tour". And so the three of us cautiously sneak into the night. In the twilight darkness the old haunted house looms

before us. The black-smoked walls paint a picture out of a thriller movie. The distorted door creaks moaningly as I slowly push it open. I have to swallow hard to contain my laughter when I see the two of them tremble with anxiety. The darkness in the house envelops your heart and they just want to turn back when I grab my twine and pull. Then the white figure rises here right before our eyes. Screaming, as they dash to the old farmhouse where the warm, bright light from the Aladden lamp welcomes them into the diningroom with open arms. I double up with laughter. My trick worked!

Darkness is associated with evil. Films make very good use of it and scenes that want to portray fear and terror and especially evil things are always shrouded in a cloak of darkness - the darker, the more evil. Why? Evil has a lot of things to hide. The evil one only shows you what he wants you to see. In the old haunted house, the only thing the girls had to see was that "ghost" of mine.

John says in verse 20 that those who do evil hate the light. They avoid light like the plague, because in the light their evil deeds come into the open.

The darkness naturally frightens a person. I still remember, when we finally got a Lister generator on the farm, it was a happy day. Then we had electric lights in the house! The problem, however, was that that engine had to be shut down at night. And it was my duty! I pushed the button to put it off, and then I had to run as fast as I could while the light was dimming slowly, to jump into my bed in time before it was completely dark. It always felt like there was something behind me in that darkness as I ran for my bed!

Light, on the other hand, brings rest and peace into your mind. Just look at how everyone huddles around the warm glow of a fire in the bush, especially if you also know that there are all kinds of creepy crawlies lurking in the dark. Light dispels the darkness. Where there is light, there can be

no darkness. Just try it: go into a pitch-dark room, and light a tiny candle. Immediately the darkness is gone! However, if you turn on a large tube light with its blue-white light, then even the darkest corner is brightly lit.

Jesus came as Light to this dark world par excellence. It was indeed dark when He came, for not only was the whole world ruled by the iron hand of the pagan Roman government with all its idols, but in the Jewish ranks the Israelites were overshadowed by the Pharisees who made God's laws totally unbearable and impossible for the people. Two absolute extremes made life very gloomy.

And then Jesus came! His light shone brightly, and showed the people that there was Someone who truly cared for them, Someone who did not require them to bear the heavy burdens of the law. The evil one tried very hard to extinguish every grain of light, but Jesus drove away the darkness when His light began to shine. Gone are the

days when you had to earn your salvation through hard work and keeping the law. By living only in Jesus' Light, you were able to obtain salvation, not out of your own merits, but purely out of grace. The dark cloud of God's judgment was now replaced with the bright light of deliverance and forgiveness.

It is so tragic that there are still so many people living in the dark. The light of liberation shines brightly out there, but they prefer to be a prisoner of darkness. Judgment hangs pitch black over them, and all they have to do to get out of it is accept the gift of Jesus' salvation.

I know that this morning here is someone reading this passage, who is still living under that dark cloud. Maybe it's you, and there's a burning desire in your heart to get out of there. Then come to the Light, and seize Jesus' offer!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for sending the Light into the

world. Thank You for giving me that Light too. I pray sincerely for everyone who reads this devotional, and is still in the dark.

# John's Testimony

## John 3: 22-36

A fact we often completely miss out is that Jesus, like John the Baptist, also baptized people. In John 3: 22-26, someone asks John if he was aware that his "Opposition" is also doing this baptismal thing now? People apparently flocked to Him!

He apparently hoped to make John jealous by playing the two off against each other. But he did not take into account John's loyalty to Jesus and made it very clear that he only saw himself as a messenger. Some people may have thought that John was the Christ, but he repeatedly vehemently denied it. He was sent to precede Christ. In any case, he did not baptize because he thought he was better than others, but because God gave him that command. He only carried out God's commands.

Moreover, John realized all too well that Jesus was truly the Christ. That is why Jesus

was much bigger than he was. He therefore had to become less so that Jesus, the Christ, could be glorified. After all, that was his purpose on earth and that is what he was sent for.

Every believer, myself included, is a messenger, just like John the Baptist. The Lord has a chosen task for each of us. For John, it was to pave the way for Jesus. He carried it out with great zeal. The question is what you and I are doing with the task the Lord is giving us. Do we do it half-heartedly, just out of a sense of duty? Or maybe we're like the slave who was entrusted with a lot of money - the one who went and buried his money?

The question that people often ask is: "What is my task?"

Yes, of course we are all different and of course each has a different command from the Lord. However, we find the great, overarching command in Matthew 28:19, where Jesus instructs not only the Apostles,

but also every believer with them: "Go .... make disciples ...." This does not mean that everyone should be an evangelist or a missionary. But that means I must be willing to carry out the task I have been given to promote the spread of the Gospel as best I can, even if it is just to scrub floors! One task each of us has is to live out love in such a way that it makes other people hungry for the Gospel.

In the next few verses, John the Baptist in his answer plays off the heavenly versus the earthly. In the first place, he makes sure that his hearers are well aware that Jesus is coming from heaven and that he is different from our ordinary earthlings. Jesus, the Heavenly, is of course exalted above all earthly things. We so much want to see things from a truly human point of view. We "speak the language of the earth" and want to reason things out according to ordinary laws of nature. For example, it is very difficult for us to understand that God's forgiveness is

totally, all-encompassing. How is it possible that He can just forgive over and over again? We try to argue it humanly. However, what seems impossible to us is possible with Him.

Perhaps it is precisely this human reasoning that made the Jews reject Jesus. They saw the miracles and they heard the wonderful things Jesus said with their own ears. But because they wanted to reason it out humanly or earthly, they simply could not accept it. Jesus was the embodiment of God on earth, but the Jews simply could not fathom it. They had imagined the Messiah for themselves very differently. He was to be a mighty ruler who would deliver them from the Romans. Here, however, they see a Servant who comes to baptize and serve and heal people and play with children!

Then John warns them: "But indeed God sent Him!" What those people did not realize was that they saw God in action. All that was expected of them was to believe what they saw and to accept God's action in faith. John

repeats here Jesus' words to Nicodemus of John. 3:16. "He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life", but here is also a very earnest warning: "But he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the punishment of God abideth on him." (John 3:36). To disobey the Son means to not believe in Him. God alone can give eternal life, and He does so only through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. John wants to make sure that not only the Jews, but the whole world today understands that message. Let's follow his example and spread the message further.

Prayer:

Lord, please help me to carry out my commission to spread Jesus' Gospel with zeal!

# **The Woman at the Well**

## **John 4: 1-18**

One day I saw a report in the newspaper that Liz Taylor was married. "Wonderful news!" you might be able to say. No, old news! It was by then already the ninth time! She was already very old and in a wheelchair, but she still longed for young leaves, only to leave them again when she was tired of them. So what does this piece of news have to do with a daily piece? Everything! The woman in today's story has had a reputation almost as long as that of Liz!

Just to put the picture in perspective: Jesus and his disciples travelled from Galilee to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, a journey of about 150km. There His conversation with Nicodemus took place.

It was a very successful visit, as people crowded around them in large numbers. Of this, the Pharisees, who had great influence in the Jerusalem area, did not like at all.

Now, however, they were on their way back to Galilee - perhaps He wanted to avoid confrontation with the Pharisees at that time. Their journey took them through the Samaritan territory. It was the shortest route but not a popular one, as the Jews preferred to avoid the Samaritans altogether.

It was twelve o'clock in the afternoon and the men were tired and hungry. Near the village of Sigar they stopped at a well, one that still dated from Jacob's time. Jesus decided to stay there while the others went to buy lunch for them in town.

And then a strange thing happened. In the heat of the day, a Samaritan woman approached with a jug on her shoulder. No decent woman would have fetched water in this hot hour, and especially not alone! Going to fetch water was a social opportunity for the women to chat and catch up on all the gossip. Why was this one alone? Maybe she had something to hide?

Then something happened that would

definitely raise eyebrows. Jesus asked the woman for some drinking water. She could not believe her ears - a Jew asking for water from her, a Samaritan? The Jews avoided the Samaritans like the plague. You certainly did not eat or drink with them, for then you would be unclean! It was so bad that some Jews even believed that they could become infected, even if a Samaritan's shadow fell over them!

The woman's surprise was therefore not unfounded at all. But things got even worse when Jesus struck up a conversation with her. Not only was she a Samaritan, but she was also a woman. So she was at the very bottom of the social hierarchy - just another piece of property. In stark contrast, we have just read of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, who was on the highest sport of the social ladder. Very soon we find out from the conversation that she also had a bad reputation!

And then we just have to realize that Jesus is

looking beyond all our human limitations. Status does not matter to Him. Whether it is the high-ranking Nicodemus or the hoar - Jesus is there for everyone, across the social spectrum.

The conversation is very interesting. It starts with Jesus asking for water. The woman answers Him with a question that focuses on the terrible contrast between Jews and Samaritans - "You Jews think that you are better than us Samaritans" - so you read between the lines in her question. Jesus sees throughout her question, and His answer tells her that He is much more than just an ordinary Jew and that He is actually God's gift to this world. Then He offers her "living water" to quench her thirst. Not only would this water satisfy her immediate needs, but it would keep her alive forever.

That water is the same that also today can satisfy every human being's thirst for God and salvation. At first this woman does not understand at all what it is all about. But then

her eyes finally open, and she becomes Jesus' very first missionary, when she goes to tell everyone in town about Jesus, as we will soon see in the next pericope.

The conversation now takes a turn, pointing the finger at the big problem in her life: her marriage. She has been married five times already. Whether she was divorced or whether her husbands were all dead, we do not know. However, we know that she was in an extremely powerless position because she could not take care of herself. Now, out of desperation, she simply stayed with a man - something that was totally unacceptable. Her life was corrupted by sin. She had to go through life shuffling and avoid other women because their offending remarks hurt bitterly. Life treated her very harshly. She had come to the end of her tether!

Could Jesus really give her a solution? Could this living water she had just heard of, be an answer? In our next devotional we see how this conversation turns out further. Indeed,

good news awaits also for you and me.

Prayer:

Lord, sometimes it feels to me as if sins as heavy as mountains have been laid on my shoulders. Thank you that I can know today that you have already forgiven me and no longer think about it.

# **Jesus Knows Everything**

## **John 4: 19-30**

Jesus took a great risk to have a conversation with the woman at the well. In the first place, it was unheard of that He would strike up a conversation with a Samaritan and, on top of that, a woman. And also, her reputation has not exactly improved the situation. He was a Rabbi with twelve full-time students. On top of that, huge crowds of people came to listen to His teachings. He could easily lose His credibility and His followers could dry up. He could certainly lose a lot through this conversation. Yet He chose to do so, for not only did this poor woman desperately need Him at that point in her life, but she would also mean a lot to His ministry among the Samaritans.

Jesus showed the astonished woman that He knew everything about her, and that she could not hide even her deepest heart-felt secrets from Him. Then she realized that she was dealing with someone very special here.

How did this strange Man know about her marital catastrophe? And how did He know she was living in sin with another man? Was He perhaps a prophet - a Man of God? She would test Him a little with a trick question to which no one really had an answer. She thus dragged the great topic of dispute between the Jews and Samaritans over the temple. Where exactly would be the right place to worship - Jerusalem or Shechem?

This dispute actually started when the temple was built in Jerusalem. The Samaritans wanted to build the temple with the Jews, but the Jews did not want to know anything about it - Samaritans are unclean, remember! And there the whole vicious animosity began! But it did not end there either. The Samaritans went to dig a little into history, and then they discovered that according to Gen 12: 6,7, Abraham built an altar to God at Shechem after the Lord confirmed His covenant with Abraham. This should now be the actual place where the temple was to be

built. Eventually, the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim near Shechem. However, the Jews later destroyed it again. Then everyone was angry with everyone!

Jesus explained to her that things would change completely, and that it would no longer matter where one worships. It would no longer be necessary at all for any holy places, not even Jerusalem or Shechem! But she had to keep her eyes open, for the great deliverance was at hand. The Lord channelled this salvation into the world through the Jews.

Furthermore, Jesus explained to her what true worship looks like. They worshipped without truly realizing what they were doing. When these things happened, then people would truly realize how to worship the Lord, and what He would want from them. Believers would then "worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). This, of course, pointed forward to the wonderful working of

the Holy Spirit. People would no longer have to go to temples or mountains to seek God, but the Holy Spirit would be within every believer, which of course gives you direct access to God. Instead of believers having to go to God, He would now go to the believers. What a wonderful thought!

I do not know how much this woman really understood from the conversation. In fact, we still do not understand today, for how is it possible for the Spirit to dwell in each of us? Do we understand the omnipresence of God? Will we ever understand Jesus' atonement? The woman's answer is therefore very informative, that the Messiah, the Christ, will one day come to reveal everything. He will have all the answers to her questions. Actually, it's very ironic, because she still did not realize that it was in fact the Messiah who was standing there talking to her!

Then Jesus answered and said unto her: It is I that speaketh unto thee.

I think the woman's eyes opened, and she began to realize that this was not just a Prophet. She left her precious jug right there and went to spread the news in town. She set aside her fear of what people were saying about her to share the good news with everyone.

These words of Jesus also leave you and me with a definite choice. The first thing we need to decide is whether we are going to accept that He is truly the Messiah, and not just some wonderful Prophet. If we accept it, then it also has certain implications. In the first place, it means that I must accept His gift of redemption, and therefore be in a personal relationship with Him. But there are further implications. This gift is so great that I cannot help but live a life of gratitude. This woman expressed her gratitude by forgetting what people were saying about her, and blurted out the good news. How do you and I do it?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for revealing the truth to me

too. I want to live gratefully and glorify Your Name in everything I do.

## **The Harvest is Ripe**

### **John 4: 27-42**

The disciples returned from the village, where they went to buy food. It was a bit of an awkward situation, because here they had to buy food from Samaritans! However, their discomfort deepened when they returned to the well, because to their horror they had to find Jesus, their Rabbi, in conversation with a Samaritan woman! On top of that one that seemed very dubious. They decided to keep quiet about this situation because they just did not quite understand what was going on. Besides, it was a very awkward situation to talk about! Their relief was great when she turned around and ran back to town. Now they could finish the important things of life, such as eating.

The men went out of their way to get their hands on food. They were tired and hungry, but when they gave Jesus His food, they had to shrink back from their Master's actions. No, He had food they did not know about! He

would not eat, thank you! The men looked at each other with a question mark on their faces. "Where would He have gotten food from?" Jesus explained that His food is to do the will of the Father.

Jesus wanted to impress in the disciples the priorities of a believer. They struggled to understand. Yes, much later, only after receiving the Holy Spirit did they begin to understand these things. But now all the concepts Jesus used were totally foreign to them. Jesus was actually trying to tell them that the normal things of life, such as eating, are less important than the spiritual things. They had to see the wonderful spiritual world unfolding before their eyes. True hunger, for example, is wanting to do what the Lord asks you to do.

Jesus looked across the plain and saw a crowd of people flocking from the town to them. He smiled - yes, the woman went to tell, and now everyone in town wanted to know about "the Man who told her everything

about her life." What a harvest!

"The harvest is ripe," He told His disciples. Now they were totally confused! Now, what would their Master mean by this? Then Jesus explained of the fields full of ripe grain, just ready to be harvested. With these "fields" Jesus naturally hinted of to the Samaritans, who at that time probably also already had a very strong Messianic expectation. They lived just as heavily in the Roman tribulation as the Jews. Yes, they were ripe for the harvest - to become Jesus' followers. The disciples became a bit uncomfortable when they saw the large crowd of Samaritans approaching.

However, Jesus calmly went on to explain how a harvest actually works. It's not something that just happens. And on top of that, it is not one person's job, no there is teamwork involved to be able to produce a successful harvest. In their minds, the men could form a picture of what was happening on the land - first the guy walking with his

plough behind the ox and turning the ground. Then the guy with his bag of seeds that he sprinkles. Later, when the wheat has become ripe, someone else comes with the sickle to cut off the veins and tie the sheaves in bundles. It's definitely not work-alone! Everyone usually jumps in to help.

As the excited Samaritans approach in a hurry, the disciples begin to get the impression that Jesus was not talking about an ordinary harvest, but that He was alluding to the spiritual harvest of His followers.

Today it is still just as true. There are those who sow the Word, and there are others who have to cut down bushes - bushes of sin - so that the plants of life can grow. And then again there are those who have the wonderful privilege of being able to reap the harvest, for here you finally see the fruit on the labour of many other spiritual workers.

I have the great privilege of being able to sow through these devotionals. I actually see little of the fruit on my labour, but I do it in the

knowledge that the seed I sow will fall on fertile ground, and that someone else will one day be able to reap jubilantly from my effort.

Yes, that Samaritan woman had the breathtaking privilege of being able to share in Jesus' harvest. The lands were ripe, and all she had to do was go and deliver the final message. She did so with full devotion, and the result was that the outcast Samaritans simply could not get enough of Jesus. Although the disciples certainly did not like the idea, Jesus decided to stay with them for two days. This was an important harvest - how could He ever leave it to rot on the fields?

Prayer:

Lord, I praise and glorify You for the wonderful privilege I have to be part of the team. Help me to live the task You give me with full devotion!

## **Test of Faith**

### **John 4: 43-54**

"A prophet is not honoured in his own country," Jesus makes the statement to His disciples on their way to his homeland, Galilee, after an extremely successful ministry among the Samaritans. When we read the next few verses of John, you hardly understand what Jesus meant, because here it seems as if the people of Galilee received Him very well and welcomed Him back.

It is dangerous to want to understand the Bible by reading only a few verses. Often you have to read other passages with it to place the specific passage in it's context. We must remember that John wrote this Gospel to bring certain thoughts home to his readers. If we read the other gospels together, you get a broader picture of Jesus' intention. For example, Matthew 13: 53-58 tells how the people of Nazareth, the town where Jesus grew up, rejected Him. Luke writes that they even went so far as to try to cast Him off a

cliff (Luke 4: 28-30).

So when John writes that the Galileans welcomed Jesus, it was only a temporary thing. However, when He began to say uncomfortable things, even His own brothers turned their backs on Him!

From Sychar the group's journey took them straight north, past Nazareth to Cana, where His very first great miracle took place, where He turned the water into wine. Their next stop would be Capernaum, about 25km further, along the Sea of Galilee.

In Cana, a man approached Jesus, very worried. He was tired because he was walking very fast all the way from Capernaum when he heard that Jesus was at Cana. His son was very ill, and he could die of the fever at any moment. This man was a government official, who probably worked for Herod Antipas, the ruler of that region.

When the man finally reached Jesus, he first had to hear how Jesus was testing him. Was

he not just there to see a miracle again? We almost want to ask: “But how could Jesus? Could He not see that the man was desperate? ”

We must remember that thousands of people flocked to Jesus out of curiosity. I'm sure many of those people got something they did not expect, however, and left as changed people. I can assure you that many of the men who attended Mighty Men gatherings at the time were there only out of curiosity, but that many of them returned home as changed people.

When Jesus "provokes" this man, however, we see from his answer that he saw Jesus as the only solution to his problem. He did not even enter into some theological conversation with Jesus, as many of the others did, but he begged Jesus to please come immediately - his son was dying! This high-ranking man poured out his heart before Jesus!

But still we see that Jesus does not do what

the man asks. He did not go with the man to lay hands on the child or do any sign. The people believed that a healer should touch the sick so that his power could flow from him to the sick. Jesus' power, however, was not dependent on touch. He tested the man's faith even further and simply sent the man back home. The official only had to believe that his son would live. What was going on in his mind as he began to walk the long way home? For him, there were two days ahead - two days where he could only hope and try to believe before he would be home. Two days in which his nerves would eat him up!

But at that exact moment, the child recovered - the official later learned from his employees.

But there was a bonus - a very big bonus. This experience gripped the man and his family in such a way that the whole family became believers. "He and his whole household came to faith in Jesus," we read in John 4:53.

You and I are often tested like this official as well. There is a matter for which we pray, and then comes the answer that the Lord hears our prayer. But then follows the long road "home" where nothing happens and you wonder if the Lord ever remembered your prayer. This is not an easy road! You have two choices: you can walk all the way and worry yourself sick whether the Lord ever remembered you, or you can walk and rejoice, knowing that you can trust Him, even though everything seems totally lost at this moment.

I know how difficult that road is. I walked it myself and the temptation to sink into the dark pit of depression, and share your problems with the world, is very great. Positive trust in Him, and living out true joy, is all that can keep you standing on that path.

Prayer:

Lord, I believe and I trust in Your promises, even though I see nothing yet. Lord, give me the strength to stay standing and full of joy,

please!

## Healed at the Pool

### John 5: 1-17

After working for a while in Galilee, Jesus embarks on the long journey to Jerusalem again to attend a feast. We know of at least three occasions where Jesus attended the Passover in Jerusalem. Therefore, we know that Jesus' ministry continued for about three years.

There were ten gates in Jerusalem's circular wall in New Testament times. One of the gates, the Sheep Gate, was on the north side. Near this gate was a public pool named Bethesda. We must remember that people in those years did not have the luxury of a bathroom in the house. When someone needed to wash, he went to one of the public baths. Around the Bethesda bath there were five pillared porches - a canopy on pillars with a wall at the back. Here people could sit quietly and wait their turn to go and wash.

However, it was also believed that the water

of the Bethesda bath had healing powers. From time to time the water was stirred up, which according to tradition was caused by an angel who descended on the water to stir it. The first person who could then get into the water was cured of whatever kind of disease he had.

John describes an incident where, during this visit to Jerusalem Jesus also visited the Bethesda bath where he found a man who had already been ill for thirty-eight years. He was desperate because he simply could not get to the water soon enough when it started to stir. Every time someone was ahead of him! Jesus gave the man a new chance in life when He asked him, "Do you want to be healed?" What a question! Of course he wanted to! But he just could never get into the water in time!

"Get up, pick up your mat and walk," Jesus told the bewildered man. And suddenly he was healthy! I can almost imagine how this man must have felt. He did not ask this

Stranger to help him and yet the Man went straight to him and helped him. He did not know this Stranger from anywhere and yet He knew exactly what was wrong with Him and He healed him. Immediately he felt life flowing into his broken body. He jumped up, picked up his mat and walked home. No, I think he might rather have hopped and skipped home rejoicing!

But there was a problem - when he wanted to thank this Stranger for His goodness, He had disappeared into the crowd. However, this was not the only problem - the Jews were a pain! They totally burst his bubble when they scolded him for carrying his mat home because it was the Sabbath day, and then you may not do any work. Carrying something was work and so he was breaking the law!

"But I only did what the Man told me to do," he tried to justify his serious mistake.

"Which Man?" they wanted to know. No, he did not know. He did not know Him .....

Later, the man met Jesus again in the temple. "Look, you are well now," Jesus told him. "Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you." Would that now mean that the man would be punished every time he committed a sin? That it would be terrible, because you and I know that not a single day goes by without committing a grain bag full of sins. Sin is sin, even if it is only in your mind. No, I do not think that is what Jesus meant. Elsewhere, He explains to His disciples that when something bad happens, it is not necessarily about someone's sin, but that God may want to accomplish something with it.

Let's think: what is true sin? What is the worst sin you can think of? To commit murder? To rob? To hate? No, the worst sin you can ever commit is to reject Jesus. The punishment for it is eternal damnation. I do not even want to describe the punishment because it is too heinous. How do you reject Jesus? By not accepting His gift of eternal

life. In John 3:32 we read: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the punishment of God remains on him. ”

So when Jesus tells the man that he must not sin further, he means that the man must believe in Him. What is the "something worse" that could happen to him? If he does not believe, the terrible punishment of perdition will be upon him.

I have asked the question several times, and I will ask it many more times: Have you stopped sinning? Have you already accepted Jesus' gift? This is a very important question, but your answer is the most important ever in your life. It is an answer that makes the difference between life and death!

Prayer:

Lord, I want to earnestly pray this morning for everyone who reads this passage, and has not yet responded to Your plea to accept Your gift.

## **Son of God**

### **John 5: 18-29**

In Rev. Danie Haasbroek's book on Jesus in the Old Testament, he makes a casual remark, that during the Israelites' exodus from Egypt there must have been about three million people. Then I started doing calculations. What a logistical nightmare it must have been to organise three million rebellious people to migrate through a desert! Where did they get enough water for everyone? And food? There is no food or water in the desert, is there? And how did Moses manage to get three million people through the sea together and very quickly to get away from the Egyptians? Just think of how vast an area they had to pitch their tents every time! Humanly speaking, it was all totally impossible. And yet it happened. God gave them water and He also miraculously provided them with food and sustained them. In light of this, the miracle where Jesus healed the man at Bethesda was a relatively

small one. Nevertheless, it provoked a fiery reaction among the Jews. They were furious about Jesus letting this man "work" on the Sabbath day. When Jesus responded to this, His answer antagonised them even further. According to them, He equated Himself with God! It was blasphemous!

But how did they work it out? Jesus claims that His Father had worked up until now (on the Sabbath) and that Jesus therefore also worked. The Jews' reasoning was that only God had the right to work on the Sabbath. So if Jesus said that He could also work on that holy day, He equated Himself with God because He appropriated to Himself the right that only God can do. It is, according to them, blasphemous and they wanted to kill Jesus then and there!

Jesus explained to them with an image that everyone knew very well at that time. It's about the relationship between a father and his son. There were no universities or technical colleges in those years where one

could go and learn a trade or profession. The father taught the boy his trade. The father also taught his son the art of living. So if a man was a good potter, everyone would know that one day his son would also be a good potter, because he learned the art from a master. In the same way, you could deduce from someone who was a good potter that his father was also one, because where else would he have been able to learn it?

This story was well understood by the Jews. Then Jesus went on to explain that only God can give life. So if someone were raised from the dead, there could be absolutely no doubt that it came from God. So if Jesus were to bring someone back from the dead, then it would only be logical that He is the Son of God, because where else could He have learned it?

However, Jesus now took this argument one step further and explained about the judgment. Throughout the Old Testament we see that it is only God who may pass

judgment. Indeed, from time to time He uses a special envoy to convey the judgment, such as Daniel (Dan 7). However, it is still God who judges. But Jesus now reveals something new, that the Father has left all the judgment to the Son and that it is therefore Jesus who casts the judgment.

Does this mean that we must see Jesus as a merciless God who is ready with to destroy everyone who sins a sword? No, definitely not! On the contrary!

What is judgment? It is the opposite of salvation. As we read this Gospel of John, the thought of salvation comes to the fore time and again. In John 3:16 we see that the Son gives life. It also appears in John 5:24, 6:37, 6:40, 6:54 and elsewhere. So when we read about Jesus' judgment, we must at the same time see God's great, great grace. His judgment takes effect only when He is rejected and when someone does not want to acknowledge Him as the second Person of the Divine Trinity. It happens when someone

does not want to accept His redemption.

Honour is something that was extremely important at that time. Showing Honour to someone meant that you took his dignity into account and that you also made it clear to other people that that person was worthy of Honour. However, to be honoured, you must have truly earned Honour. In the case of Jesus, it was very clear that He deserved all the Honour that anyone could give. If you refused to give Him that Honour, then you not only insulted Jesus, but also the Father at the same time.

Maybe today we do not really give Honour to people who really deserve it any more. However, we dare not withhold our Honour from Jesus, because there is no one greater than Him. His deeds are greater than any human mind will ever comprehend. Not only did He create the entire cosmos out of nothing, but He also saved you and me from eternal damnation. Will we not give Him all our Honour and worship?

Prayer:

Lord, You are indescribably great and good and gracious. We worship You with all that is within us!

## **The Court Ruling**

### **Jn 5: 30-47**

There are currently several major court cases in progress in which high-ranking people in society are involved. Every now and then we have to laugh (or maybe rather cry) when we hear them lying and treading water to try to stay out of trouble. Today, of course, court cases are completely different from those of classical times. Then there were no teams of lawyers who, with their knowledge of the law, could exempt guilty people on technical points. In those years, a court case was very simple - it was just the prosecutor, the witnesses, the accused and the judge. The accused had to observe his own defence, and on the basis of his testimony and that of the witnesses for and against him, the judge had to make a decision.

In John 5: 30-47 a typical court case takes place where Jesus, the accused, testifies about Himself. You and I are the judge who has to make a judgment on Him. We need to

determine who Jesus really is?

As in any court case, we must call witnesses. The law requires that there be witnesses, because the testimony of an accused alone is not good enough. However, this does not mean that Jesus does not speak the truth and we can without a doubt accept that Jesus' testimony alone is enough. In verse 34 Jesus himself says that he does not need to rely on people's testimony. But for the purpose of the "court case" we are also going to call in other witnesses, just to put the stamp on.

The first witness we call in this case is John the Baptist. His testimony is clear and distinct. In John 1: 29-34 he testifies of Jesus by saying, "There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." He concludes his testimony with, "He is the Son of God." You and I may already have decided that this evidence may be good enough. With his testimony, there is absolutely nothing wrong. However, Jesus himself says that He

does not need John's testimony. Even if it were true, he was just a mere human being. He is perishable and he is also like a lamp that burned for a while and then died again. Even John's testimony is very temporary and many people may not even believe him today! However, Jesus' own testimony is much bigger and more impressive than that of John and much, much better. Let's take a look at this testimony:

The first piece of testimony that Jesus mentions is His works. Just look at the things that happened and all the miracles that Jesus performed in the three years of His ministry. He healed people, cast out demons, calmed storms and fed crowds. These kinds of things can only come from God! Such deeds can certainly not be attributed to the devil! Isn't that already enough evidence?

But there is more: Jesus goes on to say that even the Father testifies of Him. For example, where could you ever get a better testimony than the day of Jesus' baptism,

when the Voice of the Father resounded from heaven: "This is My beloved Son." Jesus turns the court case around, when He makes the accusers the accused with this accusation to the Jewish leaders: "His Word does not really live in you!" They are blind and deaf to the Word of God. Yes, they are examining the Scriptures that testify of Jesus, but they deliberately ignore them. They do not see God in it and do not hear His voice. And the worst is that they reject Jesus because they do not recognize Him in the scriptures!

The third testimony is precisely these Scriptures, the Bible. To the Jews, this Scripture carried absolute power and what was written in it was law. They also realized all too clearly that they would find in it the path that would lead to eternal life. But the Scriptures became to them like a maze leading to nowhere.

Yes, it is possible to read the Bible and get completely lost in it! This happens when you

are not led by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is like a road map, a road map to Jesus. You will agree with me that if you look aimlessly at a road map, then it's just a mess of lines. The Jewish leaders also never read Jesus' Name in this road map. They just simply did not want to! Like the Jews of old, we will not reach Jesus if we do not take this Road Map seriously that the Lord has given us. All the directions we need are there. Moses gave directions from the Old Testament and so did Isaiah. And in the New Testament there are many. All of these things are part of the testimony God gives about Jesus.

The evidence is on the table. You and I, as judges, must now give a verdict. Who do you say as a judge is Jesus? Do you agree with the Jewish leaders? Or do you accept the testimony that God Himself gives? The choice, dear reader, is yours!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I accept the testimony from the Word of God concerning You unconditionally

and with all my heart and soul and mind. I  
accept You as my Saviour!

## **Bread for a Crowd**

### **John 6: 1-15**

Jesus and his disciples were at the Sea of Galilee, at Bethsaida-Julius. A large crowd of people sauntered behind them curiously and hoped that Jesus would do some great miracle again. The news spread quickly and everyone wanted to see what Jesus was doing. Jesus soon realized that no one would hear Him down in the plain, so He climbed halfway up the mountain to form a natural amphitheater, where He could sit with His disciples. The stage was set for one of the most vivid miracles ever. Still the crowd grew.

In my imagination I see the picture play out.

Jesus called one of the men closer, "Philip, where are we going to get food for all the people?"

Philip got the fright of his life. He lets his eyes wander over the huge crowd that is still growing by the minute. "At least five

thousand men alone are sitting here, Master!" He starts doing his sums. If the women and children are added, there should easily be fifteen thousand people! Feeding them all would probably cost a year's salary at least. And we are just a bunch of poor fishermen! How can the Master expect us to feed so many people? There are a lot of people sitting here! And they are hungry!

Desperate, Philip looked around as Jesus watched him closely. Andrew gestures laughingly to a boy in the front row with five loaves of barley bread and two herrings - dried fish. "Maybe we can use it!" Andrew jokes. Philip is annoyed: "It's just a drop in the ocean!"

But Jesus knew for a long time what he was going to do. That boy is not here by chance today and the fact that he has five loaves of bread with him is certainly no coincidence. Everything was meticulously planned, here is precisely one loaf of bread for every thousand families. Plenty! Years ago, for a

full forty years, He provided enough manna from heaven for three million people every day in the desert. Providing these few with food, on the other hand, would be a relatively small miracle! He motioned for the crowd to sit down. The grass-covered slopes of the hill are an ideal place for this "picnic." The anticipation among the people is great. What is this "Prophet" planning now?

Jesus thanks God for the food He provided and then He signals for the disciples to hand it out.

The men still do not quite understand how they are going to tackle the task. But then the miracle happens! As they break the bread and fish, it starts to become more. The more the men hand out, the more the food becomes! It sounds like a beehive with the people talking. They cannot believe what is happening before their eyes. No, it cannot be otherwise, this Jesus is definitely the Messiah! Now is the time to crown Him so that He can save the people from Herod and

Pilate and all the Romans!

However, Jesus had not yet finished the miracle, because first an old Jewish custom had to be performed, to gather the left-overs. When they were finished, there were no less than twelve baskets full left over of the five small barley loaves, after fifteen thousand people had eaten of them!

An extremely vivid miracle, indeed. But there is much more to this miracle than just its breathtaking grandeur.

John does not mention in vain in this pericope of the Passover that is at hand. Jesus was about to give this festival a whole new meaning. Passover was, of course, the feast of the commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt, when God delivered the people from the clutches of Pharaoh. One of the great symbols of this feast was precisely the unleavened bread they were to eat. Later, during Jesus' last communion with His friends, He also refers to the bread as His body. With this miracle Jesus comes to

distribute the bread abundantly because His body would be there in abundance for everyone who believes in Him. But unlike the manna He provided in the wilderness, which was only temporary, this is "bread" that He would give forever.

But there would be more than just bread at stake. During Easter, the blood of the lamb that was slaughtered also plays a symbolic role. In Egypt, that blood caused the angel of death to pass by. Jesus' precious blood, which He shed on the cross, also today, for those of us who believe in Him, let the angel of death pass away, the angel of death of eternal damnation.

The crowd wants to crown Jesus as King. It would be disastrous, because it would bring about a political revolution. Pontius Pilate and the Roman Empire would be dethroned, and Jesus would become the King of Palestine. A few million people would be saved. However, Jesus prefers to reject it because His Kingdom is much larger than

just a small political empire. It is exalted above any politics! He had to save the whole world from the power of the ruler, the devil. That is why He is also my and your Saviour today.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for thinking much bigger than people, and for sharing this wonderful plan of salvation for you and me to be saved from eternal damnation if we believe in You.

## **A Walk on the Sea**

### **John 6: 16-21**

Many years ago we went on an angling expedition in Mozambique, in the Limpopo Mouth. I was barely ten years old. Everything was very primitive. We were able to drive our Landrover over a rough, narrow dirt road to Barra, but the last few kilometers we had to tackle in a rowboat. A ten-year-old Shangaan boy was given the task of rowing us to the totally deserted sandbank at the mouth. Two days later, after an unforgettable outing, we returned.

It was already dusk when we boarded the fully loaded boat. The boy grabbed the oars and groaned under the load. When we reached the middle of the river, I could see to my dismay that there was great trouble here. We had moved backwards! I peered over my shoulder at the waves of the open sea that were sucking us in! On top of that, I realized all too well that it was teeming with sharks and crocodiles in this water. The tide was

going out and we were moving closer and closer to the fierce ocean in a small, rickety boat.

We urged the rower on, and he sweated. It's started getting dark, and the situation certainly did not look rosy. I could already see how we would all drown or be eaten up!

Then the thing happened that made my heart almost stop. The boy suddenly put down his oars and mumbled something in Shanghai. Then he jumped out of the boat! Did he decide to just leave us here at our own mercy so that we could just wash into the deep sea while he swam ashore?

I started looking around for a knife to defend myself against the sharks and crocodiles. But then, to our amazement, we saw this young boy start walking on the water, all the way behind the boat, while he pushes the boat up against the current!

I burst out laughing! The water here was barely knee deep and it was much easier for

him to push the boat than to row. And yes, we came across safely!

Jesus' disciples were in a similar situation. After that day when Jesus gave the huge crowd food from the five loaves and two fish, He had to flee uphill to get away from the people. When evening came, the disciples had to get into the boat without Jesus and start rowing to get to Capernaum. They could no longer wait for Him, because if they still lingered the darkness would overcome them!

It was not an easy boat ride, because they barely started rowing, when the wind picked up. The farther they rowed, the stronger the wind, right from the front. For five kilometers they continued against the force of the storm and it felt as if the oars were getting them nowhere. Throughout the night the poor men rowed in against this strong wind. Matthew writes that it continued until dawn (Matt. 14: 22-33).

The poor guys were surely totally exhausted! The previous afternoon they had to run

around to feed fifteen thousand people. And now they were also robbed of their well-deserved sleep. But this is not the end yet! Out of the fog of the storm, one of the men sees a figure on the water walking towards them. "Look!" He gestures with a trembling hand. The men are paralyzed with fear! "A ghost! Our end has arrived!" Ominously, the "form" gets closer and closer. The men scream in anguish!

And then they recognize Him: Jesus! They were dumbfounded. Jesus climbs into the boat with them. The wind calms down, and they row the short distance to their destination. The men do not understand at all!

I think these guys learned a very hard lesson that night. What made them decide to leave without Jesus in the first place? What would they do over there without Him? After all, he was the reason they went! Without Him, so they found out very quickly, they are in trouble! What was supposed to be an hour or

two of rowing then finally went on all night, turning into an absolute nightmare. If they had only waited a little longer for Jesus, this whole awful ride would probably have been ridiculously easy. The disciples also learned something else, that the moment they helped Jesus into the boat, the wind died down. With Jesus on board, their nightmare suddenly disappeared. They had a sleepless night for nothing!

What does this mean for you and me today? That we do not dare to tackle the storms of life without Jesus. Without Him we can be sure, it will turn into a nightmare. I know very well, I have experienced it numerous times already. How many times have I experienced a crisis in my life, and then tried to solve it without His help. And every once in a while, I came second-best from it. However, the times I left everything in His capable hands, it went completely different. No, He did not solve the problem for me every time, but still He faithfully gave me the strength and peace

to face this crisis every time. There are many beautiful stories of people who went through deep water but could still stand in Jesus' power.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for always being there for me, even through the greatest crises. Please help me to trust You in everything in my life - even through the biggest difficulties.

## **Bread of Life**

### **John 6: 22-40**

It was a breathtaking miracle! The people of Bethsaida-Julius were moved by what Jesus was doing there against the hill. Before their eyes, the handful of fish and bread became more and more until thousands of people could eat more than enough of it! It captured their imagination. The next day they were there again because if it rains manna from heaven, then you have to make sure you scoop it up! A free meal is not to be scorned at! However, when they did not find Jesus in the same place, they make a great effort to locate Him. They even got into boats and went to look for Him across the lake at Capernaum.

Yes, it's all very well to seek Jesus with such passion, but they sought Him for the totally wrong reason! They wanted more bread and more miracles. They did find Him, but Jesus immediately saw through them. They certainly did not understand, so Jesus began

to explain to them that the physical bread is not important. It is the spiritual bread that is most important in life. That miracle bread of Bethsaida-Julius was only temporary, it could only satisfy your hunger for a short while. However, spiritual bread is eternal! And you can only find it in one place, with Jesus!

In verse 27 Jesus' authority is once again emphasized by the words: "On him God the Father has placed his seal." This means that He was appointed by the very highest authority. He therefore does everything with the authority of God. Of course, this cannot be otherwise, because He is part of the Divine Trinity!

It would seem that the people have finally begun to understand that Jesus was the Messiah. They wanted to know from Him what God expects of them? Who but the Messiah can give such an answer? Jesus' answer was simple: Faith! They may have suspected that He was the Messiah, but they did not even understand who this Messiah

really was!

The Old Testament already paints a picture of Jesus that makes you fall down before Him in worship. Indeed, we meet Him many times in the Old Testament. The very first time we see Him in the Creation story as Creator of heaven and earth and of the whole universe. On numerous occasions we see Him descending from heaven to act as God's Messenger. For example, He takes on the form of a man when He comes to speak to Abraham. He appears to Moses several times, first at the burning bush and later when the Tent of the Covenant is filled with the presence of God like a cloud, it is Jesus who is present there. Also on Mount Sinai where Moses receives the law, it is again Jesus who is present. When the "Angel of God" appeared to Gideon, it was again Jesus speaking to Gideon.

What I mean by this is that Jesus' mere presence fills you with great awe. But what are the people of Galilee doing? They are

looking for bread! And they are looking for miracles. Instead of bowing down to Him in worship, they just demand all sorts of things. How many more signs did He have to do before they would believe?

They tried to show Jesus from the Scriptures that God gave their ancestors manna from heaven and that was exactly what they wanted to see now. They wanted Jesus to give them manna from heaven so they could believe properly! How ironic, because their ancestors also despised God's miracles. They saw all the things happening there in the desert and experienced it personally and yet they never trusted God! Now Jesus had to say to this new generation of Israelites, "You have seen Me, and yet you do not believe." (Jn 6:36)

The saying goes that you can bring a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink! This is exactly what happened here. All the signs were there. The people saw Jesus and experienced that He is truly the Messiah.

They saw the miracles happen. He was within reach of them all. You can stand with the bread in your hand, but still be hungry, for the simple reason that you do not eat it!

Jesus gives them, but also us, the most wonderful promises:

v. 37: "I will never reject anyone who comes to me."

v. 40: "For this is my Father's will, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise up every one of them at the last day."

What more more did they want? Yet they reject it! Today, Jesus' promises are still being thrown away in the same way!

How do we experience Jesus today? He is all too often referred to as our "Pal" and is often even mockingly referred to by believers, as for example: "The Man up there." We must remember Who we are dealing with, and that He holds the highest authority in heaven. Yes, He is present here - an

incomprehensible miracle! But even here right next to me, He is still the One before whom I must fall down in worship.

At the same time, we must also ask ourselves whether we have already made His promises our own. Do we cling to it with everything in us?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I bow this morning in great reverence and wonder before You in worship. To You comes all the praise and honour and thanksgiving and worship.

## **Eat the Bread!**

### **John 6: 41-59**

We saw that people were amazed at Jesus. Was He perhaps the long-awaited Messiah? They even wanted to crown him King - indeed for the wrong reasons unfortunately! However, when Jesus said to them, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," he went one step too far! They knew Him then! He was Joseph and Mary's child! The two of them were ordinary earthlings - so how could He want to pretend to be coming from heaven? It was definitely too much to swallow!

Unfortunately, this is still the reaction of many people today. There are still those who only want to see Jesus as a kind of exalted Prophet. How could it be that He could be a heavenly Being? No, they say, what Jesus said and did was all meant only in the spiritual sense. They even want to see His resurrection from the dead spiritually, because that is not possible, or is it?

Jesus began to explain, "Everyone whom my Father gives me will come to me." He further says that the Father teaches or instructs people and that "Anyone who hears the Father and learns from Him comes to me."

So if anyone learns from the Father and belongs to Him, he will also go to Jesus! This verse is so easily taken out of context, and people interpret it in such a way, that only those who are sent by God to Jesus will be saved. It just wants to tell us once again that it can be very dangerous to single out a single verse and build a doctrine around it. It should be read along with the rest of the passage, and as we read wider, we clearly see that your call to faith can never be ruled out. Yes, indeed it is the grace of God that makes you believe, but at the same time it is your own responsibility as a human being to accept Jesus as your Saviour. So you have to make a wilful decision!

We can also clearly see in these verses the great grace of the Father. He draws people

to Jesus. Today, at the end of times, it's as clear as daylight. There are evangelists scattered throughout the world who are proclaiming Jesus. The technology has further exploded so tremendously, that today there are few people who can still claim that they could not hear about Jesus. The internet trumpets His Name out and calls people to believe in Him. It is only the most remote parts of the world that do not have access to it. Television stations broadcast the message everywhere, and radio waves reach the most inaccessible parts of the earth and trumpets forth Jesus' salvation. If it is not grace - then what is?

Two thousand years ago it might have been different when only the Jews knew about God. But even this the Lord changed quickly, when people like Paul and his associates spread the news all over the world within a few years.

However, it is not enough to hear the Word alone. There is also a need for a response to

the Father's action: in verse 47 Jesus says: "He who believes has eternal life." The person who is "drawn" by the Father must respond by believing in Jesus. Jesus explains this through an image. He describes Himself as the "Bread of Life". By simply eating bread will only temporarily satisfy your hunger. Even "holy" bread, such as the manna that the Israelites received in the wilderness, was only temporary. But the "Bread of Life" has eternal value. However, it does not help that you only look at this "Bread" and acknowledge and appreciate it! No, in order to give it real meaning and make it worthwhile for you, you have to eat it!

It is so beautifully embodied in the celebration of communion. When we eat that piece of bread, we confess and thereby confirm that we are partakers of Jesus. At the same time, He strengthens my faith with it by reminding me that I took that step by making Him a part of my life. What step? That I accepted Jesus' gift of eternal life, and

accepted Him unconditionally as my Redeemer and only Saviour.

This brings to me a frightening thought: If I have not taken that step yet, I dare not take communion, because then I will lie to all who use communion with me. The worst is that I am lying to God by saying that I have a share in Jesus, when this is not the case!

Jesus furthermore says: "He who eats my body and drinks my blood abides in Me, and I in him." You must therefore also drink His blood to have a share in Him. Blood is the lifeblood of someone's life. Without it, life is not possible. When Jesus hung on the cross, all His blood drained. When the soldier pressed a sword into Jesus' side, there was no more blood, only water. He shed all His precious blood so that you and I can live. When I use communion, I want to confess when I drink the wine, that Jesus' blood was also shed for me. I have a part in it. So Jesus' precious blood cleanses me and forgives my sins!

In short, we can say that the Lord's Supper does two things: In the first place it reminds us of what Jesus did for us on the cross. But secondly, it also reminds us of what we must do for Him!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that I can know today that I have a part in Your body. Thank you for confirming this to me through communion. Help me to also do my part for You with great zeal.

## **To Follow Jesus**

### **John 6: 60-71**

Jesus' words shocked His followers to their foundations.

It was wonderful to follow Jesus. The mere thought that He might be the Messiah excited people. He always said the most beautiful things, and He was so indulgent and loving. And those incredible miracles! The blind saw, the lame could walk again, the deaf could hear! Jesus could heal every ailment under the sun, even cast out demons! Of course, the cherry on the cake was that day when He fed thousands of people out of virtually nothing! How did He manage that? He simply had to be the Messiah! It was wonderful to follow Jesus!

But suddenly Jesus turned around and told them the most horrible things - things they just did not like. He wanted them to eat his body and drink his blood! It's disgusting! How could He?

One by one, the people started turning around and going home. They had heard enough. Their bubble had burst! The Jesus they wanted to see did not materialize. They were bitterly disappointed.

Jesus stared after them sadly: "Does this offend you?" Yes, of course, He knew that the things He just said would scare them off. "What if you saw the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?" Jesus throws the question in the air, as the stream of deserters grows larger. They expected an earthly Messiah, One who would rule like King David. He would crush all their enemies and make Israel a great nation again. This Messiah just had to do pleasant things and say nice things. And on top of that, He had to stay here forever! What would it help if He left for heaven again? No, they would rather go back to the old beaten tracks as outlined by Moses and the Pharisees, it was much easier!

In the end, only a handful of followers

remained. Jesus looked at the twelve chosen men questioningly, "Surely you do not also want to leave, do you?"

This is a very gloomy picture that took place here. Did Jesus totally miss His purpose? Shouldn't He have reached as many people as possible in those three years? If only those thousands who received the miraculous bread could all become disciples and begin to trumpet the Word forth - would it not have been wonderful? They could conquer the whole world for Jesus in a short time! Not so?

However, Jesus thought totally differently from the people. He did not need huge numbers. He preferred to work with small groups of people. In the end, it would be only the twelve - actually eleven - who were left, as well as a few women. But this small group would later work so powerfully after the Holy Spirit came upon them, that they would set the whole world on fire with the unquenchable fire of the Gospel.

We often stare so blindly at numbers. In the church we moan and lament that it is again just the same old few who have to do everything. It's the same old handful that responds when there's a request. We're looking for the Mighty Men numbers, and we get excited when a few hundred thousand men come together and set each other on fire. It's all very well, but still it's the small groups where the big things happen.

Indeed, it was difficult for these twelve men to choose Jesus. They soon realized that it was not easy to follow Jesus. It takes hard work! Just look at how they had to run around to feed that large crowd of people! Often there were bitter disappointments, such as the one they had just experienced. Just when it seemed as if their Master's ministry had reached a peak, all His followers walked away. I wonder if they might not also have chosen the rabbit's path if they knew exactly what would await them in the future! The next year or two would be littered with

thrushes and thistles. Their Master would do things that according to their traditions were totally unacceptable and the authorities would persecute them. On top of that, one of their group would turn out to be a traitor. They would often have to go to bed hungry and tired on the rock-hard ground.

Today, if you are truly willing to follow Jesus fully, it is still not an easy path. You just have to be prepared for disappointment, persecution and suffering. However, it is worth it over and over again! The job satisfaction you experience is indescribably great. The joy of life that comes with it is bubbly. But the greatest of all, is that wonderful day you can look forward to - the day when Jesus will appear on the clouds again as He ascended!

Prayer:

Lord, I want to give my all to You. I want to follow You fully. Please give me the strength for that.

# **God is Still in Control!**

## **John 7: 1-9**

The Feast of Tabernacles was imminent. This festival took place from the 15th to the 22nd of the 7th month, Tishri of the Jewish Religious Calendar. It was a joyous feast during which no one worked. Everyone made huts out of leafy branches. This was to remind the Israelites of the Exodus from Egypt, where they had to live in such huts. One of the characteristics of the festival is that a burnt offering was offered to the Lord every day.

The festival was also known as "The Feast of Ingathering" because it took place only after the harvest and the fruits of their labour were gathered. This was accompanied by great merriment. For example, on the first night a show with lights was held with large chandeliers. There was singing, and the men performed torch-light dances to the beat of music. This festive bustle continued throughout the night until the morning. On the

last day, a drink-offering was brought along with a water pouring, to commemorate the day when water flowed from the rock in the desert.

Just before this feast was about to begin, some very interesting things came to light about Jesus' ministry. He was in Galilee at that time. He stayed away from the Jerusalem area because it was starting to get too dangerous, because the Jewish leaders were looking for His blood and Jesus did not want to knowingly enter the lion's mouth. So when His brothers came to Him urging Him to preach in Judea again, Jesus refused.

His brothers had a hidden agenda. They were not at all so excited that the Gospel was being spread - it was rather about their own prestige. As long as their Brother was in the spotlight and attracted large crowds, it was also good for their own ego, because then they also enjoyed the attention. They could boast: "That's my Brother - the One who performs the miracles!" Of course, they were

well aware of the fact that He was very special. But did they ever believe that He was the Messiah? No! To them, Jesus was just their older Brother - their "Miracle Brother".

It is so tragic that even today, for many Christians, Jesus is the same "Miracle Brother". They identify with Him because it's good to be connected to that Name - it gives you that extra bit of status in life. He even sometimes goes to church to confirm it and he gives generously (in money or time) to some charity. However, if you ask him if he has a relationship with Jesus, then you will be looked at askance. Now that far he does not want to go!

Jesus had four brothers: James, Joses, Simon and Judas. At first they rejected Him as the Messiah. After the events on the cross and Jesus' resurrection however, they came to other insights and eventually James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He then also wrote the Epistle to

James. Judas too, must have risen in the circles of faith, for he wrote the letter Judas. Unfortunately, today we know nothing further what became of the other two brothers.

When Jesus rejects His brothers' request to go to Judea, He explains to them, "My appointed time is not here yet." Everything was worked out in detail in the wonderful plan of God and every little detail was extremely important. Every conversation, every meeting had to take place, because everything was part of the great plan that God had worked out. We must fully realize that He was in full control of absolutely everything. It was no coincidence that there was no abode in Bethlehem with Jesus' birth - God planned and provided for the Son of God to be born in "shame" as part of the price He had to pay for the debt of the world's sins. It is no coincidence that the Jewish leaders hated Jesus so much. Just think: what would have happened if they had recognized Him as the Messiah, and

crowned Him as King? Then Jesus would never have been able to die by torture on the cross. Then the great reconciliation could never have taken place!

Jesus had to be in the right place at exactly the right time. Even the shame of being betrayed by His own disciple was of utmost importance! That everything had to take place during Easter was equally important. The whole universe focused on these events. Even the motion of the stars, planets and comets was crucial.

This brings us to the question: if God was in full control at that time - is it still true today? At that time, everything seemed to be going awry. Today, too, it often feels to us as if everything has gotten out of hand - Covid-19, the Russians attacking Ukraine! No, He is still in full control! We do not always understand things because our human mind cannot fathom it. If we want to argue it, then we get confused. Therefore, you and I can only be calm today about the events around

us, and know that God's time and His timing are accurate and that He is in control of everything. You and I can not change it. We just have to do what He asks of us, because each of us is a gear in the clock of God's time.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that we can know that You are still in full control, and that we can therefore be at peace.

## **To God All the Glory**

### **John 7: 10-24**

We saw that Jesus refused when His brothers urged Him to go to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. But then we read that He did go after all, but that He maintained a low profile so that the people would not even notice Him there. Of course, everyone expected Him to be there because this would be the ideal opportunity for someone like Jesus to draw huge crowds without much effort. However, Jesus just disappeared among the crowds.

Again, we must realize that Jesus' purpose was not to impress huge crowds with great miracles and impressive healings. His primary purpose was to bring about reconciliation. He wanted to put God's love and grace into practice for the people. His secondary purpose was to train a core group to proclaim this love of God to the world.

At the feast there was a whisper among the

people - a whisper about who Jesus really was. They were clearly divided into two camps. On the one hand, there were those who believed that Jesus was a good Man. Being converted, it means that they believed that the things He did and said came from God and that God was therefore on Jesus' side. The other group of people believed exactly the opposite, that He had deceived everyone. His works therefore, according to them, came from the deceiver, or the devil.

The day your path crosses with that of Jesus, you must make a clear choice! No one can be neutral. If you do not make a definite choice to follow Jesus, then you are automatically following the devil!

This is quite a scary thought! Anyone who has not yet reached that point to enter into a relationship with Jesus is a follower of the devil. This, of course, is why our world today is plunged into such chaos, because the devil realizes that his hourglass is running out. He must throw everything into the fight to win

souls and therefore he uses every follower of his - all non-believers - to achieve his goal. Even believers who have become lukewarm are tempted to co-operate, and the devil gets it right!

But back to the Feast of Tabernacles. Halfway through the feast, however, Jesus decides to break His cover and He begins to teach people in the temple. The wise men were dumbfounded at Jesus' insight and knowledge of the Scriptures, because unlike them, He had no formal training. Actually, this is very ironic, because how do you train the original Author of the Bible to understand His own Book? How do you train the Legislature to understand His own law? Jesus was the One who at that time on Mount Sinai wrote the law for Moses on the stone tablets with His own finger. Jesus was the One who later in the desert came to explain the law to Moses in the tent of meeting. Every time Jesus came to talk to Moses, the tent was filled with a cloud and all

the people saw it. Indeed, it was Jesus who had descended from heaven. Yes, and it was also Jesus who came to speak to the earthly father, Abraham, and there made the covenant with him.

Now that same Jesus is teaching the people in the temple, and they are amazed at His knowledge.

But although Jesus deserved to receive all the honour and glorification, He rather pushed it into the background, because here was a much bigger issue involved. Jesus did not speak about Himself, but He taught the people about the highest authority. Jesus submitted Himself to the authority of the Triune God. Yes, for us as insignificant people it is extremely difficult to understand. However, there was a big purpose behind the fact that Jesus had to be subordinate, especially here. We must remember that He was humbled here as a human being as part of His mission. Therefore especially He had to be subordinate to God. And when He

taught people, it was important that they should learn about God, because He is the origin of everything. All honour had to belong to Him.

So often believers make the mistake of not following Jesus' example. You want to keep that little bit of glory to yourself. For example: I wrote 60 books - it makes me quite a respected author! Meanwhile, for the sake of convenience, I forget that if God had not given me the talent in the first place, I would have been nothing! Secondly, I forget that it is He who puts the words in my mouth and without it, every page will be a failure. So when I elaborate on one of my books, I should not praise it's author, but the original Author, namely the Holy Spirit. Jesus went so far as to not only submit Himself to God, but often to other people as well. We see it when He was at the feet of His disciples or saw Himself as a Servant. Also when He mixes Himself with the exiles and sinners that everyone has looked down on, we see His

humility. In today's society where people are exalted, and it's fashionable, it's very difficult for a believer to follow Jesus' example. But let's begin with that. Let us give all the glory to God and be humble towards our fellow-man. This is how we reflect Jesus' light!

Prayer:

Lord, please give me humility, and teach me to give all the glory to You.

## **To Know Jesus**

### **John 7: 25-31**

Do I really know Jesus? But of course! Now, what kind of stupid question is that? No, it's not really as stupid as it sounds.

In Jerusalem there were a lot of people who attended the Feast of Tabernacles who also thought they knew Jesus. They were personally present while He healed the sick and they heard Him speak! They saw what He was capable of and each time they were amazed at the incredible things He accomplished.

However, they were also well aware of the fact that the church leaders were looking for Jesus' blood and that is why they were so surprised that He dared to preach openly in the temple. The fact that the authorities did not try to lift a finger to do something against Jesus was even more surprising! Indeed, they repeatedly threatened to kill Him. The people began to wonder if the Jewish Council

might not have come to other insights after all. Did they not perhaps begin to realize that Jesus was indeed the Messiah?

But then John lifts the veil slightly on the true state of affairs, that there was actually a totally different reason why they could not arrest Jesus. In God's great plan, everything had not yet been completed for Jesus' execution. His time was not yet there and no matter how hard the men tried, they would not be able to hurt Jesus! God was in total control of the situation and only when the exact right time came, as determined by God, would they get the green light to kill Jesus.

This morning's big question, however, is whether Jesus' followers really knew who He was? Then we must say outright: "NO!"

Oh yes, they thought they knew Him, but actually they did not know Him at all. Some had argued that when the Messiah came, His origin would be a great mystery. Jesus certainly could not be the Messiah, even

though He did all these wonderful things, because there was absolutely nothing mysterious about His origin. Yes, they even knew His parents, Joseph and Mary. Where was the mystery then?

And that was their biggest problem, because they did not know Jesus' Father at all! Again, they thought they knew Him, but in their zeal to practise their Religion, they totally neglected the God of their Religion! In the process, they got a totally wrong understanding of God. They tried to live the law so diligently that they totally lived beyond the core of the law, namely love. In the process, they did not even notice God's wonderful love and grace at all and there was nothing left of it in their lives.

They had to learn a very expensive lesson, that only when you truly know God can you get to know Jesus the Messiah! However, the opposite is equally true: You can only truly get to know God through Jesus. Am I talking in riddles? No, not at all, because Jesus is

God!

Now, what does it really mean to know Jesus? This is a question that has been asked numerous times over the past 22 years that these devotionals have been sent out. The question has been answered many times in these daily passages. And yes, the answer is given in many places in the Bible, often very straightforward, unequivocal and unabashed. Yet the question is still often asked, "What does it mean to know Jesus?"

Do not get me wrong, I certainly do not get discouraged when I get the question over and over again. On the contrary, I am so excited because it means someone is inviting me to share the Gospel with him / her. And that's the one thing that gives me the most joy in life. So feel free to send your question - I will answer it with great love and definitely without complaining about it!

John gives the key to getting to know Jesus in quite a few places. John 3:16 says pertinently that those who BELIEVE in Jesus

will not be lost. The key word here is: "Believe!" John 5:24 says that those who BELIEVE in Him who sent Jesus have eternal life. Likewise, 1 John 5:13 says that eternal life belongs to those who BELIEVE in the Son of God. Again the key word: "BELIEVE." 1 John 5:10 says, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." and verse 11: "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life."

So everything comes down to FAITH. To truly know Jesus means to believe in Him. However, it is not just a belief in His existence, but it means that you place all your trust in Him as your Savior. It comes down to a personal relationship with Him, just as a man and woman in a marriage have an inseparable love affair. The only way to truly know someone is when there is an intimate relationship with that person. So when I say I know Jesus, it implies that relationship is a reality. The reality is also that if there is not such an intimate relationship yet, then I do

not know Him yet.

This morning I confess unequivocally: I know Jesus! Can you say the same? Do you know him?

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that I know You. Thank You for saving me from eternal damnation.

## **Streams of Living Water**

### **John 7: 32-39**

While Jesus was teaching the people in the temple, He heard them whispering about Him. He was also well aware of the conspiracy to capture Him. The temple guards were actually on their way to seize Him. Then Jesus said a shocking thing, that He would only be with them for a short time. Yes, He would leave them and where He was going, they would not be able to come. They misunderstood it as usual. They thought He was on his way to emigrate to Greece! Of course, by this Jesus meant that He would die and go to heaven. The shocking thing is that He knew that most of the people present there would never see the inside of heaven, because of their stubbornness and unbelief!

It was the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. The festival-goers went every day of the festival to the well of Siloam for water to take to the temple, where it was

poured out at the altar. Singing, the people waved twigs around and held up citrus fruits as a sign of the harvest that was over. With this they wanted to thank the Lord for the harvest. The water was a symbol of the water that the Lord gave them from the rock in the desert. Ezekiel 47: 1-9 tells of a vision of a stream of water flowing from the temple, so strong that it becomes a mighty river. The Jews therefore believed that in the last days a river would physically flow out of the temple mount. According to Ezekiel, the river flows so strongly that it fills and freshens the Dead Sea, and that fishermen would find a rich variety of fish there. It is going to give new life to the land, and where there was once arid desert, it would turn lush green. Revelation 22 tells of the same river of living water.

Jesus grasped this beautiful tradition of the Jews, to bring water to the temple, and while everything was fresh in their memory, He trumpeted it forth so that everyone in the

temple could hear it: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink! " A breath-taking silence fell over the temple. All eyes were on Jesus. What would He mean by that? Suddenly He had all the attention! "He that believeth in me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

A dead silence hung in the temple. Suddenly it started buzzing like a swarm of bees: "What does He mean? Does He perhaps refer to Ezekiel's prophecy? Maybe the water will start flowing out of the temple rock now?" But as has happened so many times, the people just once again totally misunderstood Jesus. He was referring to something completely different here - a great event that would overshadow even the flow of water from the rock. John explains in verse 39 that Jesus was referring to the great day, a few years later, when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on the believers.

At the end of May, the Dutch Reformed

Church will once again hold a series of Pentecostal services, a long-standing tradition and probably one of the most blessed traditions of the church. The climax is of course reached on Pentecost Sunday, when the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is commemorated. What a wonderful event it must have been!

The image Jesus uses here is therefore so accurately descriptive of what would happen. Streams of living water that would flow from the believers. Peter was the first to experience this, when this man who hid during Jesus' trial stood up and fearlessly addressed a crowd of thousands of people. The words literally bubbled out of him like a fountain of delicious fresh water as he explained what was happening. Three thousand people came to faith that day. The bubbling stream of water simply swept them away!

That same current still bubbles just as strong today. The Living Water of which Jesus

spoke is in every believer. Unfortunately, most of us screw a plug on the Source so that it stays inside safely. Pull out that plug! Give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to flow out of you too!

Ezekiel tells how this stream gives life as far as it goes. Indeed, this stream began in Jerusalem, exactly as Ezekiel had predicted, and it brought life to the arid desert! The Spirit prompted every believer to trumpet the Gospel forth and in a very short time it flowed all over the world, through Judea, Samaria, Greece, Syria, Africa and into the heart of evil Rome.

This morning I want to plead with you to allow the Holy Spirit into your life as well and to use you as a source from which His life-giving water can bubble. All He asks of you is your willingness. He will do the rest Himself! Just be an instrument in His capable hands, He will do the work!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You that Your Holy Spirit is also in my life. Please help me to allow Him to use my life to Your glory.

# **The Fountain**

## **John 7: 37-39**

My heart is pounding in my throat as we drive around South Hill, past the Elandskrans holiday resort. This is a path I know so well! Yet I do not know it any more, for I last walked this path forty years ago. Behind us lies the slumbering village, Waterval Boven and here in front of us the picturesque guest farm, Tegwaan. We stop first so I can drink in everything I see. My eyes search for familiar beacons and every now and then a light goes up when I see something I remember. The first sixteen years of my life I spent here on this very farm. Here I learned to walk, learned to talk, learned to swim, learned to ride a bike and cultivated an inner love for nature. In those years the farm's name was Doornhoek.

The excitement erupts inside me! What am I going to find here? Does the old dam still ever exist? That one where my friends and I swam naked in the afternoons after school?

And the big dam that Grandpa Johnny built in the brook, where I had to stalk many a shiny-bodied trout for hours for a mouth-watering dinner? And the fountain ..... Oh, that wonderful fountain!

When we arrive at the farm, I start walking locked in my dreams. I search with every step memories from my childhood. Wildflowers greet me cheerfully. In my mind the sound of exuberant laughter of boys splashing around in the water in a homemade corrugated iron boat that sinks when you just move slightly.

“The fountain,” it grinds in my head, “the fountain! I have to get to the fountain just to taste that delicious fresh water again!” But the darkness catches up with me, and I have to hurry back to our bungalow by the river.

Late at night I lie in bed, rolling around. I see in my mind's eye the fountain again, halfway up the rocky hill. Crystal clear, ice-cold sweet water bubbling out from under a giant granite boulder. I lie flat on my stomach and quench

my thirst with the delicious water until my stomach actually hurts. I could never get enough of it!

The daylight is still struggling to dawn the next morning, when I bravely tackle the rocky koppie behind the old farmhouse. Those years I just ran up it! Now I huff and puff up the steep slope. Finally I'm at the top - the view is breathtaking. Rough sandstone boulders, shaped over the centuries by wind and weather into masterpieces of art, lie scattered all over the hill. My eye seeks the fountain - there is an impassable thicket between me and the fountain. I try to wrestle through there, but with tears in my eyes I have to give up eventually! My disappointment is very big when I cannot get to the origin of the fountain. I look for the stream at the bottom of the fountain, and follow it. A wonderful world of forests and misty ponds where trout frolic unfold before me. An old willow tree lazily hangs its long slender arms over the stream. A wetland of

bulrushes and arum lilies full of life surrounds the mirror-smooth water. Dragonflies sweep over the mist, and a single water bug dances on the water surface. Beneath the ponds an almost impassable wetland stretches, far down to the bottom of the brook, a wetland drenched with life!

My disappointment that I cannot see the fountain slowly turns into amazement at all the life that feeds this single fountain. How wonderful it is that a multitude of trees, plants and animals absolutely flourish, and literally rejoice and exult as a result of that single fountain that bubbles out from under the rock!

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink! He who believes in Me, as the Scripture says, ‘Streams of living water will flow from within him.’” This is how Jesus trumpeted it out at the temple that day! If a small fountain in a rocky koppie at Waterval Boven can give so much life, how much more so the Source of all life, Jesus. Have you

been to that source already? Have you ever tasted how sweet the Living Water is that Jesus gives is? Tegwaan's source was blocked for me so I could not get there. The true Source, Jesus, is always accessible! He actually urgently invites you to come and drink there. Once you have tasted the living water that Jesus gives, it bubbles up in you, and you simply cannot keep quiet about it.

It is that very same living water that made the Samaritan woman with whom Jesus once spoke, jump up to tell the whole town about Jesus, the Man who gave her new life. Yes, she was so excited about the amazing water, that everyone in Shechem flocked to Jesus to get some of that water too!

The fountain of my childhood water excites me, but the Living Water that Jesus gives makes me jump around and rejoice and sing with excitement, because He does not just give life - He IS life! In Him and through Him all things came into being. He is the Source of all life.

Are you also excited about Jesus? Then tell it to Him, and tell it to everyone you come in contact with today.

Prayer:

Lord, I thank You for the delicious sweet water of the Fountain of Life from which You gave me to drink!

# **The Old Testament**

## **John 7: 40-52**

"No, I do not read the Old Testament!" she says to me. "The old things have passed! It is only the New Testament that applies to us believers today! " A frown forms on her face: "And besides, the Old Testament is just full of violence! All those horrible, cruel stories of bloodshed and war and murder! It gives me the chills! I once heard that the Old Testament is the story of the Jews. It ended the day they rejected Jesus, so we just need to read the New Testament. In any case, nothing in the Old Testament applies to us anymore!"

I stare at her in amazement, I have no words! Her reasoning is so far from the truth!

Even in the very first chapters of the Old Testament we read of murder and manslaughter. We see how Cain killed his own brother, Abel, just because he was jealous because the Lord accepted Abel's

sacrifice and not his. A few verses later we already see how violence washes over the earth. Later, when the kings, Saul, David and the others first appear on the scene, the bloodshed knows no end. Often it is accompanied by adultery, rape and corruption.

Does this mean that we have to leave the old Scriptures to gather dust?

No, definitely not! We must first ask ourselves the question: What is the message of the Bible as a whole? The answer is simple, but at the same time very complex. You cannot reproduce it in one sentence. I see the message in the first place as one who wants to tell of the love and grace of God. The Bible wants to teach us something about the Creator of all things. In the New Testament, the message is given over and over again that man is sinful and therefore lost, but Jesus, the Son of God, came down to earth and paid the price to save those who believed in Him. Again God's love and grace

emerging here.

But what about the Old Testament? Do we see that same love and grace? And what about Jesus? Except for a few prophecies about Him, we see nothing of Jesus in the Old Testament. Is that really so?

Then I have a surprise for you this morning! Yes, indeed we see the ugly side of man in the Old Testament and there are no matters to be minced when it is described. But at the same time, we see God's love right from the very first words in the Scriptures as a golden thread that runs right through to the last pages of the books. In addition, we see Jesus, the Son of God, acting throughout the Old Testament.

In John 7: 40-52 we hear how the people argued about Who Jesus really was. Some claimed that He was the Prophet who would precede the Messiah while others again believed that He was the Messiah. Where did they hear about this? Not simply from traditional stories, but from the Old

Testament! Later we see that the scribes and Pharisees also became involved in the debate. These people, of course, made a thorough study of the Old Testament!

The fact is that the people who lived in Old Testament times knew Jesus. No, they did not know Him in the same way that the New Testament people came to know Him, but still there were many people who lived in Old Testament times who had a personal relationship with Jesus.

The very first time we meet Jesus is in the very first verse of the Bible, where it is said that God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning. "But it isn't Jesus?" you might say. John 1: 1-3 explains that Jesus is the Creator. In Gen 1:26 God says: "Let Us make man as OUR representative, OUR image". Here we see the Father, Son and Holy Spirit acting together. In Gen 3 we read how the same Creator (Jesus) spoke to Adam and Eve. There was already talk of a loving, meaningful relationship.

In Gen 18 we read of the visitors Abraham received. Two of them were angels, and the third was Jesus, the Son of God. Abraham had a very long conversation with Him. After Abraham, Jacob even wrestled with Jesus at the Jabbok brook. There Jesus blessed him. In Exodus 3 we read of Moses' calling, when the "Angel of the Lord" (Jesus) appeared to him in the burning thorn bush (Ex 3: 2). After a long conversation with Moses, He introduces Himself as YAHVEH (Clear proof that Jesus is God!) In Ex 33 we read how Jesus was constantly talking to Moses in the tent of meeting. In Judges 6:11 we read of the "Angel of the Lord" (Jesus)'s conversation with Gideon.

These are just a few excerpts about Jesus' appearance and fellowship with the people of the Old Testament. There are many more examples and we see the great contrast between man's sinful life and Jesus' love, grace and forgiveness throughout the Old Testament. Go and read it with new glasses,

and recognise Jesus in it.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for Your great love and grace to man through so many thousands of years. You are truly love!

# **"You are Forgiven!"**

## **John 8: 1-11**

John tells us that Jesus spent the night on the Mount of Olives.

A rabbi at that time was the equivalent of a professor, someone who lived quite luxuriously. Jesus was different, He often just slept in the veldt on the hard ground!

Jesus walks to the temple early in the morning. He is greeted by a large crowd of people who are already waiting for Him. He sits down and the large circle of people around Him prick their ears with great anticipation. However, not everyone is excited about what He is going to say, and many Pharisees and scribes are jealous. "This Jesus is attracting more and more people! He poisons them with His teachings!"

"Yes, but this morning we have an unpleasant surprise for Him! Bring that woman!"

Hard-handedly, a young woman is dragged closer. She cries hysterically because she knows all too well what awaits her. She faces a terrible end. She trembles with anxiety! Oh, why did she give in to her desires? That man knocked her feet out from under her with his charm! It did not even matter that he was married because she was in love with him. He said that his wife did not understand him - that she did not satisfy him. One single night of passionate passion ..... and then they were caught out!

Sobbing, she stands there, plucked around hard by the guards. The end is too awful to think about. They're going to stone her to death. It is a gruesome, painful death that does not come quickly. Her legs are going to be broken by large stones, and when she eventually dies, her body is going to be thrown to the vultures to eat her. Cruel!

Crying, the woman is dragged into the circle where Jesus is teaching the people. "He will definitely not be able to worm Himself out of

this mess!" The learned men are very content with themselves! With a pious face dripping with honey, one of the Pharisees emerges: "Master, this woman has been caught red-handed while committing adultery." He grins, because now he has this Jesus in a trap that will mean His end. "In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. But You, what do You say? "

He knows very well that there are some ugly pitfalls. Jesus simply has no choice, because according to the law she must be stoned. However, if He would agree, then it shows that He does not know the law well enough, because the man must rightly be stoned along with her.

However, there is another problem: Roman law states that the Jews may not carry out a death sentence. So if this woman is stoned as required by Jewish law, then they are violating Roman law. However, if Jesus says that she should not be stoned, then He is going against the law of Moses. Moreover, it

would mean at the same time that He also approves of sin. Now they have finally caught Him! Whichever way He answers, He's in trouble!

To their great frustration however, Jesus pretends to completely ignore their question. He leans forward and begins to write something in the ground. It makes them wild with rage! He must give an answer! Finally He looks up. He calmly says, "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her." He leans forward again and completely ignores the lot by simply writing with His finger in the ground!

One by one, the men begin to turn around and walk away. The only one left behind is the woman.

The Jews have a motto, that you should not do to others what you do not want done to yourself. So if one of them picks up a stone, he exposes himself to the same kind of judgment. The circle of people around Jesus is very quiet. What happened here? Jesus

made each of them judge over his own life. The standard you want to set for other people - is it the same standard by which you measure your own life? Do you comply with it yourself? I think every one of those people from the crowd felt deeply guilty because they all condemned this woman for her loathesome act!

After a bitterly awkward silence, Jesus rises. He looks the woman in the eye: "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you? "

"No one, sir!"

As tears of gratitude flows down her cheeks, she hears Jesus forgive her in love. He does not condemn her either! But then He warns her, "Go, and sin no more."

How great is God's grace and His forgiveness! Even this woman's deadly sin is forgiven. People have often told me that their sin is so great that they do not know if God would ever forgive them. If you feel that way, read Isaiah 1:18 again. Yes, His forgiveness

is all-encompassing. At the same time, however, there is a responsibility, a command to swear off sin. In short, it means living in an intimate relationship with Jesus. Sin is not doing God's will. His will is to believe in Jesus - to serve Him and make that relationship with Him more and more intense every day, and love Him with all your heart and soul and mind. The natural consequence of this is that you are going to seriously try to live holy!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for forgiving all my abominable sins. I want to serve You, Lord, with all that is in me.

## **By the Light of the Campfire**

### **John 8:12-20**

We sit in the Bush by a lovely, cozy campfire. It's late at night, and the fire crackles and lights up as I add the last few tinder-dry sickle bush twigs. A delicious scent of real bush herbs fills the air and the warm flames scatter a soothing light in a cozy, warm glow to all the dark corners of the bush around us. Every bit of darkness is driven away. Everything is beautiful and quiet and peaceful. The only sound is that of the crackling fire.

But then the thin twigs start to burn out until only a thick stump remains which stubbornly conjures up small blue flames. Yes indeed, the embers are still glowing red-hot, but the fire is burnt out. A deadly silence descends upon us. Suddenly we realize how dark and threatening the forest around us really is. A twig cracks. I crane my neck to see something. The pitch-dark is overwhelming. My heart is pounding - what could it be?

Leopard? Maybe a lion? In the distance, the ominous lamenting of a hyena resounds. A cold shiver runs down my spine. Night in the forest is frightening as the pitch-black darkness overwhelms you!

As long as your campfire is burning brightly, you feel safe. The crackling fire dispels not only the darkness but also the other ominous forest sounds. However, when the fire dies you start hearing all sorts of things that scare you. Exactly the same goes for your spiritual life.

The theme of light and darkness appears time and time again in John's Gospel. In verse 12 Jesus once again says that He is the Light of the world and that if you follow Him, you will never live in darkness. Light was at that time a common religious image to indicate the contrast between good and evil. People relied on small oil lamps to make light when it started getting dark. If you wanted to do anything after dark, you had to use a lamp, otherwise you would mess up! So a

lamp added sense to your life.

At the same time, darkness was used again as a cover for evil deeds. If a robber wanted to take your things, he did it in the dark to hide his identity and at the same time to catch you unawares.

Darkness is also seen in the same light as blindness. Have you ever tried to walk through the rough veldt on a pitch-dark night without a flashlight? It makes you feel what it must be like to be blind. Mosbolletjie and I once experienced such a hike without a flashlight on a pitch-dark, moonless night at Doornkloof camp in the Free State with a group of Voortrekkers. Termite mounds, rocks and boundary wires took their toll heavily and numerous bruises and abraded shin-bones marked our experience!

So when Jesus says that He is the Light of the world, some thoughts come to mind. The first question is, do I really have that Light in my life? Without it I am spiritually blind and I am going to stumble and fall hard with every

little pebble in my path! Without Jesus' Light it is pitch-dark around me and I am exposed to evil powers. Then it's like sitting in the bush without a fire, while you hear the lions and other dangerous things around you. Fiersome!

With Jesus' Light in my life however, it is different. Then I do not have to fear the darkness of evil. But it is also the duty of every believer to allow Jesus to let His light shine in him. In the bush, the glowing embers of a late-night campfire are all very well. However, having a crackling fire requires me to add wood and twigs. In my faith life, it's exactly the same. Allowing Jesus to let His Light shine brightly requires me to constantly throw wood and twigs of "good works" on my "embers." What does it mean? In the first place to put my love into practice with my fellow-man. But at the same time, it also means that I will cherish my relationship with Jesus. I do this through a healthy prayer life as well as a constant hunger for the Word.

You can never stop learning from the Word!

We can learn a lot from a campfire. It starts with a heap of thin twigs that flare up quickly and give a bright light. However, they burn out very quickly, so your fire should be stoked further with thicker wood. With someone who is new to the faith, it's exactly the same. Your first amazement about your salvation flares up brightly, but your faith fades easily if it is not stright-away stoked with solid food.

As the evening progresses and wood constantly burns out on the fire, it forms a warm base of coals, which only needs a few twigs to make it flare up again. Likewise, your constant search for knowledge of the Word forms a solid foundation for your faith, which makes it easy to ignite. However, if you do not add wood to a fire, the embers will soon become cold and exactly the same with your faith-fire - if it is not constantly stoked, it will eventually become cold.

So stoke that campfire of your faith today, so

that Jesus' light may shine brightly through you and expel the darkness of evil.

Prayer:

Lord, I want to let Your light shine in my life.  
Remind me to stoke it constantly.

## **Unbelief of the Jews**

### **John 8: 21-30**

Jesus was in conversation with the Jews. They asked Him all kinds of questions and Jesus gave them answers that they did not understand at all, or perhaps did not want to understand. His conversation with the Jews was completely incomprehensible from a human point of view. We also see in this conversation a frustration building up, both from the Jews as well as from Jesus.

"Who are you?" asked the Jews, after Jesus had explained to them numerous times who He was. "Why am I still talking to you?" came Jesus' discouraged answer. How much clearer did He have to put it then? Yet there was a deep mystery when Jesus explained, something that is too great for the human mind to ever comprehend.

This conversation is one of the most important statements of Jesus about the things that happened at the cross. He tells

the people that He is going away, and then He further also tells them that they cannot go where He is going. In John 7:34 He says the same thing to them. This is an urgent warning - unfortunately one that the Jews chose to ignore. They prefer not to understand what He means. "Maybe He's going to commit suicide?" they wonder. Laughable! They make total fools of themselves!

By the way, there was once a report in the newspaper of a congregation that put up a huge poster on the church grounds with a Bible quote: "The fool says in his heart that there is no God!" An atheist was very offended, because by this he was branded a fool. He went to court with this, and he won his case, because it is unconstitutional to call someone a fool if he does not believe, even if the Word of God says otherwise. Yes, he may have won his court battle, but the poor man lost a much bigger battle, and that makes him the biggest fool there is. For

what's the point of having everything on earth, but you lose the right to have eternal life?

Jesus spells it out for the Jews again - He is from up Above, not from this world. Could He say that more clearly? He is from heaven. And by that Jesus did not mean to be an angel! Yes, He does have the title of Angel, but it is an exalted title: Angel of the Lord! However, this does not mean that He is an angel, but He is God. In His explanation, Jesus uses the term "I am what I am" to say Who He really is.

During the events of Moses' calling in Exodus 3, where Moses sees the burning thorn bush, we read that the "Angel of the Lord" appeared to him in the form of a burning bush. So it was the Son, Jesus. Later in the conversation, when Moses wants to know how to tell the Israelites who sent him, the Lord says to him, "I am what I am" (YHWH or YAHWEH).

Moses had to take off his shoes, because the

Lord made him understand that he was on holy ground. Upon hearing these words, the Jews must have also fallen down in worship before Jesus, because here they were before the Holy God. But what do they do? "Who are you?" they ask Him. He had just spelled out to them Who He is, and then they come up with such a silly question! That is why Jesus said to them, "Why do I still speak to you?!"

But then comes the totally incomprehensible statement of Jesus, that He only says what He has heard from the Father. Here we see Jesus' true humanity come through, that His knowledge is limited to what the Father told Him. At the same time, we see His divine side when He tells them that He can condemn them. Later we will see how Jesus' human side emerges even stronger, when He is afraid and distressed shortly before the crucifixion. He was truly human, just like you and me, but with the big difference that He had no sin in Him. But again we also see in

His Humanity, that the Divine comes through, in that He is fully aware of what would happen to Him in the future. He knew exactly what was lying ahead of Him during the crucifixion. It must have been, humanly speaking, absolutely terrifying! No wonder He prayed in Gethsemane that awful night that these things should not happen to Him! It was more than any human could endure.

In the following part of the conversation, Jesus speaks of His "exaltation." They, the Jews, would exalt Him, and only then would they begin to realize Who He really is. This "exaltation" of course indicates Jesus' crucifixion. But it actually has a double meaning, because at the same time it also indicates His ascension during the ascension, where Jesus again took His rightful place in the throne room of the almighty God, as ruler over heaven and earth.

Despite the stubborn unbelief of the Jewish leaders, John tells us that many people still

came to faith in Jesus about these things He said to them.

Today, you and I as believers should not become discouraged as we witness the unbelief around us. There is still a large crowd of believers who serve the Lord.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for all the believers who serve You with me, and who also, like me, unconditionally believe in You.

## **Child of God?**

### **John 8: 31-47**

Can someone who has accepted Jesus in faith lose his faith and thus be lost again? There have been many hot debates on this question! Is it possible that you could lose your faith in Jesus? In the Netherlands, a pastor one day came to the conclusion that there is no God and he became a total atheist. The worst is that he retained his pastoral status and preached this terrible lie from the pulpit!

The letters of John tell us that the church was torn in two and that one part of the church no longer clung to the truth of Jesus. They also no longer acted like believers. I have experienced many times that living members just disappear from the congregation one day and become completely estranged from the church.

John 8:44 tells of something almost worse, when Jesus tells the Jews "who believe in

Him" that they are children of the devil! This is bad! How can this be?

But let's start at the beginning: We have already mentioned in a previous passage that when John speaks of someone who believes in Jesus, he does not necessarily mean that the person is a believer, but that it can also mean that the person merely joins Jesus without really having an intimate relationship with Him. For example, 70% of all South Africans call themselves Christians, but this does not mean that they are all believers and live in a relationship with Jesus.

We have already mentioned that chapter 8 is actually a kind of court case about the identity of Jesus. The question is, is God Jesus' Father? If this is the case, it naturally puts Jesus on God's side. We have already seen from the previous verses that this is in fact the case. But now Jesus comes and He turns the court case around. Now He is no longer the One standing in the dock, but

those who are listening to Him. The time has come for them to take responsibility now. "If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples," Jesus told them. Herein lies the test of true faith in Jesus - that you will remain fully obedient to what Jesus says.

He further tells them that they will know the truth and that that truth will set them free. What is this "truth"? Those things that are right and true for God. The Jews again misunderstand Jesus - they are then Abraham's children, and they are not slaves! How can He now want to claim that they need to be set free? They are already free!

But actually they are playing right into Jesus' hand, because He is now using exactly their ignorance to explain what this freedom truly means. He uses the position of a slave towards a child in the house. Every seven years the Jews had to release their slaves. The slave therefore has a limited relationship with the family. However, a child's relationship is permanent. The implication is

that when Jesus sets you free, or makes you part of the family of God, then it is a permanent gift.

For the Jews who stand on the fact that they are descendants of Abraham, and therefore part of God's people (family), Jesus has an unpleasant surprise: Abraham was part of God's family, but it does not make his descendants part of God's family. Their actions do show this very clearly. Jesus' Father and the father of these "believers" can certainly not be one and the same. Jesus preaches the truth to them, but what is their response? They want to kill Him. Jesus comes from God - He (the God of Israel) sent Himself for Jesus. By not wanting to accept Jesus, they now also prove that they have turned against the God of Israel. This is a terrible thought! But it gets worse: it means at the same time that they have the devil as father! And that's why they cannot or do not want to understand Jesus' message. "If God were your Father, you would love me," Jesus

told them (John 8:42).

The Word of God is eternal, and so today just as fresh as two thousand years ago. It also speaks to us today as people in the modern era. If there were really 30 million believers in South Africa, our country would have looked very different. However, we all realize that this is certainly not the case, and that the largest percentage are only in name Christians. However, if we draw the circle closer, and we look at those in the church, then we also soon find that there are many people who do not really know Jesus. In verse 47 Jesus emphasizes this: "He who is from God listens to the words of God."

So if you and I are asked the question today, about Who do we think Jesus really is, then we cannot simply put together such an answer. The truth comes out in the things we do and how we live. The answer is therefore given by our actions.

The question at the beginning: Can a believer be lost? A true believer is also only a

human being, and he can stray, as happened to the prodigal son. However, I believe that Jesus will never let him go astray, and that he will always be drawn back again by the love and grace of the Father.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You that I am not a slave, but Your child. Thank You for all the privileges You give me, and for holding me even when I stumble. Help me to fully live my love for You.

## **Jesus Is Insulted**

### **John 8: 48-59**

Jesus is horribly insulted by the Jews, in the worst possible way. In the first place, they call Him a Samaritan. For a Jew, this is a terrible thing to say, because as we know, the Samaritans are despised by the Jews. They were considered traitors of the true faith and even though they were half-Jewish, they were considered unholy because they were of mixed blood. The Jews would rather have had a conversation with a complete heathen than with these "half-baked" people.

It is so ironic that when Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, he is pointing out that it is not the "holy" Jews who are doing good to a man in need, but a "filthy" Samaritan. Jesus therefore clearly does not carry the same sentiments in Him as the Jews. We have already seen that He puts it into practice by not travelling around Samaria, but travelling through the region. Furthermore, we saw how He dared to strike

up a conversation with a very obscure Samaritan woman. So Jesus does not pay any attention to this insult!

However, the second insult they inflict on Him hurts. The Jews claim that Jesus is possessed by the devil. It simply cannot be further from the truth. Today we wonder how the Jews could ever be so blind. To accuse Someone who has only done good and lived out love to the highest level, of demon possession is absurd! Have they never seen what He did? Did they not notice that He healed thousands of sick people? Have they not experienced or at least heard of the miracles Jesus performed? What about the huge crowd that He fed with only five loaves and two fishes? And the water that became wine - does it not say anything? Someone who is possessed by the devil will not do good things at all! And besides all the miracles, they must have heard Him preach. Nicodemus, their esteemed colleague, did notice this and He sought Jesus afterwards

to hear how you can obtain salvation. From everything Jesus said, they must have been able to see very clearly that He was definitely not possessed by the devil!

Today it hurts me deep inside, that my Saviour had to be so terribly insulted. He who regards the devil as the greatest enemy, was accused by the spiritual leaders of the people of God of standing with the devil in an alliance! This people, whom He chose even before the foundation of the earth, and whom He carried, protected and cherished through the millennia, are the same people who now so cruelly reject Him.

When Jesus answers them, He does not say a single word about the accusation that He is a Samaritan! What would it matter anyway? He came to earth not only for Jews but also for Samaritans, and Greeks, Romans, Turks and even South Africans! However, He strongly denies the second allegation. How can it be otherwise?

For Jesus, however, it was not about what

the people said about Him. After all, his purpose was not to come here on earth to seek glory. If that were the case, everything would have happened very differently and He would have been born in a palace and not a stinking stable! Then He would not have travelled the country on foot and slept on the hard ground at night. However, there is a Great Judge who would eventually exalt Him and give Him all the honour that is due to Him. But for now there was a much more important issue, namely to come and save. That is why Jesus warns the Jews that they must listen to what He says and take it to heart so that they too, the mockers, could have eternal life.

I sometimes wonder if any of those people did eventually come to repentance? Oh yes, at least one came to other insights, and became the greatest missionary of all time - Paul! If this could happen to a fanatic like Paul, then surely there were others who came to new insights, and saw Jesus for who

He really was.

The Jews now come and also drag Abraham into the argument. Jesus explains to them that Abraham knows Him well, and that He was already there long before Abraham. How can it be otherwise? Jesus is the One who not only made Abraham, but created the whole universe out of nothing. But the Jews would not have understood this at all. Then they did what they could do best: they picked up stones to kill Him with. Jesus had to flee for His life!

How ironic, that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus. He was the one chance for them to have eternal life. Would not you have seized this opportunity with both your hands? Unfortunately, history repeats itself time and time again, and today the mockers are still there - people who reject, mock and slander Jesus, who is the only Way to eternal life. Do not make the same mistake!

Prayer:

Lord, it hurts bitterly when I read today how terribly You have been insulted. I worship You and honour You. Thank you for still paying the ransom for me in spite of all the insults!

# **Trials**

## **John 9: 1-12**

These trials that befall us - are they not just God's punishment for our sins? If the day is difficult for us, it is not the Lord punishing us? Or if a loved one is taken away from me, is it possible that I have sinned somehow? This is an ancient question! It was even on the lips of Jesus' disciples. It was so widely accepted, that they took it for granted that the poor blind beggar they encountered had been punished by God for his sin, or perhaps rather for his parents' sins. God was seen at that time as the God of life and of the good. Nothing that had anything to do with pain or sickness could come from Him, and therefore it could only be through the sin of the man or his parents that he suffered. In this case, the man was already blind from birth, so it could only be the parents' fault! It is their sins that have been punished!

However, Jesus shook His head. No, this man was blind so that God could be glorified

through it. The works that God does had to be seen in this blind man. So if God healed this man, then it would once again be a proof of His omnipotence, love and grace, and that He could even erase the signs of sin. If Jesus healed the man, it would serve as further proof that His works could not, as the church leaders claimed, be linked to the devil, but that it would come from God. That man was therefore blind so that it would establish the people of that time's faith in Jesus, and even today strengthen our own faith.

Jesus could only have spoken a single word, and the man would be healed. However, he prefers to do it in another way - a very surprising way: He makes "eye medicine" by making a little clay with spit, which he applied to the man's eyes. Then Jesus sent him to the pool of Siloam to wash himself. John mentions very pertinently that the name of the bath means: "The one who was sent." This is for a very good reason, because this blind man is now also being sent. What was

he sent for? To testify of Jesus - something he did very well, not only by being an example of Jesus' miracles, but later also by what he had to say before the Jewish Council, where he had to speak on behalf of Jesus.

Here we have an example of a totally illiterate person who did not even have a proper background in religion, and certainly did not know much about Jesus. Yet the Lord used him very fruitfully to carry the message of God's grace and Jesus' salvation.

You and I so often hide behind our excuse for lack of sufficient knowledge to serve as witnesses for Jesus. This man testified with a few words and surely a radiant face. We see the same thing with the Samaritan woman, who testified with absolutely no knowledge, except for a single brief encounter with Jesus, and stirred up an entire town. Another example is the man who was demon-possessed, in the cemetery. After Jesus set him free, he went to testify, and won over an

entire region for Jesus. This man could only testify of what Jesus did for him! He had absolutely no knowledge of the Scripture.

The day you and I were saved by Jesus from the power of the devil, we were automatically became missionaries. Like the blind man, we were also spiritually blind, and Jesus gave us eyes of faith to see. Unlike the three people we mentioned above, we are in the immensely privileged position of being taught Scripture knowledge from an early age by our parents, Sunday School teachers, and pastors. How dare we say that we are not worthy to be sent out?

"But I'm scared!" we often say. We are afraid of rejection. We will see later that this blind man was also rejected. He was expelled from the synagogue because he dared to testify for Jesus. Evidence brings confrontation. We see this all the time with missionaries carrying the Word in the countries where the Gospel is not welcome. They are often persecuted and even deported if they are

caught handing out Bibles or preaching the Word. Even worse: the Christians of these countries are thrown into prison or even killed if they are caught out spreading the gospel. It is risky, and their suffering are horrific. They, and the missionaries who risk their lives to bring the Word there, must be constantly in our prayers.

I would like to ask you two questions this morning: Are there trials that are threatening to overwhelm you? Then you must see it as an opportunity to magnify God's Name. The second question: are you really living out your mission as a messenger of Jesus?

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for the trials in my life - I know you have a great purpose for it. Teach me to convert it into witnessing for You.

## **Intimidation**

### **John 9: 13-34**

The saga of the blind man whom Jesus healed did not end with his healing, it was just the beginning. A fact that was not mentioned to us before is that this whole episode took place on a Sabbath day. The Jews sat like a flock of vultures waiting for Jesus to break some of Moses' laws, but this simply did not happen. And here the "transgression" falls, as it were, into their laps!

The Pharisees made a great deal of the Sabbath. This law was, as it were, highlighted above all others. They were so afraid that someone might by accident break the Sabbath law, that they made a whole bunch of by-laws to describe what all may not be done on a Sabbath. Some of these laws are really comical and a mockery of the Pharisees' intelligence. In short, the law began to weigh much heavier on them than God, the One who instituted the law! Nor did

they keep pace with the true meaning of the law.

So when the Pharisees learned that Jesus had healed this man on the Sabbath, they went down to the poor man, for he was their number one witness! He was interrogated over and over until he eventually became discouraged with this lot that just could not understand what was happening to him. That the man was miraculously healed did not matter to them. That he could now see for the first time in his life did not count for them at all. All that mattered to them was the law, and how to catch Jesus. Over and over they intimidated him. They simply cannot accept that this could have been a miracle. "What do you say about Him?" they tried to push him into a corner. They wanted to know Who exactly Jesus was for this man? Perhaps the same question resounds in your ears this morning: Who is Jesus to you?

In stark contrast to this, we see the man's testimony about Jesus: To him Jesus was a

Prophet, a Messenger, a Mediator of God. He overflowed with praise to Jesus: "How can someone who is a sinner perform such miracles?" he despairingly threw the question before the learned men (verse 17). This question totally confused them and we read between the lines that they argued among themselves about this.

When they could not get anything of value strangled from the man, they turned to his parents. However, they were too scared to say anything except that their son was blind from birth and that he could now see. If they would say what was in their hearts, that Jesus was the Christ, then it would be the end of them. They knew very well that they would be banished from the synagogue. This would mean that all social ties with the community would be severed. They would become strangers in their own town. So they dare not say anything, so their comment is: "Ask him yourself - he is old enough."

For a second time, the man is pulled closer

and peppered with questions, until he later says to them: “I have already told you, and you have not listened. Do you also want to become His disciples?” It made them furious, so they brought out the big cannon: Moses! They were disciples of Moses, and after all, Moses spoke to God.

How ironic, in a previous passage, we saw that it was Jesus Himself who appeared to Moses in Exodus 3. It was He who commanded Moses to lead the people. We can also assume with certainty that it was Jesus who spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai and gave him the Law (Ex 19 and 20). It was also Jesus who regularly spoke to Moses on numerous occasions in the tent of meeting. In deep humility, Moses even took off his shoes when he first met Jesus. He spoke to Jesus in worship and great respect. For Moses, Jesus was absolutely everything in life, and he recognized and acknowledged Him as God.

In contrast, Moses and the law were

everything to the Pharisees and they tried to kill the God of Moses. They simply did not want to recognize or acknowledge Him.

On the other hand, we see how the man who was blind emerged from someone who was too scared to speak to someone who was outspoken and defended Jesus. The Pharisees actually did him a great favour, because before our eyes he blossomed and fearlessly recognized Jesus as a Man who is from God. Fearless, because for him a terrible punishment would await, to be banished from the synagogue and therefore from the whole of society for his point of view. Yes, he still did not quite understand what it was all about, but he realized that Jesus was very special and that he therefore had to hold on to him. The worst has happened and he is being banished! But also the fact that he did not understand would change when Jesus later explained to him Who He really was.

The question this morning is: How much does Jesus mean to me? So much so that I

would throw everything overboard to follow Him? So much so that I am even willing to give up my status and friends?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You are everything in my life. I worship You because You are the King of kings. Please keep me standing when I am confronted.

# **Spiritual Blindness**

## **John 9: 35-41**

We have seen what a terrible fate befell the blind man whom Jesus healed. The Jewish leaders banished him from the synagogue. He may have been the first of the Christians persecuted by the Jews, but many would follow him. For this man, the punishment was great, because for the first time in his life he could see and he could participate with full devotion in all the social activities of the community, but the moment it happens, he is totally cut off from this very same community. What a terrible disappointment. What a cruel punishment!

But who comes to his rescue? None other than Jesus. He heard about the poor man's dilemma, and then he went looking for the man. Jesus knew that He could offer this man something much, much greater and more satisfying than acceptance by an unbelieving community. A whole new world was waiting for that man - a world of which

you and I are also a part today. Apart from the breathtaking prospect of the perfect life that awaits one day, there is also the world of the believer, which is totally different from that of the unbeliever.

If we continue to read in books like Acts, we see how the believers lived. There was love and care for each other that knew absolutely no boundaries. Some believers even went so far as to sell their property to raise money to help their fellow-believers who were oppressed. Today, I still see this love and care in believers who are really serious about their faith. I myself have been through some very difficult times in my life, and in those times I was literally carried to by caring believers.

It is also a whole new world of friendship that opens up to you the day when you come to faith. Worldly friendships are often extremely superficial. But friendship between believers is built on a totally different foundation - it has depth, and it does not look at worldly things,

but the spiritual and the eternal. Jesus knew these things, and therefore He went to seek the man to introduce him to this new world.

When Jesus confronted him, he was well aware that this man still did not realize what exactly had happened to him. Yes, he could suddenly see, but Who was it that healed him? He did not know! He was still spiritually blind, and he needed to be able to see. So when Jesus asked him if he believed in the Son of Man, the man did not even know who he was. Meanwhile, the Pharisees surrounded them like a bunch of blue flies. They knew exactly who Jesus was talking about. They learned over and over in Scripture about the Son.

Then Jesus also healed the man's spiritual eyes, when He told the man that He, Jesus, is the Son. His immediate response was to confess that he believed and he worshipped Jesus right there while the Pharisees gasped for breath. Suddenly this new wonder world opened up to the man and he saw on a

whole different level!

I still remember very well, the day Jesus opened my eyes. I was alone in a small rondavel in Amatikulu, when I gave my heart to the Lord. I did not even quite realize what had happened to me. A few days later a girl asked me what happened to me? My radiant face told her that something had changed my life! Then she explained to me that I had just become a believer. I did not even realize it myself! But suddenly everything was just different and a new, wonderful world opened up before me! It was as if peels had fallen from my eyes, and I could see and understand.

Jesus looked at the Pharisees around him. Yes, He healed the blind again, but those who could see would become blind. How do you understand that? "We are not blind!" the Pharisees immediately protested.

"If only you were blind," Jesus shook his head sympathetically.

They knew the Scriptures well. They had all the knowledge needed to know about God. However, they were so entangled in their religion, rituals and laws, that they no longer saw God! So they could see properly, but they kept themselves blind.

Yes, today we still see that there are highly educated theologians who have gone completely off track. They had all the knowledge and opportunities, but let it slip through their fingers because they did not want to see the miracle of God. On the other hand, there was this man who had no knowledge – he was healed by Jesus. He opened up the heavens so that the man could see the miracle.

It is a wonderful privilege for someone to be able to do theological studies, but then a huge responsibility rests on his shoulders. However, such a person must also work so much harder on his spiritual life than anyone else.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for opening my eyes too so that I could see Your glory!

# The Good Shepherd

## John 10: 1-21

It was a nostalgic visit on the farm where I grew up, near Waterval Boven. Forty years have passed. Would I still find the things there that were beautiful to me? The first thing I see is the old homestead - I'm disappointed because it's changed. What to me as a child looked like a massive house, is now an ordinary house with small rooms. The outbuildings where I enjoyed playing as a child are still standing, but even here things have changed and I do not feel satisfied. It's not as I remember it!

I walk over to where the old stone kraal was. It's almost completely hidden among the trees. But then, when I find it, my thoughts lift. Those solid stone walls that Grandpa built himself - they still stand exactly as I remember them. Indestructible they were preserved! In my mind's eye I see the cattle again - I hear them moo-ing contentedly in the kraal. I hear my dog barking excitedly

again, where he goes to fetch the cattle in the evening and leads them to the kraal so that they will be safe behind the solid old stone walls. It was wonderful that they knew his voice and that they followed him.

Jesus tells a story of such an old stone kraal. Like Grandpa's kraal, this one also has a gate. This is the only place where the cattle can go in and out, and it is the entrance for the herdsman. No one came into Grandpa's kraal except through that gate. And now Jesus says that it is also the only entrance for someone who must enter there rightfully. Yes, there are people who climb over the wall, but they are there for only one purpose, and that is to steal!

Jesus tells the people that the sheep know the shepherd's voice well, and that they follow him when he calls them. The shepherd knows his sheep so well that he calls each one by name. But they do not simply follow any voice - these sheep only follow their shepherd and no one else. When they hear a

strange voice, they are startled and run away.

It was a beautiful story, one that Jesus' listeners could associate with, because it was part of everyday life. But with the story, Jesus wanted to bring home a truth.

We can see that solid fortress of the stone kraal as the eternal life. There's only one way to get in there, and that is through the gate. This gate distinguishes the true from the false. Someone who does not belong there will not go in there. He will try to sneak over the wall. In this story there is only one kraal and one gate. In verse 7 Jesus says that He is that Gate, and that He is the only access to the kraal.

There are theologians today who want to claim that there is more than one way to enter the fold of eternal life. According to them, you just have to believe - whether it is in Buddha or the Hindu religion - it does not matter. This is nonsense! Jesus is the only way! He himself said so. All the others are

thieves and robbers (verse 8). What does a thief do? He steals and he slaughters and he exterminates (verse 10).

In contrast - what does the shepherd do? He cares for the sheep with love and makes sure they graze on the juicy green grass. "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (verse 10) Jesus says to them. Jesus came to earth, not to judge, but to save and to give love and to care. In stark contrast we see the works of evil. The Pharisees are in his power, and all they do is sow destruction. Not only are they trying to kill Jesus, but they are also making life impossible for the people. We would see later how they persecuted and even killed the Christians. They only think of themselves!

Jesus is not only the Entrance or Gate to eternal life, He is also the Shepherd who cares for and protects His sheep (the believers). In verse 15 we see how He laid down His life for His sheep. If a shepherd sees a wolf with his sheep, he will risk his life

to drive away the wolf and protect his sheep. Jesus proved to be that Good Shepherd when He risked His life to break the power of evil over believers forever. In the process, Jesus brought the greatest sacrifice of all time - he gave His life for His sheep!

But what good is it to a flock of sheep if their shepherd is dead? Then they are shepherdless and lost. In verse 18 Jesus explains that not only does He lay down His life for mankind, but that He takes it up again at the command of God. Those who want to claim that Jesus never rose from the dead must swallow their words, because here Jesus explains why it was so necessary that He should rise again. He's alive! Not only does Jesus live, but He is still the Good Shepherd, and He still cares for me and you, His sheep today. He still protects His sheep from the attacks of the wolves (the evil one), and He still gives His sheep the green pastures. But even more: He leads them to that indestructible rock fortress of eternal life.

Prayer:

Thank you Lord, that you are also my Shepherd and that I am safe with You.

## **Stubborn Unbelief**

### **John 10: 22-42**

It was winter in Jerusalem. With winter came one of the great festivals of the Jews, the Feast of Dedication. It dates back to the year 164 BC. Syria was the world ruler in those years and Israel was in it's grip. At the head was a man named Antiochus Epiphanes, a wicked despot. He added the name Epiphanes, meaning "revealed god". Moreover, he said the most blasphemous things of God. To teach the Jews a lesson, he desecrated the temple by having an image of Zeus erected in the temple. He even sacrificed a pig on the altar.

After a bloody battle, however, Judas Maccabeus manages to drive out the enemy and in the winter of the year 164 BC, the temple is finally restored and put back into use. Thereafter, this festival is held every year in mid-December and lasts for eight days.

During these great festivities, Jesus was in the temple. The Jews gathered around Him and then sought a straight answer, whether He was the Christ or not? How many times has Jesus not already given them the answer? But still they did not hear what He was saying. "I told you so, but you do not believe it!" Jesus must have been discouraged with them by this time. Could they simply not understand then?

Today, you and I do not have to get discouraged if we pass on the gospel message to someone and he stubbornly refuses to accept it. Even Jesus had this problem!

Jesus explains to the Jews by once again using the image of sheep. His sheep are in a special relationship with him - they know His voice and follow him. Like a good Shepherd, He cares for them. He even gives them eternal life! He protects them with His life, and no one will be able to steal them from Him. Why can He do that? The Father gave

them to Him and of course the Father is omnipotent. But even more: Jesus and the Father are One. Jesus therefore identifies Himself very intimately with the Father.

What does it mean to us when Jesus says that He and the Father are one? No, that does not mean that Jesus is the Father. After all, the Father is greater than Him and Jesus remains the sent Son. However, they are one because they have one will. Their interests are the same and it flows together. The unity between Father and Son is a unity of will as well as of deeds. Of course, this also implies that Jesus is truly God and part of the Divine Trinity. And this refutes the claims of the Jehovah's Witnesses, that Jesus is not God, but only a Divine being.

Of course, the Jews understood very well what Jesus was saying. It was in their eyes nothing less than blasphemy, because with this Jesus wants to exalt Himself as God. They also picked up stones to kill Him. Actually, it's so ironic, because absolutely

everything Jesus did and said pointed out that He truly is God. From Him came only love and good things, but for that these men were totally blind. "I have shown you many good deeds of the Father. For which of these deeds do you want to stone Me?" Jesus asked them. However, they did not heed what Jesus said. He had to die because He made blasphemous allegations!

Then Jesus came with a masterful quote from Psalm 82: 6, where the judges are judged. Here the Lord tells them that they are all gods, because they had to make divine pronouncements and therefore had to quote God. They represented Him on earth, as it were. If they were "gods", then all the more so is Jesus God. He does not say it in so many words, but the implication is there! If the Jews were to read Psalm 82, then they could not find Jesus guilty, because everything He said was correct according to Scripture and they do not dare to argue with it. Now they were driven into a corner!

If only the Jews wanted to bring together Jesus' words and deeds. Then they would have come to the realization that Jesus and the Father are part of the Trinity. But all in all, nothing helped, because these Jews were certainly not of Jesus' sheep and so they did not recognize His wonderful voice at all. They were looking for only one thing: Jesus' death! Before they could seize Him, however, He escaped them. He then left Judea for Perea, a region across the Jordan. How tragic that the Jews - His own people - let Jesus go! They heard Him and saw the wonderful things He did, but they would not accept Him and did not believe in Him. With the people of Perea, however, it was different: They remembered everything that John the Baptist said about Jesus and it was enough for them to fully accept and believe Jesus! He did not even need to prove it with miracles. To them He gave eternal life.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I pray this morning for everyone

who has heard Your word but still remains indifferent to it. Please open their eyes Lord!

## **Death's Sting is Gone**

### **John 11: 1-16**

Just outside Jerusalem was a village called Bethany. There lived a group of people who were very close to Jesus' heart: Mary, her sister Martha, and their brother Lazarus. Mary in particular had a special place in Jesus' heart, because she was the one who broke the precious bottle of perfume and poured its contents on Jesus' feet. You probably still remember how angry Judas was about this, because this oil was worth a whole year's salary - what a waste! But Mary simply went ahead and dried Jesus' feet with her loose hair - a wonderful act of love!

Now, however, they were in great distress - Lazarus was mortally ill! Jesus was their only hope. However, there was a problem, because Jesus and His disciples had to flee from the Jews in a hurry and they were now in the region of Perea, across the Jordan. It would take at least two days for the message to reach Jesus and the situation was critical!

There were probably some extremely difficult questions asked by Lazarus' friends. Would they ever be on time? Would Jesus ever risk coming back to heal His friend?

When they arrived two days later, the twelve were very frightened because it was life threatening for Him! The Jews would definitely not let Him get away again this time! Actually, Jesus could only speak the word, and Lazarus would be healed! That's what He did with the soldier's son! The men were very worried - what would their Master do?

Then Jesus reassured them: Lazarus' illness would not mean his death - but it would however reveal Jesus' power. The next day, to the great alarm of the men, He simply went on preaching and healing people. And also the day after. Finally, he announced the disturbing news to the twelve: "We are going to Judea." The men were shocked! How could Jesus want to stand and do such an irresponsible thing? It was, after all, to seek

His own death! The Jews would surely get their hands on Him and then it would be over! But Jesus was determined - He wanted to go to Bethany!

Then Jesus said a very strange thing to the men: "Our friend Lazarus is sleeping, but I'm going so as to wake him up." What would He mean by this? We know that Lazarus was already dead by this time and Jesus surely knew it too. Why then would He say that Lazarus was only sleeping?

There is a very good explanation. For Jesus, death was as insignificant as it is for someone to sleep. To us, death is often a nightmare - the end of the road! Everything finally comes to a standstill! It's done! It's over! However, Jesus saw it very differently, because death is only the gate to the new life that lasts forever. So it's nothing more than a mere nap and when you wake up you're on the other side of the gate. If we read between the lines, we see that on that side of the gate it is breathtakingly beautiful, clean, pure and

wonderful. I look forward to it with great longing!

Of course, the men totally misunderstood Him. When a sick person sleeps, his chances of recovery are so much greater. So it was no longer necessary for them to go to Bethany. Then Jesus helped them right: no, Lazarus was dead, and it was necessary to go there. Then Jesus said another incomprehensible thing, that He was glad that He was not there with Lazarus' death. Why would He say that? And why then did he waste another full two days when He knew that Lazarus was already dead? Now it would take another two days to get to Bethany and the body of poor Lazarus would have been decomposed in that heat ages ago!

Again, there was a very good reason for Jesus' actions. The belief at that time was that someone's soul did not immediately leave his body when he died. The soul kept hanging around there, just to be certain. Only when the body began to decompose, three or

four days after his death, would the soul leave for the "underworld". They say that there were Greek doctors who claimed to have brought someone back from the dead, but that the man was not completely dead yet, believing that his soul was still nearby.

Jesus wanted to ensure that everyone would know that Lazarus was irrevocably dead and that no one would be able to say that his soul was still around. Then no one would be able to say that it was not a miracle from God. Thomas' discouraged response was, "Let us go also, that we may die with him." How ironic that when Jesus gave life to Lazarus, it was precisely the last straw for the Jews to kill Him. However, Jesus 'act not only gave life to Lazarus, but it also gave eternal life to Jesus' disciples, as well as to everyone who believes in Him!

Jesus was calm about this, because He knew that if believers were willing to follow Him, even if it was in the greatest danger conceivable, that we can still trust in Him. No

one will snatch us out of His hand, not even death!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that I can know today that I do not even have to fear death, because You are holding me tight!

## **You Were Too Late!**

### **John 11: 17-32**

In the town of Bethany, everything is in turmoil, because people flocked there from the great city of Jerusalem, to comfort the two sisters, Martha and Mary, after the tragic death of their brother Lazarus. It is only an hour's walk from Jerusalem, so it is not much trouble to fulfill their duty. They are met by a sad picture, everyone lamenting. Lazarus is all that these two women still had left in life and now he is dead, buried, gone forever!

Someone came running up and whispered in Martha's ear: "Jesus is on his way!" Hurriedly she got up and went to meet her Master. Some distance outside the town she found Him, and greeted Him with a reproach: "Lord, if You were here my brother would not have died!" Why did He not come in time? She did send a messenger in time to fetch Him. Why did He linger so long? However, Martha still secretly believed that Jesus could still do something about it. Everything could not be

totally lost, could it? But even in her wildest dreams, she was not prepared for what awaited her. So when Martha told Jesus that she knew that God would give Jesus what He asked, meaning that Lazarus could still be saved, there was still a glimmer of hope in her. However, unbelief outweighs hope!

Jesus' answer is that Lazarus will rise from the dead. However, this thought is too much for Martha – is it possible? Her brother has been dead for four days! His body had already begun to decompose in the stuffy stone tomb! This would mean that if he is called back from the dead, that his body will have to be totally recreated. God alone is the Creator! No, it's totally impossible! Oh yes, she knows, of course, that one day he will come back to life with the resurrection. All the children of God will then come alive when the final judgment arrives. She believes this because she has been taught that way since childhood.

Jesus turned and looked directly at Martha.

What He said to her was one of the greatest words of comfort for you and me that we could ever have: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he has died; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." These are not just words of comfort to Martha about her brother, but a dramatic statement echoing through the halls of heaven. "Do you believe that, Martha?"

"Do you believe that?" Jesus is asking you and me today. If you believe this statement, then it still does not mean that you have eternal life! The most important thing, however, is that you believe in Jesus! Is there a relationship between you and Jesus? Have you told Him that you believe in Him unconditionally and that He is your Saviour?

What exactly does Jesus' verdict entail? As we saw clearly in the previous passage, death for the believer is not the end of the road, but rather the beginning of a brand new life - one where the horror of death is no

longer a factor. We have seen that death is only the gateway to this wonderful life with Jesus where there is not even sickness, old age or pain anymore, and where sin is totally absent.

Martha answers Jesus with an uncertain "Yes, Lord ..." Yes, she know that one day Lazarus will live, but for now he is dead. But then Martha comes forth with a big surprise when she expresses her unconditional faith in Jesus. This is the most comprehensive creed about Jesus that we find in the entire Gospel of John: "Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which cometh into the world." Can anyone make this clearer? Even the clever scribes who studied the Bible for years and saw all the statements about Jesus over and over again did not realize what this simple, illiterate woman noticed. However, whether Martha understood well what she had just confessed is an open question, because we will see later that she tries to stop Jesus when He

wants to open Lazarus' tomb.

Jesus does not want to go further into the town. He remains outside Bethany. Perhaps he does not approve of the bunch of mourners who are lamenting around Mary. So Martha whispers to Mary that Jesus had come. She tried to slip out unnoticed, but the lamenters follow up behind her to assist her as she cries at the grave. However, that's not where she's headed - her greatest Comfort has arrived, and she's going to fall at His feet. "Lord, if You were here ....." she reproaches Him.

How often do we not seek comfort from Jesus, and then we blame Him: "Lord, if only You had intervened in time ...." I speak from personal experience, because I have done it so often in my life. And then I have to confess to Him later in shame, "Lord, I'm so sorry - I did not realize what You were planning for me." Will we ever learn to trust Jesus unconditionally in all aspects of our lives?

Prayer:

Lord, today I want to ask that You will help me to have full, unconditional trust in You. You are omnipotent - with You nothing is impossible. But I also realize that Your thoughts are much more exalted than mine.

# Death Is Overcome

## John 11: 33-44

May one cry? May you be sad? Because Paul teaches us to always be joyful - to still be able to sing and laugh cheerfully even through the most terrifying situation. So then crying does not fit into the picture anywhere. Not so?

We find Jesus where Martha stands with Him and Mary kneels at His feet. A group of people are already lamenting around them, a sad picture indeed! Then the surprising thing happens, when Jesus' emotions overcome Him and He also weeps. Why would that happen?

I attend funerals regularly, often of people I did not even know. I sometimes help with the audio editing or video broadcasts at funerals. When I let my eyes wander over the people during such a funeral service, I see the sadness on their faces. They have lost someone dear and they are crying. I

especially feel so sorry for the person doing the eulogies. They usually start speaking with courage and confidence, but then the emotions take over and they can hardly get a word out. At that point, everything is usually just one too much for me and I join in and cry heartily with everyone, even though I do not know them at all. It is at such a time that I thank the Lord that I never became a minister, because I am far too emotional. How does he manage not to cry along?

Yes, a man (even a man!) is allowed to cry! For women, it comes naturally! But the question is, why did Jesus weep? Was it because He truly loved Lazarus so much? That's what the Jews thought. No, I do not think so, for Jesus was well aware of the things that were to follow. He knew that He could raise Lazarus and moreover that Lazarus had eternal life and therefore was not really dead. Usually people seek Jesus' sorrow in the short-sightedness of His friends. They knew Him well and Martha had

just confessed that He was the Christ. She believed with all her heart! Yet there was still that uncertainty in their hearts and they just could not see the full picture. Was Jesus grieved because they could not understand in spite of everything?

Maybe we should read a few verses to get a better picture of Jesus' sorrow. He wanted to be taken to Lazarus' tomb. Then all the remarks follow when people see that He is weeping, some of them full of compassion - "Look how much He loved him!" However, there were also the sarcastic remarks: "He could make a blind man see - could he not then have prevented this man from dying?" We read in their remarks hostility, reproach, unbelief. Once again Jesus' heart is filled with sadness and he weeps. So perhaps we should see His sorrow - not about Lazarus, but about the ignorance and sinfulness that He is dealing with here. Jesus must have known for sure that although there were believers among these people who would

definitely be with Him in paradise, most of these people were on their way to eternal damnation! So I see Jesus' sorrow for all who were lost because of their unbelief.

Meanwhile, the weeping procession arrived at the grave. It is most likely the exact same kind of tomb in which Jesus would soon be buried as well. It is a hole carved out of the rock and with a large stone rolled in front of the opening to seal it. Once sealed, such a grave would certainly not be re-opened soon, because of course the smell of the decomposing corpse was unbearable! No wonder Martha protested when Jesus asked the unthinkable that the stone should be rolled away.

Oh Martha! She saw with her own eyes many breathtaking miracles that Jesus performed. She recognized that He was the Son of God, but still it could not penetrate her mind that He was capable of anything - absolutely anything, even raising her brother from the dead! This would of course mean that

Lazarus' body had to be recreated in a certain sense because He had already begun to decompose. But to the Creator of the universe, this was a trifle! Now God's omnipotence had to be revealed to her and everyone else around her!

The smell of death hangs heavy around the group as the stone rolled away. Then Jesus prays that the Father would give him the miracle of life for the sake of those around him. After that, there should be no doubt that Jesus is truly the Son of God. At Jesus' command, Lazarus steps out of the tomb, still wrapped in his own burial cloths.

Jesus is indeed the resurrection and the life. Every mourner who was in Bethany that day had to see it with their own eyes! Today, this is just one of many such miracles that strengthen our faith as believers and just tell us once again that with Jesus nothing but nothing is impossible. Do you believe that? I believe with all my heart!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that I can know today that I worship an Almighty God.

## **Jesus' Execution Planned**

### **John 11: 45-57**

Lazarus' resurrection from the dead had a huge impact on everything that would take place over the next few days. The people who were there all saw what had happened and many of them simply could not help but come to faith in Jesus. The other miracles might still have been explained in some way, but here they saw before their eyes the absolute impossible happen, something that could only come from God! It certainly could not be otherwise, Jesus simply had to be the Messiah, the Son of God!

However, this feeling was not shared by everyone. There was also a group of sceptical men and they ran straight to the Pharisees to share the disturbing news with them. This latest miracle of Jesus made the red lights flicker for them! Great trouble was on the way here if Jesus would continue like this! It could even lead to an uprising!

The Jewish Council, the highest authority in Jewish society, was hastily convened. They consisted of all the political and religious leaders of the community. The decision they would make, therefore, would be made on behalf of the entire Jewish people. We see very clearly how scared these men were, because if there was an uprising, then it would be the end of them. The Romans were very tolerant of the Jews. They could practice their religion as they wished and calmly arrange their cultural affairs. However, they did not tolerate any political instability. Then they intervened with an iron hand! Of course, they also knew the Jews very well and they knew how quickly this nation's mood could flare up. They had been like this all these years and today they are still exactly the same. This was the reason why the Roman troops were deployed in Jerusalem and were always on standby to strike at the slightest sign of rebellion. A mere 30 years later, in 70 AD, the worst happened and Jerusalem was completely destroyed. Their pride, the

temple, had literally disappeared from the face of the earth so that today there is no evidence of it left!

The Jewish Council was therefore not so stressed about the situation for nothing. However, Caiaphas the high priest came up with a solution. One Man had to die for the people so that the nation would not be lost. Caiaphas himself did not quite realize the extent of what he had said. The idea of substitution, where one person dies for the benefit of all the others, he certainly did not mean in the sense in which we understand it today. John explains, however, that God used Caiaphas to prophesy that Jesus would die for the nation. But it would actually spread to the whole world!

It may sound strange to us that God would use an enemy of Jesus to make such a statement. However, as we flip through the history books, we see that He often used total gentiles to accomplish His purpose. This is just another example. At the same time,

however, we must also remember that, although this high priest was opposed to Jesus, he was at that time the most important religious figure and served as the earthly mediator between God and His people. So he spoke as a prophet on behalf of God. God's will was that Jesus would die on behalf of the people and He announced it through the high priest. So if Jesus hangs on the cross, it is because God wanted him there and not because the Jews decided so.

The hourglass was running out. Tension was building up over the greatest event of all time, an event so great that even the calendar was arranged accordingly. Believers as well as unbelievers simply need to take note! The Jews put their heads together and began their final planning to get rid of Jesus forever. However, Jesus escaped their grasping fingers and went to stay with His disciples in Ephraim for a while. But the Passover - Jesus' last Passover as Man on earth was near. People from all over

the country flocked to Jerusalem for this memorable festival. The stage is being prepared for that awful Friday.

Everyone could feel the tension building up. People asked each other if they thought Jesus would come to the feast? Everyone knew that if He made His appearance there, He would not leave there alive again. The Jewish leaders also began to make their final arrangements. People were instructed that if Jesus showed His face, they should be notified immediately so that He could be arrested.

I have read and experienced this history over and over again and every time my heart beats in my throat from tension. Will God's plan work out? I do not want Jesus to suffer so terribly. But each time I just have to realize once again that God's thoughts are so much more exalted than mine - that His planning is perfect and that He knows better. Also in my own life today I must realize that He is still in control, and that I can only rest

on the things He has planned.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that I can realize again again this morning that You hold everything in Your capable hands.

## **Ointment for Jesus' Feet**

### **John 12: 1-11**

The final time has arrived! Jesus and his disciples leave for Bethany, just outside Jerusalem. Now, of course, they are also right in the danger zone where the Jewish leaders are waiting for them. The right moment must now come to capture and execute Him.

Jesus and His disciples are invited to dinner by His dear friends Martha, Mary and Lazarus. They sit around the table, or maybe we should rather say that they are lounging around the table. Martha is, as usual, the one who runs around and serves them. And then, while she is working so diligently, her sister, Mary disappears and re-appears with a marble flask. All eyes are on her. Everyone gasps because you can see that this is a very expensive bottle. What would she want to do with it? She goes straight to Jesus, breaks the neck of the flask and begins to pour all its contents over His feet.

Nard oil is made from the roots of the nard plant that grows in India. This oil is therefore imported from India, and is very expensive. A single drop or two is enough to disperse a delicious fragrance. For Mary, however, it is not enough and the entire contents, a full half litre is used for her Master. The room and the whole house are filled with the heavenly fragrance of Nard!

A deadly silence hangs over the group, no one utters a word. "Does Mary realize what she just did?" Everyone wrestles with their own thoughts. However, Mary is not done yet. She loosens her hair and then begins to use her well-groomed hairdo as a towel to carefully dry Jesus' feet. Now she has everyone speechless! You can literally hear the spectators catch their breath. Such a thing is simply not done!

Hair was very important to women at that time and they went to great lengths to take care of it. Maria's action was therefore considered very, very special, because a

woman would only use her hair in this way to dry a man's feet if he was very special to her - if she was therefore attracted to him. With this she wants to tell the man that she wants to give him her very best. However, it would be very far-fetched to see Mary's action towards Jesus as a sexual attraction. To her, He was her Master for Whom she would do anything.

Judas Iscariot is the first to break the silence. He is a very unhappy man! He measures Mary's action immediately in monetary value, for this expensive oil could rather have been sold. His reasoning is that the money could have been given to the poor. Very noble, indeed! But Judas has a hidden agenda, he was miserly for money!

In those years a Rabbi did not worry about the everyday things like food, money etc. his followers had to take care of this and so of course with Jesus. His disciples had to make sure there was food and other necessities. Judas was the one who handled the

finances, but they suspected that some of the money ended up in his own pocket. This bottle of nard oil made Judas' money-hungry eyes twinkle, because it was worth a whole year's salary!

Did Mary know what was waiting for Jesus? Did she suspect that her Master would be dead a few days later? She would anoint Him with the best she had while He was alive. She worshipped a living Lord! In stark contrast, Nicodemus arrives a week later with a full fifty liters of spices to keep Jesus away in the tomb forever!

Jesus is calm about Mary's action. If Judas wants to reprimand her because she's wasting so much, Jesus' reaction is that Mary had to keep this perfume especially for this day, because it is to anoint Him for His burial. They can give something to the poor again another day, but for now Jesus is the most important One.

For Mary, it was of utmost importance to give her everything for a living Lord. Not only does

she sacrifice very expensive perfume oil, but she also risks her reputation by using her hair. So someone might easily have read something else in her action, but she did not care. She realized that Jesus' time was up and that there might not be another opportunity later.

I think it is very important that we serve Jesus while there is still opportunity for us to do so. So easily we want to say that one day we will sit at His feet, one day after the Second Coming. But it is also important that we throw everything into battle here and now and bring all our praise and glorification to Him, the King of all Kings! Mary was grateful for what Jesus had done for her, and she showed her gratitude in a tangible way. Are you grateful for what Jesus has done for you and still does every day? Then it is only right to thank Him in a tangible way! Not just in a half-hearted way, by giving a few drops of oil to Him, but by giving your all to Him. No sacrifice is too great to give to Jesus!

Prayer:

Lord, I often give so half-heartedly, and my gratitude is so insipid. I want to serve You with everything I have!

# Hosannah, Hosannah!

## John 12: 12-19

The tension is building up to a huge crescendo. Two days after Mary pours the expensive nard oil over Jesus' feet, Jesus and His disciples walk from Bethany to Jerusalem. People come from far and wide for the Passover. Then someone recognizes Jesus, and within minutes it is buzzing among the crowds that meander like a living river the last distance to Jerusalem, that Jesus is also there on his way to the feast. Everyone is happy and excited, because such an event only comes once a year! But this year, it's like something else is gnawing at the mood. Everyone realizes that something very big is going to happen, but no one can put their finger on it.

"There is Jesus!" Within minutes, a large group of people broke away like a giant swarm of commando worms following Jesus. A young donkey is brought closer. As Jesus ascends, the crowd becomes hysterical.

Their chanting echoes across the ravines, echoing so that it can be heard miles away. He rides down the steep slope to the city on the donkey that His disciples had fetched for Him. Everywhere along the way the people are picking palm branches and while waving the branches and singing are gathering around Jesus, the sing with gusto: "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Hosanna is a Hebrew word from Psalm 118: 25 and it means "save us." It is pronounced hosji-a na.

"The King of Israel! The King of Israel!" it rumbles through the crowd, which is still growing at an astonishing rate.

In Zechariah 9: 9, this entry of Jesus on the back of a donkey is literally foretold word for word. The people are very excited! Has the end of Roman domination finally arrived? This crowd definitely thinks so! And yes, there are the small handful who are bitterly concerned but also share in the festive joy.

What will tomorrow yield? Will their Master perhaps be executed? Does this screaming crowd not realize it?

But there is also a group of men who were not participating at all. Furious with rage, they stood aside and deliberated. "Just look what He is doing!" a Pharisee hissed. He hurled angry reproaches at his discouraged colleagues: "See now! You guys have not achieved a thing! Here we have it now - the whole world is now following Him!"

"Yes," grumbled another grumpy "if we do not act quickly now, this thing will turn very ugly! Just think for yourselves: what will the Romans do when they see that a great revolt is brewing here? That will be the end of us! All our hard work of recent years is going to be ruined! Those Romans are going to destroy us!"

"We must get rid of Him immediately, or we'll be in big trouble!" the grumpy men agree.

The words of Zechariah 9: 9 jump from the

pages of the prophecy: "Rejoice, Zion! Rejoice Jerusalem! Your King will come to you. He is just and He is a conqueror, He is humble and rides on a donkey, on the colt of a donkey. "

Did any of the thousands of people, while dancing and singing behind Jesus, remember these words of Zechariah? Only later, when it was all over, did the prophecy begin to make sense to the group of disciples. Now, however, they want to cry because they see their Master riding to His death. Those men are definitely not going to let Him get away again. Yet he rides submissively into the city, as a Lamb lead to slaughter. They do not understand it. How can He so willingly and knowingly ride straight into the trap?

"Hosanna!" shouted the crowd hysterically. "Hosanna! Give us salvation now!" How prophetic are their words! "Hosanna! Hosanna!" it echoes against the city walls that are getting closer. This is exactly what

Jesus is going to do, to bring about salvation! But this is certainly not the kind of salvation that these people expect. This King does not ride on a fiery horse to go to war, as this crowd wants. No, this King rides on a gentle donkey! He brings peace! The salvation and peace they seek can only come by force. Yes, the terrifying force used against Jesus makes one tremble. But He did not answer it by force. When they treat Him in the most cruel way, He answers with love: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

The events there in front of Jerusalem's proud city gates touch my heart, just as it surely shook His disciples. "Could not the Father have just given salvation? Why did Jesus have to suffer so terribly?" He could possibly, but then it would have been cheap and drained. Our redemption came terribly expensive! God's grace is not cheap, and that's why it asks of you and me to live out our gratitude with passion. Jesus was willing

to walk all the way. He was willing to deliberately climb into the pit full of vipers to save us. The frightening thing is that He knew exactly what He was getting Himself into!

Prayer:

Lord, it grieves me greatly, and I get deeply hurt when I think of Your great sacrifice for me. I want to serve You, Lord, with all that is in me, because I am so grateful for what You have done for me, a sinner!

## **The Wheat Grain Dies**

### **John 12: 20-36**

Time was fast approaching the final moments of Jesus' mission on earth.

John tells us that it was no longer just Jews and Samaritans who came to listen to Jesus, but even a Greek who wanted to see Him. When Jesus heard of this, he said to Andrew, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." He had already seen the time of glorification approaching and after that an indescribable gospel explosion would follow that would flood the whole world!

Then Jesus explained to them with an image, what would happen with His death. It's like a grain of wheat that you plant in the ground. That seed grain dies, as it were, but in the process, a brand new, grass-green plant emerges that grows and eventually yields a great harvest. You have probably already planted a seed in the ground and then stood with great anticipation and watched for the

first signs of life to begin to appear. What a happy day, when that ground starts to show a crack, and then, when you look again, the first fragile leaves peek through the crack. Before long there is a large plant that bears fruit. Oh, the wonder of new life!

However, if the seed does not get into the soil, this miracle cannot take place and then there will also be no harvest. The seed must die before new life can take place and produce many new grains of wheat. In the same way, Jesus' death would bring new life and produce fruit in abundance.

What was awaiting Jesus over the next few days was frightening and He was deeply upset! He would rather pray that this should not happen, because the terrible crucifixion events were just too much to endure. The other gospels describe how Jesus wrestled in prayer through the last night in the Garden of Gethsemane and how He literally sweated blood from anguish. How He begged the Father not to proceed. But Jesus realized the

truth about the grain of wheat, that without His death everything would be in vain. It was precisely for this reason that He had humbled Himself to descend to earth from His heavenly glory. He did not come to set an example for us on how to live - He came to pay the ransom.

Now the worst ordeal lay before Him. "Father, glorify Your name!" Jesus prayed in full surrender. He was willing to walk the last step fully - to the very last step!

Suddenly there was a voice from heaven, the voice of God, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." It was like a thunderclap rattling through the gorges and over the mountains. "It's an angel! It's an angel speaking to Him! " the people whispered to each other in amazement.

It only happens on very special occasions that God speaks to people in an audible voice. This was surely the greatest event ever in human history and here God speaks so that everyone there could hear it.

Everyone simply just had to take note of God's glory and of the great act of atonement that was approaching.

Jesus explained to those around him, "This voice did not come for me, but for you." But then He says that with the reconciliation comes judgment. The devil's last hour of great power has arrived. With Jesus' death on the cross, the power of the devil is broken, so that anyone who believes in Jesus would no longer end up in his greedy claws, but would be saved by Jesus. The devil was the ruler here on earth. With Jesus' coming, He entered the realm of the devil's kingdom and came to dethrone him.

Yes, the devil is still here and he still has power. Paul calls him a roaring lion - extremely dangerous! But he can no rule, for his power has been restrained. The only place where he still reigns is where there is impiety, there where people do not want to believe in Jesus.

The question is, is the devil still dangerous to

believers? Let me explain: If a lion is behind bars, you are dead safe and he cannot reach you. However, if you stick your hand through the bars, or if you get too close to his cage, then he can hurt you badly. One simply stays away from those dangerous cats! The devil is exactly the same. If a believer becomes indifferent, he can be hurt badly.

What is the answer? In verse 26 Jesus says, "If anyone desires to serve me, let him follow me." To truly serve Jesus, you must be willing to get up from your armchair and do as Jesus asks of you. Believers are not always willing to make great sacrifices and they often take life very comfortably. However, those who are willing to sacrifice their comfort and serve Jesus fully, experience joy of life that is unprecedented! Paul did so, and joy and gladness flowed from him like a clear fountain. Today, there are many believers who do exactly the same thing and are willing to walk the extra mile for Jesus. Feel free to talk to such a person, and

you will see how he radiates. Let's start today and follow Jesus unconditionally!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I want to follow You with all that is in me. Guide me to follow in Your footsteps, and to live in Your bright Light.

# **The Jews Reject Jesus**

## **John 12: 37-50**

Through the ages, and especially in the early Christian church, there has often been the nagging question: Why did so few Jews finally believe in Jesus? After all, he performed all these miracles before their eyes and even raised people from the dead! They were amazed at everything and the wisdom that flowed from His mouth were far above the human. Why did the Jews never accept Him? Indeed, it was the heathen world that was finally set on fire by Jesus' actions!

Was it simply part of God's plan? We will not know, but one thing is for sure: He knew it would happen! After all, He had foretold it many years before through His prophets. In Isaiah 6: 9,10 we read how the Lord told Isaiah that the people would see and hear these things and yet not see and understand them. And in Isaiah 53: 1 the prophet sighs that the people will not see the power of the

Lord in these events and that they would not believe it!

Oh, there was a small handful who finally believed, a very small percentage of the giant group that sang, "Hosanna! Hosanna!" There were even some Jewish leaders who believed, but so tragically, they believed in secret, because if it came out in public, they would have been banished from the synagogue and society which meant so much to them!

Today we want to say so easily: "But it is so unfair! They are then the people of God! He chose them! "

Is that really unfair? It almost seems today that the Lord has rejected the Jewish people. If that were the case - could we say that the Lord was not just to them? A frightening statement!

Let's take a look at the history books of the Jewish people and then decide for ourselves. It all started already with the ancestors,

Adam, Noah and Abraham, where the miracle of God was spelled out to these men. They had experienced God intensely and if we read carefully, we see that they had often dealt with God personally. He walked with Adam in the garden and talked to him. Abraham saw Him as a human being and even ate with Him and talked with Him. Jacob, the father of the Israelites, even wrestled with Him at the river Jabbok and he saw God sitting on His throne. Moses met Him in person on Mount Sinai. Later, during the exodus, Moses was constantly in conversation with Him in the tent of meeting and the people watched it in amazement. God appeared there in full glory!

What was the reaction of the people? After everything they saw and experienced, they constantly lamented and even worshipped idols. It was a slap in the face of God. When, in spite of their unbelief and rebelliousness, they finally arrived in the Promised Land, they found the most wonderful leaders in

Samuel, David, Elijah, Isaiah and many more, wonderful people who walked with God and taught His people. What did they do? They fought, worshipped idols, killed the prophets and time and time again turned their backs on God!

In short, we can say that the Jewish people experienced Jesus intensely over thousands of years like no other people on earth. Yet they reject Him. But still the grace of the Lord is not exhausted and He sends Jesus down to earth in human form as His messenger. Where to? To this very Jewish people! What do they do with Him? They reject Him and kill Him! Would it be unfair if He decided to reject them? I'm just asking .....

But still God's grace is indescribably great, because even the Jews who rejected Him get another chance. All they had to do was believe in Jesus. He did not come to condemn, but to save. He was therefore willing to forgive and forget even all those terrible sins of theirs from the past, if they

would only believe in Him. By believing in Jesus, you also believe in God, the Almighty, because they are One.

However, Jesus' offer applies not only to the Jewish people, but also to the rest of the world - to you and me. No man's sin is too great to receive forgiveness. If you might think today that eternal life can never be destined for you because of your past, then you are wrong. If Jesus could give even the rebellious Jews a second chance, then you and I can get one too.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for giving me a second chance, and for saving me too, in spite of all my many sins.

# **Jesus Washes Dirty Feet!**

## **John 13: 1-17**

The Gospel of John consists of three sub-sections. Chapters 1-12 deal with Jesus' work on earth, His public ministry. The message that John wanted to bring home in this is that whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life. Today we begin with the second part, chapters 13-17 which deal with the last few hours Jesus had with His disciples before He was taken prisoner. The third part, Chapters 18-20, deals with His crucifixion and what follows.

We now find Jesus with His followers where they enjoy a meal together. Jesus' last hours as a human being have arrived and His intimate circle of men is very important to Him, so He brings them through with them and assures them that He will take care of them forever.

The final step of God's great plan of redemption has arrived. John outlines in a

few words the background of what was about to happen. He tells of Jesus' love for the world that was so infinitely great that He would go to all extremes. In the opposite pole, the devil grins, trying hard to thwart God's plan. In the process, however, he plays directly into God's hand! John also makes it very clear that Jesus comes from God, so He is the One with all the power and glory!

The scene is a typical Oriental meal, where everyone lounges around the table. So you can imagine that one's feet were uncomfortably close to the other's face. Their open leather sandals did not keep the dirt from the dusty streets off their feet, so it was essential that guests at the table's feet be washed first. It was the slave's creepy task but in the absence of one, the person with the very lowest status was given the privilege of completing this unpleasant task - usually the woman in the house.

So when Jesus, their Teacher, wraps a towel

around His body and takes the wash-basin, the men gasp for breath! This is simply not done! Reluctantly and surely extremely uncomfortable, the men present their feet. But Peter refuses stubbornly: "Never in eternity!"

Oh dear! Peter was always obstinate! This time he saw how his Master was humiliated to play slave and Peter wanted no part in his Rabbi's humiliation. This meant that Jesus first had to explain again patiently so that Peter could understand. Suddenly a light (a very small light!) came on for Peter. He decided that as Jesus wanted to wash, then He could please wash his whole body! And again, Jesus had to explain very clearly that it was not necessary.

Jesus' action demonstrated that we, His followers' value systems are totally different from those of the world. In fact, that day He completely overthrew our value systems! God's love and power lie precisely in sacrifice and humility. Here He, the Son of God,

Creator of the universe and Supreme Ruler came to demonstrate it practically by becoming a Slave himself and doing the most humble of all works!

What did Jesus want to say to His followers that day?

Two thoughts emerge. Firstly, that the washing of feet was symbolic of our filthy sinful past being washed clean by Jesus. "If I do not wash you, you would not have part of Me," Jesus told Peter. In order to have any part of Jesus, we must allow Him to wash away our sins. How does He do this? He bore the full punishment for our sins with His crucifixion on Calvary. We must accept this gift of forgiveness and make it our own, then we are automatically washed clean.

Secondly, we must follow Jesus' example. If He, who is so exalted above us, was willing to do the most humble work, we must also be willing to be the least. It is not easy! At the time when Adriaan Vlok washed Desmond Tutu's feet at the time, the world laughed at

him and mocked him. It was a bitterly humiliating symbolic act. But in doing so, he healed many raw wounds of domination and bossiness.

We must realize very clearly that your life changes drastically the day you receive Jesus' forgiveness and deliverance. However, that's just the beginning. After this, you must follow Jesus' example - you cannot just sit back and relax! Jesus therefore demonstrates very clearly that one of the ways to follow Him is to also do that same sacrificial service to one another as He did. Yes, we all want to be leaders and do the things that are noble and spectacular. However, few believers are willing to do the "dirty work" - the things that are humiliating to do. Sitting on a park bench next to a dirty, smelly beggar and just chatting is very humiliating for me. How far are you and I willing to go so that Jesus, the King, may be glorified?

Prayer:

Lord, I confess that I still cling to my dignity so tightly. Please help me to follow Your wonderful example.

# **Betrayal! Betrayal!**

## **John 13: 18-30**

The night was filled with suspense and drama. The air is so thick that you can cut it with a knife! First the strange washing of feet and Peter's harsh reaction to it. And now, when it finally calms down around the dinner table, Jesus detonates a bomb again. One of this intimate group that has shared every moment with Him for the past three years is going to stab Him in the back – betray Him!

The twelve have no idea what Jesus is talking about. They do not suspect a single one of their group, not even Judas. We so want to accuse Judas Iscariot of being a bad person. However, if we look at the disciples' reaction, we see that he was no different from the others. He participated in all the activities. In fact, he had a big responsibility, because he had to deal with their finances. Yes, they had such a vague suspicion that he might have long fingers, but no one could ever prove it. Judas Iscariot was an ordinary

disciple who prayed with John, Peter and the others and sat at Jesus' feet and learned.

However, Jesus knew what was brewing deep in Judas' heart. Outwardly he never showed it, but deep down he was very unhappy. Was it perhaps that he, like so many other followers of Jesus, saw Him as the One who would deliver them from the yoke of the Romans? Many theologians believe that this was the case. When he saw that this would not happen, he may have become bitter. However, we can only guess what went wrong in Judas' life. But while they were lounging around the table, Judas secretly already had all his plans in order. And Jesus knew it!

"I am telling you the truth, one of you is going to betray me!" Jesus is extremely upset when He makes this shock announcement. So much love has gone into His ministry! With so much love and compassion, He trained these twelve men to tell the world about God's grace! However, this betrayal was part

of God's counsel plan and no matter how heart-rending it was, Jesus accepted it.

These guys were totally devastated! Surely there could not be a traitor in their midst? Then Peter nudges John: "Ask Jesus what does He mean!"

John had the place of honour next to Jesus at the table. "Master, who is it?"

"The one to whom I give a piece of bread." With these shocking words Jesus reaches out to Judas and gives him the bread. "What you want to do, you must do very quickly!"

Judas got up summarily and walked out into the night.

John describes that the devil entered Judas Iscariot, the moment Jesus handed him the piece of bread. This leaves us with a lot of awkward questions - questions to which there are no easy answers. Questions like, did God send the devil into Judas' life?

The answer is simply: "NO!" We can really

only speculate, but to me it seems as if Jesus chose Judas as one of the group, precisely because He knew that Judas would never be truly loyal. Judas' Messianic expectation was a political motive and God needed exactly such a person to betray Jesus. Judas may have shown his true colours a long time ago, but for God the time was not yet right, so He prevents the devil so that he does not overwhelm Judas too soon. At exactly the right moment, God allows the devil to exert his final influence on Judas!

Another question often asked is whether Judas ever had a choice? Could he not have made the right choice? Was he merely a pawn in God's hand? No, I certainly do not believe that Judas was merely a pawn who had to do as God wanted. He had a choice and he made the wrong decision! However, God knew in advance what Judas' choice would be and that is why Judas was chosen as a disciple and not someone else.

Stories circulated that Judas was actually the

hero in the story and that he was a "good" man who had to carry out God's command to betray Jesus. That is why Judas must be given a place of honour! That is certainly not what the Bible teaches us. In the first place we see that the devil had an influence over him. Also, it was partly greed for money that drove him to this act. He earned thirty pieces of silver for this!

What do we learn today from this event? I think the most important thing is that we can know that God is in control, even through the worst situations. He allows the devil and Judas to do their evil work so that His great plan of counsel would work out flawlessly. We also learn that He is omniscient and that He even knows the future. So when things seem lost to us, it is not because God has lost control, but simply because there is a greater purpose behind things that are happening. He allows certain things to happen because it is in His plan of counsel. And no, it's definitely not God doing the bad

things! Those things are the work of the devil!

Prayer:

Thank you Lord, that I can realize again today that You are in full control, and that I can rest in it and still place my full trust in You.

## **Do You Love ME?**

### **John 13: 31-38**

Mother Theresa is seen by the world as an icon of service. She was honoured with a Nobel Prize award - the highest honour anyone can receive. However, if we look at her life, we actually see a dull existence of hard work and hardship. She dealt daily with the poorest of the poor. Her skinny, wrinkled face was definitely not that of a movie star. In her life there was absolutely no glory!

When Jesus tells His disciples that His time of glorification has come, then we must also put this glory into perspective. In human terms we see a glorification as splendour and glory and all that shines. At a gala evening, everyone is dressed up in the most beautiful and expensive clothes, and the gems sparkle like the stars. Only beautiful things are bestowed upon the glorified, though sometimes they are rotten within. And the crown they receive may look beautiful and spell glory, but it is also perishable and

hollow from within.

Jesus' glorification works completely differently: A night of anguish in Gethsemane, where He sweats blood and wrestles with God, leads to His glorification. Then follows the despicable act of betrayal by one of His confidants. He is captured and dragged to court where false testimony is thrown before Him. The friend on whom His hope was built to lead the emissaries denies Him in His greatest hour of need.

Yes, that was only the beginning of Jesus' glorification! However, it would get much worse! He was mocked and they spat on him and beat him. The climax of Jesus' glorification would come when the soldiers slammed rough nails through Him against the wooden cross, where He had to hang as the mockery of the whole world, in a place meant only for the worst of criminals. Is that glorification?

Not only were these gruesome events a glorification for Jesus, but also for God

Almighty. For in this the greatest act of love of all time takes shape. What father would be willing to sacrifice his only son, the one he loves, in a cruel way so that bad people could be saved? Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only son Isaac, but it was for God, and it was very noble. Yet he never committed the act. So when God sends His only Son, the One He loves, for slaughter to be sacrificed so that bad people who are His enemies can be saved, then He alone can be crowned with the highest honour and glorification ever possible. And Jesus, who voluntarily submits Himself to this horrible torture and humiliation, must simply be glorified and honoured for this with the highest honour imaginable. If Mother Theresa could get a Nobel Prize - how much more Jesus!

Everything actually comes down to love. It was the greatest act of love of all times! Jesus also connects this act of love to a new commandment that He gives to the disciples

on that frightening night: "You must love one another." We might want to say that this is an old commandment from the Old Testament, that we should love God and our neighbour as ourselves. But the love that Jesus is talking about here is much deeper than that. "You must also love one another as I have loved you!" How much does Jesus love them (us)? So much so, that He was willing to face the horror of the cross for them (and us). How much do you and I love our fellow-believer? So much so that we will undergo even the worst torture for him?

This kind of love does not really need even the Ten Commandments, because automatically you will not take another person's property, kill him or hurt him and it will be second nature not to say anything bad about him. But this love goes even much deeper, because the kind of love that Jesus is talking about here is expressed in Paul's poem about love in 1 Corinthians 13.

We say very easily that we love Jesus so

much that we are willing to do anything for Him or our fellow-believer and fellow-human being. In theory it's easy, but in practice it's a whole different story! Yes, even the great old Peter, the Rock, the one with the keys to the Kingdom, had to figure it out the hard way. "I will lay down my life for You!" He says confidently to Jesus. But then Jesus must bring him down to earth hard, because before that sad night would be over, the very same Peter would deny Jesus no less than three times. "I will lay down my life for You!" Really?

Peter really loved Jesus. His actions did not really show it and he fell hard! Yet Jesus still loved him and after Jesus' ascension He picked Peter up and made him strong through the Holy Spirit. The question to each of us is whether I truly love Jesus? How big and strong is my love for Him and how big is my love for my fellow-believer?

Prayer:

Lord, my love for You and my fellow-man

falls so far short. Lift me up, please Lord.

# Jesus and the Father are One

## John 14: 1-14

Jesus' disciples had just heard the most disturbing things, first that one of them would betray Him and then Peter must also hear that he would deny his Master no less than three times that same night. But then came Jesus' wonderful words of comfort: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in Me ". This comfort comes when they face the biggest crisis of their lives! When you and I go through the darkest depths today, Jesus also says to me: "Do not be upset, trust Me!" Then I do not have to worry about anything, because everything is in His capable hands, He will take care of everything!

Next, Jesus paints for the disciples a picture of where He is going. However, He does this with a purpose, to go and prepare a place for them in heaven for the day when He will come to fetch His children. This is what Jesus is going to do now and He will soon be

going to Above to get everything ready.

In this late stage of Jesus' ministry, we still see the hopeless ignorance of the men with him. "Lord, we do not know where You are going; how then can we know the way?" Thomas whines. Did he not listen? Didn't Jesus spell it out for them numerous times already? And still they do not understand at all!

Then Jesus comes with probably the most famous of His statements: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life". Some people want to translate it as Jesus being the true path to life. But that would not do justice to the full scope of this statement, for it goes much deeper than just the fact that life can be attained by Jesus. The focus should be on Jesus alone, and that those wonderful things be attributed to Him - that He is the only Way; that He is the Truth; that He is the only Source of life. Once we come to Jesus, we first truly discover what truth is, and then we experience true life, as only Jesus can give it.

And if anyone thinks that he can reach God through a way other than Jesus, then he is making a very big mistake. You can only know God if you know Jesus, because He and the Father are one. This unity consists in the fact that Jesus reflects everything that is in the Father. So if the Father were present here personally, He would have done exactly the same thing that Jesus does.

The problem is that God is so almighty, exalted and glorious, that His glory would scorch man in the twinkling of an eye. Jesus was therefore sent as His representative so that we could communicate with God without being exposed to His magnificence. When Jesus came to earth as a human, it was not the first time that He acted as a Representative - He had already done so numerous times in Old Testament times. The best known of these is His conversations with Abraham, Moses and Elijah. We read, for example, in Exodus 3: 1-17 that "the angel of the Lord" appeared to Moses in the burning

bush. The Angel of the Lord is, of course, Jesus, the Son of God. As the conversation progresses, we realize that it is God who is talking directly to Moses. Jesus speaks to him here as if He is the Father. What is happening here is that Jesus, as the Father's Representative, is speaking to Moses on His behalf, because Moses would never have been able to survive the Father's presence. When the conversation ends, Jesus tells Moses to tell the people that YHWH (God) has sent him.

When Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father, he clearly does not know what he is asking for. "I have been with you for such a long time, and have you not known Me, Philip?" He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

So those disciples very clearly did not realize how close they really were to the Father and that they were busy with the Father's direct Representative all the time. Exactly the same goes for me and you today. The fact is that

Jesus in His omnipresence is also here with you and me and that He is present in everything we do and in our conversations. As Representative of the Father, He is indescribably great and glorious and powerful. With how much disrespect is He often treated? And here I am not talking about unbelievers, but specifically believers, who often treat the Lord Jesus as a kind of playmate. He is often ridiculed. Yes, the Father is usually treated with great respect, but what we do to Jesus, we also do to the Father, because they are ONE.

Let's always remember Who we're actually dealing with. Yes, Jesus is accessible to us and we can talk to Him at any time. On top of that, He is always there for us. We can share with Him all our burdens, needs, joys and deepest heart secrets with Him. But at the same time, we must not forget for one single moment that He is God Almighty, and that He is the Father's Representative. Let us treat Him with the respect with which Someone

like Him should be treated. Let's give Him all the glory!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I worship You, for You are God Almighty, Creator of the universe – my Saviour!

# **The Spirit Within You**

## **John 14: 15-31**

Jesus thoroughly prepared His disciples for the fact that He was leaving and the depression weighed heavily on their hearts. But then He comforts by saying that He will ask the Father to send them another Paraclete (Parakletos). The 1983 translation uses the word: "Intercessor."

This word, Parakletos is actually very difficult to translate, because we do not really have a similar word in Afrikaans. But let me try to explain: at that time only a few rich people could afford an education, consequently the vast majority of society knew absolutely nothing about the laws. So a benefactor was appointed from the rich ranks who could teach the poor people of these things that were expected of them, support them and to assist them in, for example, court cases. This benefactor was called the "Parakletos". So when Jesus comes to introduce the Holy Spirit to the disciples, He calls Him a

"Parakletos".

It is very important that we know exactly Who and What the Holy Spirit is. We can learn from what Jesus comes here to tell His disciples about Him as well as what we also read about Him from the Old Testament.

In the first place, the Holy Spirit is not only a power of God, but He is a Person. In verse 17 Jesus says: "He is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because the world does not see Him nor know Him. But you know him, because he lives with you and will be in you." Here the Holy Spirit is very clearly referred to as a Person.

Secondly, we need to know that the Holy Spirit is God-Triune with the Father and the Son. From this passage we see that He comes from the Father. in Genesis 1: 2 He is referred to as the Spirit of God. In John 14:23 Jesus says: "We will come to him ...", the "We" referring to Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, we see that the Holy Spirit is not for

everyone. In the Old Testament we see that it was only very special people who had the privilege of having the Holy Spirit in their lives. We always read of a great figure: "The Spirit of God came upon him." Everything would change very drastically with Pentecost, when Jesus "pours out" the Spirit on believers. Now these are no longer special individuals, but all believers. But there is still a limit: ONLY believers will receive the Spirit! He is therefore not meant for the unbelieving world. So when an unbeliever tells you that he has the Holy Spirit in him, it is a lie! In John 14:17 Jesus unequivocally declares that the world cannot receive Him!

Fourthly, Jesus teaches us in verse 26 that the Holy Spirit speaks to us the "Parakletos": "The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you in all things and remind you of all the things that I told you."

How does He do this? No, He does not speak audibly, but in your heart. An example

of this is through the Bible. To the unbeliever, the Bible is a dead book. For the believer, however, it is the Word of God, because when you read it with a praying heart and an open mind, the Holy Spirit speaks to you through what you read. You suddenly see something in a totally different light than you saw before and then you know that the Spirit has now spoken directly to you. How do I know? It is often just an indescribable "feeling" of peace or bliss that comes over your mind. When I write the daily passages, it is only that peaceful knowing that comes over my heart that tells me that I am now writing what the Holy Spirit wants me to write. It sometimes happens that I write something that leaves a question mark in my heart - an uncertainty. Then I go back to that passage and change it, because then I know that this is not what the Spirit wanted me to write.

In the fifth place, we see that the Holy Spirit does not just dwell in you temporarily for a short time and then leave again. On the

contrary, in verse 16 Jesus says, "... so that he may be with you forever." He comes to dwell in you the day you make a choice for Jesus. That day He comes to fill your life. The question I have often heard is why can the voice of the Spirit become silent in my life? Maybe I should explain it with an image that Rev. Dana Minnaar used at the time, that your life is like a bucket full of stones, where the stones depict sin. When Jesus comes into my life, my bucket is filled with the Holy Spirit. It is like an everlasting stream flowing in. However, the stones of sin are the cause for there not being much room in my life for Him. However, the more of these stones I throw out, the more room there is for Him and the more clearly I can hear His voice. What are these sin stones? Sin is not doing the will of God. It is therefore not only physical sins, but also, for example, not talking to Him enough or learning from Him enough.

In short, we can say that the closer I live to

God, the more I will experience the Holy Spirit in my life and the more I will experience God's complete peace and joy in my life.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You that Your Holy Spirit is also part of my life.

# The Vine

## John 15: 1-8

The fruit of the vine played a very important role in Jesus' ministry on earth. Time and time again it is used to emphasize God's omnipotence or to bring home some truth or to serve as a symbolism. You will still remember that Jesus' first great miracle was to make wine from water. Here He provides the fruit of the vine in abundance and quality from nothing! During the last meal with His disciples, wine becomes the symbolism of His precious blood, shed so that the believers can live.

And now, a few hours before He is to be imprisoned, Jesus uses the image of grape farming to show the interaction between God and the believers.

In the most beautiful Cape you are often amazed at a farmer's vineyard on a tiny piece of land, with even a wine cellar somewhere. How is it possible that so little can produce

so much? In the Free State, the maize fields often extend far beyond the horizon and then the poor farmer still suffers miserably. It is absolutely amazing how a single vine can produce a large bunch of grapes! But there are certain conditions that must be met for such a good production! And it is precisely these conditions that Jesus spells out, because what applies to the vineyard also applies to the believer.

The first truth that we must realize very thoroughly is that there are three elements without which a vineyard cannot exist at all. The first is the vine. Without that vine there is no fruit, shoots or life. The second is the shoots, the stems on which the grape seeds grow. The third, very important element is the grape farmer, because without his intensive attention the vineyard will rank so wildly that there will be no energy left for fruit.

In the image that Jesus uses, He introduces Himself as the Vine - the Source of life. The Father is presented as the Boer who

maintains everything. The believers are seen as the shoots. Now we must realize very well that the shoots on a vine are of utmost importance, because without shoots there will be no fruit. If you look closely at a vine, you will also notice that there is not a main shoot that carries all the grapes and a bunch of smaller shoots that just support or grow together. No, all the shoots are equally important and all bear fruit. If we apply it to the church, then it is not the pastor who has to bear all the fruit and the congregation only supports. Everyone has an equally big task.

Jesus says a frightening thing about the shoots that do nothing. They get cut off because they are worthless! What exactly does this mean? Does this mean that believers who do not bring their side will be expelled from the Kingdom? In verse 6 Jesus says that such shoots are even burned! Will someone who once believed in Jesus suddenly be lost? No, I do not think that is the intention. After all, Jesus says in John

10:28 that no one will snatch a believer out of His hand!

However, there are many people who gather around the Vine under the banner of the Christian faith. They even come to church and often take an active part in congregational activities. However, they have never taken that step to accept Jesus' salvation. I know - I was there myself! It is they of whom Jesus says will be cut off and burned. Terrifying! Do not let yourself be such a shoot .....

But the important part is, that what happens to the true shoots. If you look at what a vine looks like shortly before the growing season, you wonder if a single grape can ever grow on such a plant. It's just the bare stem and wherever there were lush shoots last season, there are now only stumps - pruned bare! And then the miracle happens: within a short time the shoots begin to bud and spread to form a lush green bush, loaded with juicy grapes. That pruning process is of utmost

importance to stimulate new growth and fruit. The more drastic the pruning, the better the fruit.

In the life of the believer, this is also a very important principle. The Father often prunes us very drastically and it sometimes hurts bitterly. The results however, are that we are flourishing and growing spiritually and that we can bear fruit. Often we go through such a pruning process and then we want to shout it out: "Lord, that's enough now!" But we must realize that He is the Farmer who knows better than us and He will stop pruning when He is satisfied.

Another very important aspect is that a shoot cannot grow apart from the vine. It is totally dependent on it, because the life juice flows out of the vine to enable the shoot to bear fruit. Likewise, we are totally dependent on Jesus. I must abide in Him in order to survive, spiritually as well as physically. However, he also remains in me. He is the One whose "life juice" flows through my veins

and the One who gives the fruit in my life. Without Him I am totally lost and absolutely worthless.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that I can be a shoot from Your vine. Please give me the strength to survive the pruning process so that I can bear much fruit for You!

## **Abide in ME**

### **John 15: 1-17**

In the previous passage Jesus used the image of the vine. "Abide in Me," Jesus pleaded. We have seen the juice of life burst forth through the branches, and give life in abundance. The juice gives unprecedented growth and it lets the shoot produce delicious, syrupy sweet, juicy grapes. The branches (now believers) that remain in Jesus are anchored to the Vine. It is not only eternal life that is at stake now, but a spiritual life that is bubbling and growing and bearing fruit. The reason is that Jesus makes the "juice of life" rush through your veins, just like in the Cape vineyard.

What is the purpose behind it all? So that the Father may be glorified through this! This is how we read in John 15: 8.

Jesus has said on several occasions that the Father loves Him and it is very important to know that. Now He compares the Father's

love for Him with His love for us. He loves His disciples just as much as the Father loves Him. Of course, this also applies to you and me! This is a very big love!

However, Jesus also asks something of us - it should never be a one-sided love! The question has often been asked, how do I prove my love for Jesus? Here He personally gives that answer in very simple language. He begins by explaining that He is certainly not asking anything of us that is impossible. He himself came to set the example when He came to carry out the commands of the Father as proof that He also loves the Father. In the same way, we must respond to Jesus' love by loving Him as well. The proof of our love for Him is to follow His example and carry out His commands. Note that the instructions we receive from Jesus are not even nearly as difficult as the instructions He received from the Father!

What is Jesus' command to us? It's a terribly difficult one: "You must love one another."

Am I being funny when I say that it's very difficult? No, because it's so natural to act unlovingly. It takes effort and self-control to love one another under all circumstances, especially when someone is in a crisis. It's so easy to slander that person. You are literally killing him with your words. It's murder! Love is to not say anything that might hurt someone else but rather act positively towards that person and try to help.

To carry out Jesus' command means to think love, to feel love, to do love, to live love! Love should be the total guideline of your life. Did not Jesus live exactly like that? What a wonderful example to follow!

It still seems to me that two norms are set regarding the living out of our love. In the first place there is the love described in the law, that I should love my neighbour as I love myself. This is the least the Lord expects of me. But the love that Jesus describes here is a much more intimate and intense love. It's the bond of love between fellow-believers.

After all, you're going to love your own brother or sister a lot more than a stranger, are you not? Well, in Jesus, all believers are brothers and sisters. So these are real close-knit ties that bind us together.

What does such love entail? Paul spelt this out very clearly in 1 Cor 13, where he says, among other things, that love is patient and kind, not boastful, envious, light-hearted or conceited. Indecency and self-interest are two things that do not appear in love's dictionary, not to mention keeping track of wrong doings. If you have Jesus' love in you, you will not rejoice in injustice, but rather rejoice when the truth triumphs.

But once again we must realize, as I have already mentioned above, that everything is ultimately primarily about the Father and that He is also glorified in the living out of our love. Think of it this way: if two brothers were to fight, who would be hurt the most? Their parents are hurt by their headbutting! It's they who suffer the most from the brothers'

disagreement. On the other hand, have you ever heard how a father can brag when he tells about his children who love each other so much? A father wants to burst with pride when his children will do anything to protect each other! There is nothing in life that gives him more pleasure!

God is our Father, and we make Him happy in exactly the same way when we live out our love practically and in a very tangible way towards our brothers and sisters in the faith. Love for our fellow-man, and especially for our fellow-believers, is an integral part of our love for God. If we do not love one another, living out our love for God is useless.

Jesus closes this pericope by returning to the thought of the vine. The disciples (and this includes us) were appointed to go out and bear fruit. Like the deliciously sweet, juicy grapes on the vine shoots, so must our love be for one another, like sweet, juicy fruit. But this is not just a request from Jesus - it is a command! "I command you," Jesus says,

"You must love one another!" (v. 17)

Prayer:

Lord, I am deeply guilty before You this morning, because my love for my fellow-believers is but half-hearted. Please help me to love them unconditionally!

## **Witness Despite Prosecution**

### **John 15:18 - 16: 4**

Being a Christian is not for sissies! I already realized this truth when I was still in school. For a start, I was excluded from the "big fun", because I was not impious. I was an "exemplary" guy, although not quite an outspoken believer. At that time I had not yet met Jesus, but my Christian upbringing played a big role. Actually, I was neither fish nor flesh, because I was somewhere between the world and the faith. However, I do remember two brothers who were outspoken Christians. Their father was a minister and they lived out their faith in school. The two poor guys were outcasts! They were mocked and no one wanted anything to do with them. They were fanatical with their religion, at least so we believed. Yes, even I joined the mockery! Today I feel guilty about it, because now I know they never raved about it. They simply lived out their faith and I admire them that in the cruel

world of the child they still clung to their values!

In Jesus' last conversation with His disciples before He is executed, He prepares them for the terror that would await them. For the past three years, they have had a very protected life with Him. Now, however, the time had come for them to go and face the world up front and it would certainly not be easy. They have become accustomed to large enthusiastic crowds of people running after them. Now comes the disillusionment that the world would hate them - so Jesus says. But they should not lose heart, because Jesus had already experienced this several times. After all, the Pharisees hated Him with a passion! Within the next few hours, the disciples would have to face the full extent of this hatred in horror. They had to think about it in such a way that if the world loved them, there would be a huge mistake! Then they would be the property of the impious world. They also always had to remember that they

were servants of their Master, Jesus and a servant cannot expect to receive preferential treatment while his Master is being persecuted? He is not more important than his Master, is he?

What applied to the disciples also applies to all believers and that includes you and me today. Jesus is always much more important than us! We do not stand apart from Him, because as believers we have accepted Him as our Lord and Master. If He were to be persecuted by the world, we must expect the same!

However, we must remember that this kind of persecution is something totally different from the pruning process we are going through, which we talked about in the previous two daily pieces. That refining is something the Lord does to us to make us spiritually strong and fit, almost like sweating in the gym. However, what Jesus is talking about here is something completely different. It has to do with the hatred that the devil has for any

property of God. Actually, this whole onslaught is aimed at God, but the devil does this to us because we are God's property and He is trying to reach God through us!

The question now, however, is that if the world is so hostile to us, should we not rather isolate ourselves in a monastery and lead a protected life where we can praise and worship God in peace all day long? No, very definitely not! In verses 26 and 27 we read that Jesus sends us into this cruel world to testify of Him. If we do not testify, how is the church going to come into being? How will the church survive? It will pine away and wither! How did the church come into being in the first place? These disciples did exactly what Jesus asked and they went to testify. And everyone that came to faith proceeded to testify further, so that many of the people who had first joined the enemy, the devil, came to faith.

Of course, they did not go out empty handed! They had the Holy Spirit to guide them in

their testimony. You and I still have the Holy Spirit to guide us in our testimony today!

However, if you think it was easy to testify at that time, then you are making a big mistake. These believers were expelled from the synagogues and society. They were put in jail and even killed because what they did was seen as blasphemous. We have it very easy here in South Africa, because a believer does not get much opposition, except when he may start to testify and make worldly people feel guilty. However, there are many other countries where believers today are horribly persecuted and where they are even killed if they dare to testify!

Today Jesus wants to say to you and me: Do not be afraid to testify about Him. Yes, it's not easy and I can even expect to be laughed at, even cursed. But then remember, that Jesus went through exactly the same and many more for you and me. Why then will we not do it also for Him?

Prayer:

Lord, please give me the courage and will  
and strength today to be able to testify of  
You.

# **The Work of the Holy Spirit**

## **John 16: 5-15**

It seems that the disciples did not yet understand Jesus' departure. But they were too scared to ask Him about it, because maybe they would just get an answer they might not want. Yes, they realized that the writing was on the wall, and that Jesus would certainly be executed. If they only knew what this execution would be like - the horror of it, then they might have chosen to run away. But the mere thought of Jesus leaving them already put a strain on their hearts. It was the whole uncertainty surrounding it all.

Jesus comforts them by explaining that His departure would be to their advantage. Of course, they did not understand it at all and Jesus did not even try to explain it, because at that point it would not have made sense to them. Only later would they see the light and they would start to see the whole picture. But first something else had to happen to them. Jesus had to give them the Parakletos, the

Mediator before they would truly understand.

What would the Mediator do? Jesus mentions three very important matters here. First, the Mediator had to expose the sins of the world. What is sin? It is not doing the will of God. We may want to compile lists of sins: dancing, smoking, drinking, gambling, etc. But no, that's not what this is about. What is the greatest sin of all - the sin that will definitely keep you from heaven? Not to believe in Jesus! This is the core of all sin, because without faith in Jesus you are in the power of the devil and then the most heinous deeds are possible. Faith in Jesus brings a whole new perspective to one's life. The question is, how will Mediator expose the sins of the world and what methods will He use? The answer is very simple, through the testimony and proclamation of believers! God uses people (believers) to proclaim His Word and trumpet forth to the world that Jesus is the only Way and that without Him you stand before God in sin.

Secondly, Jesus says that Intercession will prove that the law is on Jesus' side. After Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, everything could have simply disappeared into oblivion, like another Martyr who sadly came to His end. However, this did not happen because the Holy Spirit used people like Peter and John to trumpet out to the world who Jesus really is. He is not just a martyr, but truly God! The task of the Holy Spirit was to make it clear that all the things that happened could only be explained in one single way, that none of this could happen without God's holy intervention. Everything about Jesus is real and true.

The third great task of the Holy Spirit is to convince the world of the judgment to come. How do you convince an unbeliever of the judgment and that he is under the judgment? I think most unbelievers are already living in fear and trembling for what awaits! Everyone knows what hell means, and even if someone tells you that he does not believe in

hell, he secretly carries the fear in his heart:  
Just say now .....

Yes, the judgment has already begun with Jesus' coming. The ruler of the world (the devil) has already been condemned! He has already lost his position of power and the final punishment is already his fate. Any unbeliever is walking the exact same path. For the devil there is no more hope, but for the unbeliever there is still hope. If only he would allow the Advocate to lead Him to Jesus.

But the work of intercession is not just focused on the world. The Holy Spirit will also be very actively involved in the life of every believer. It is He who will lead the believer into the truth. It means that He leads you and me to live according to the will of God. We must remember that when John wrote this gospel, there was not yet a Bible like we have today. Then it was of utmost importance that the congregation would listen to the whispering of the Holy Spirit. Today we

are so wonderfully privileged to have the Bible as our guide. But still it is the Spirit who speaks to us through the Bible and guides our lives.

What does the Spirit preach to us? He preaches Jesus! The main purpose of the Holy Spirit is not to testify about Himself, but about Jesus. He glorifies Jesus in our lives. He proclaims to us the omnipotence, the glory and the greatness of Jesus. I think you will agree with me that He has managed this wonderfully from everything we have dealt with so far from this Gospel of John alone. Do you still remember the very first chapters that dealt with Jesus as Creator of the universe, and all the glory that came with it? It was the work of the Holy Spirit that lead John to convey these miracles to us. How glorious is Jesus not glorified by this!

Prayer:

Thank you Jesus, for giving me the Holy Spirit, and that I may learn from Him every day about You!

## **From Sadness to Joy**

### **John 16: 16-24**

People claim that a man does not experience birth pains. This is pure nonsense! I still remember like yesterday, that day, 47 years ago, when my and my Mosbolletjie's firstborn was born. At first there was the excitement that the day had finally arrived, but then the birth pains began. I do not know which of us experienced the most anxiety - would we ever arrive at the clinic on time? With each contraction the cold sweat broke out on my face from sheer anguish. Long before it was really necessary, I had already done my precious delivery at the clinic. And then the painful wait began - minutes crept past painstakingly slow and felt like hours. With each cramp, I cringed in pain for my darling. I tried to make her pain less, but I felt so powerless!

And then, finally, the moment arrived, and she was admitted to the theater. And then the real nightmare began! It felt like my

insides were being ripped out, every time she screamed with terrible pain. Anxiety gripped my heart when I saw the veins bulge in her face and she turned blood red. “Does the doctor ever know what he is doing? Suppose my precious Mosbolletjie has a stroke - I can see how frightening her blood pressure rises, every time she has to push! So many women die during childbirth - I do not want to lose her now!” The anxious thoughts ground through my mind and the fear wanted to devour me!

Then suddenly everything was over and our firstborn made the most beautiful sound one's ears have ever heard - that first scream of indignation because he had been treated so inappropriately! Blue, swollen and ugly, he was wrapped in a cloth and given to Mom. Our joy knew no bounds! The moments just before were still anxiety, were now unprecedented joy. In my Mosbolletjie's arms lay the perfect little human being and my smile was only hindered by my ears that

were in the way!

Jesus explains to His disciples that it is only a short time before they will see Him again. But it will be short-lived, for soon He will be back again, but this time only temporarily before He leaves for His Father. Jesus prepares them for the trauma they will go through in the following days. He compares it to the terrible pain a woman goes through during the birth of a baby.

What a wonderful comparison this is! Yes, indeed, it is He, Jesus, who physically experienced all the pain and had to go through the process. It was His life that was at stake, but the disciples had to face all these things with anguish that gripped their hearts.

Sometimes it just so happens that a father can no longer handle it and then he runs away! Similarly, Peter could no longer handle it and also chose to run away, saying that he did not know who this Jesus was at all. He no longer wanted to witness the terrible torture. I

think those handful of men and women who stubbornly clung to Jesus to the bitter end experienced every moment of His torture, mockery, and crucifixion with Him. The anxiety tore at their hearts. Their sorrow knew no bounds when they finally had to take Him down from the cross and carry him to the grave, to be laid to rest forever. Now there was no one left to even perform a miracle to raise Him like His friend Lazarus. It was finally over! All their dreams were destroyed. They were terrably afraid, because now it was their turn to be persecuted like their beloved Master!

The pitch black Sabbath had come - a Sabbath in which they sat in sackcloth and ashes!

Then that Sunday morning dawned. Firstly the shock when they find an empty grave. But then the news begins to come in from all directions: Jesus is alive! Their Master has risen from the dead! Someone saw Him here and two men saw Him somewhere else

again. He had dinner with two men in Emmaus. And then the exuberant joy when He suddenly stood between them and talked to them!

Only then do they realize the meaning of it all. When Jesus ascends to heaven a while later, it is not with sorrow that they say goodbye to Him, because now they realize that He is still with them, even though they can no longer see Him physically. In addition, shortly afterwards He also gives them the Other Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus paints this picture for them, He raises the issue of prayer. For them this would become an extremely important form of communication with Him. Jesus opens the door to the Father for them, because through prayer they can now pour out all their needs before the Holy God. Jesus also becomes the Way to the Father for you and me. Today we can freely enter into conversation with Him through Jesus. "Ask, and you will receive," says Jesus, not only for the men

with Him around the table, but also for you and me today, "so that your joy may be complete."

Prayer:

Almighty Father, thank you that I also have the wonderful privilege of being able to speak to You through Jesus, my Lord. Thank You that I can also ask of You and that You make my joy perfect!

## **Free Access**

### **John 16: 25-33**

During the last 63 meditations we have already done on the Gospel of John, we have seen time and again how Jesus uses imagery to bring truths home to the crowds and also to His 12 chosen men. This was very necessary because they simply could not understand the high theological concepts. Their minds were far too small to comprehend the things of God.

Yes, this is often the case with us too - I must confess that a pastor has often completely lost me during a sermon. Once the high theology is tossed around, my mind wanders and at the end I step out and wonder what the pastor was actually preaching about right now. However, when he tells a story to illustrate a truth, I often remember for many years after that not only the story but also the message behind the story.

The stories that Jesus told had so much

impact and brought the truth home so clearly, that now, two thousand years later, they are still remembered by people and still have the same effect!

For the eleven men with Jesus, however, the time had now become too short for imagery and now Jesus had to speak directly to them. He tells them about the Father. Until now, the image that mankind had of the Father was one of an unattainable God who is exalted above all beings. Only very special people like the high priest have access to Him. And even this access does not take place directly, but through the Mediator, Jesus. We showed in a previous chapter how Moses spoke to God through Jesus, the Son of God. Throughout the ages, Jesus has repeatedly acted as Mediator.

However, Jesus has now completely changed the picture. He points out to them that the Father is not that God before Whom you have to live in fear and trembling! He is not the One who only condemns and

destroys, but He is the God of love. "The Father himself loves you", Jesus tells them. He makes them understand that they can also talk directly to the Father.

Yes, only the next day it happens that that heavy curtain that separated God from the ordinary worldling, the veil in the temple is torn in half from top to bottom by the hand of God. From that moment on, God is accessible to every human being on earth. The work of the high priest, to stand behind the curtain in God's presence in fear and trembling only once a year, has come to an end.

From now on, Jesus is no longer the Messenger between God and man, but we can only call on Jesus' Name when we want to talk to the Father. I want to try to explain it. Years ago, a strange couple came to our door. "Uncle Jannie from Melkrivier said that we can come to you for help." Based on Uncle Jannie's (Dad's brother) good name, the two were able to stay with us for a week,

because we knew that Uncle Jannie's judgment was correct.

In fact, the Father is NOT accessible to all people. A Buddhist and a Hindu, for example, have NO access to Him and they can only pray until they turn blue in the face, but He will not Listen to their prayer. The key is Jesus! If you know Jesus, then you have direct access to the Father, just as that young man who knew Uncle Jannie had access to us. However, this is not just a superficial knowledge of Jesus. No, it involves a commitment - a personal relationship with Him.

It is as if a light is finally going up for the disciples, when they tell Jesus that they now understand. After all their questions and lack of insight, we can now almost clap our hands and cheer: "Hooray!" But maybe it's a little too soon, because Jesus admonishes them to not be in such a hurry with their confession. In the next few hours they would still be severely disillusioned and they would

even be chased apart. They would even do the unthinkable and while hiding in fear leave their beloved Master, Jesus alone, to fight His own battle. But then comes the comfort when He explains to them that He would never be alone, for the Father would be with Him throughout the terror. They do think that they already understand everything, but only after all these things have happened will the truth penetrate to them. Jesus says they just should not get discouraged. Maybe everything will look completely lost to them, "but be of good cheer, I have already conquered the world," Jesus comforted.

It took a cross to make the men truly understand. Then the unbelieving Thomas would come and stand before the risen Jesus and declare filled with faith: "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus' victory also opened the heavy, inaccessible doors wide open for you and me, so that we have free access to the Father. However, free access means that we

have to make use of it. Let's use it as much as we can!

Prayer:

Holy Father, thank you for your love for us, and thank you that we now have full access to You through Jesus' holy Name.

# **The High Priestly Prayer**

## **John 17: 1-26**

Jesus' last moments in conversation with His disciples arrives and He uses them by dedicating them to the Father in prayer. This High Priestly prayer consists of 4 phases: In the first part (17: 1-5) Jesus declares that His work on earth has been completed and that He is now ready to return to heaven. In the second phase (vv. 6-19) Jesus says that there is a group of people who have accepted His message in faith. He prays for them and their needs and that the Father will protect them. The third part of Jesus' prayer (vv. 20-23) is about other people who will also come to faith in Him, thus about the expansion of the church. In the concluding passage (vv. 24-26) He asks the Father to one day bring all the believers to where He is going now.

The time of Jesus' glorification has arrived. What is the culmination of His glorification? The horrific events of the cross! We have a

hard time digesting this, because is it not actually humiliation? If we look at our great national heroes - in what do their glorification come to the fore? Racheltjie de Beer's glorification came when she took off her clothes in a snowstorm to save her brother's life. She died a cruel ice death, but it made her a hero. Wolraad Woltemade became a hero when he braved the icy stormy sea with his horse to save shipwrecked people and drowned in the process himself. Jesus' glorification did not come in His ascension, but in the act of atonement on the cross, where He had to endure the punishment for the sins of men through the ages.

However, this was not His only task. From His prayer we see that He was sent to earth as God's Messenger to come and reveal the Father to mankind. Before Jesus' coming, no one had ever had the privilege of seeing God. Moses did interact face to face with God, but even then he experienced only His glory and splendour in the tent of meeting.

What he experienced there, he could only share with a small part of the earth's population. In Jesus, mankind could now see and experience God in the flesh. What's more, those who accept Him in faith now become part of God's family and have the privilege of knowing Him personally. This is the true meaning of eternal life, to be able to live in the presence of God. Isn't that a wonderful thought? And no, it does not even happen only one day, but it is already part of every believer's life!

In fact, Jesus' task of introducing God to the people had already begun thousands of years before. Abraham was already experiencing something like this when Jesus appeared to him with two angels. Jesus regularly appeared to Moses and introduced God to him so that he could pass that knowledge on to Israel again. But now Jesus comes to reveal Himself to all people and thus conveys the image of the Father.

However, there is another very important

task, namely to make it known to mankind that they can be saved. Those who belong to Him receive eternal life. The wonderful thing is that all these people will eventually be taken to the Father so that they too can be where Jesus is going.

Salvation is pure grace and God does all the work. But man has a small share in this, to make the decision whether he wants to be part of God's family or not. That's all! Throughout this Gospel we see Jesus' call to make that choice. Have you done that yet?

In the third phase of Jesus' prayer, He dedicates His followers who must be left behind to the Father. Many demands will be made on them, and Jesus prays that the Father will keep them safe. However, it is not just about them, but about the Name of God that is in jeopardy. After all, they are part of God's family and therefore they and GOD are intertwined. Their interests flow into each other. There is therefore a close unity between the believer and God. From this

unity it should flow that the children of God will act as the Father expects of His children. It must be very clear to the world out there whose children they really are. That unity should grow closer and closer together. Jesus therefore specifically prays that no one will ever snatch them out of that unity.

However, a child of God cannot be stuck only in himself and his connection with God. The good news of salvation must also go out to the world out there. That's why Jesus sends them into the world (v. 18) to trumpet the Gospel forth just like Him. They must therefore now take over the task of introducing the Father to the world. The believer must be, as it were, a mirror that reflects the image of God.

Jesus also prays for unity, not only that believers will be one with God, but that they will function together as one. In their unity, the unity between believer and God must also become visible.

Finally, Jesus pleads that His love will also

be part of every believer's life. So live out love!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for praying for me too. Help me to always be one with You and my fellow-believers.

## **Arrested**

### **John 18: 1-11**

Ever wondered why it was necessary for Judas to take the soldiers to Jesus? He was easy to find, wasn't He? In the first place, it would be a problem if they arrested Jesus in broad daylight, because He still had many followers and the Jews wanted to avoid an uprising at all costs. So He had to be arrested at night so as to avoid being seen. The last thing they wanted was for it to attract a lot of attention.

We must remember that it was Easter. Jerusalem was overflowing with pilgrims from all over the world who wanted to come and celebrate here. Accommodation was of course a nightmare, because all the inns were full and most pilgrims simply had to find a place to sleep somewhere in a park or a public garden for the night. So you can imagine that finding someone at night between hundreds or maybe even thousands of people lying and sleeping somewhere was

a totally impossible task. Remember, there were no street lights! Of course, Jesus and the twelve men would also have spent the night somewhere in a garden and their favorite place to sleep was the Garden of Gethsemane.

So this is just where Judas came into the picture. He tallied with the Jewish Council that he would show them where to find Jesus for a fee. He knew exactly where Jesus and the other men would sleep that night. After all, he was supposed to be there with them! And so we see the procession of soldiers in the service of the high priest and guards who worked for the Pharisees, armed with spears, sticks and torches to find their way in the dark garden. Judas leads the procession, because he knows where Jesus was to sleep. I can imagine this must have been a scary procession. The learned people reckon that there must have been somewhere between two hundred and six hundred people in the group! The irony of the matter

is that this small army was there to arrest a single Man - someone who probably never had a weapon in His hand before in His life!

But if we think clearly about the matter, this irony actually extends even further, because this "superiority" is actually coming to capture God! Then they become a trifle, because what mighty army can stand up for one moment against the heavenly powers that God can deploy with a single word? The Jews and the high priest think they have the situation under control. They have full power over this Jesus! However, they do not realize that they are actually trying to act against the King of all kings and that all power in heaven and on earth is in His hands. They do not realize that they are completely powerless before Him and that they succeed in what they succeed only because He allows them to, so that God's plan of salvation can be carried into effect.

What would be any man's normal reaction if he saw this force coming and he knew they

were here to arrest Him? It would actually be very easy to simply disappear into the garden among the dark trees and take refuge among the horde of people lying there sleeping. But what does Jesus do? Instead of fleeing, He goes to meet them! He knows exactly what they are looking for and He makes it easy for them. After all, He is laying down His life voluntarily!

In the other gospels we read that Judas kissed Jesus. John, however, tells that the soldiers retreated and fell to the ground.

Why?

Maybe we can look for the answer in Jesus' words, when they say that they are looking for Jesus of Nazareth. His answer was: "I am He!" Did Judas and the soldiers perhaps hear the words of God in this when He introduced Himself to Moses at the burning bush: "I AM WHAT I AM"? Did Judas perhaps realize for the first time that he was really dealing with God? One can only wonder.

In a normal situation, Jesus' disciples would be taken prisoner with Him. Yet, against all expectations, they are released at Jesus' command. Even after Peter cut off Malgas' ear with his sword, they are not captured. Why? This illustrates the power that Jesus still had over the circumstances. The disciples had a task and the soldiers were powerless to stop them from performing that task. Jesus was in full control of the whole situation. Peter tries to intervene when he attacks with his sword, but here too Jesus takes control. After all, He had to continue His act of atonement and not even Peter could stop Him.

Today, God is still in full control, even though the situation sometimes seems completely impossible to us. Trusting God when the night is at its darkest is not easy - just ask Peter! Personally, I myself went through a very dark time a few years ago and it was definitely not easy. However, it is pure grace that I could trust God and see His wonderful

hand in my hour of need. Oh yes, and He sent the most wonderful friends on my way to hold my hands and to encourage me and remind me that He is in full control!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, every day I come more and more to the realization that You are the almighty God, and that You are in control of everything.

## **Peter's Betrayal**

### **John 18: 12-27**

That night was a nightmare that Peter would rather forget completely, but he cannot - it keeps repeating in his head and in his confused heart.

“Why did I not listen to my Master? He spelled it out for me, but I did not want to believe it! How could I, Peter, the Rock ever do such a treacherous thing? I try so hard to forget, but I just keep seeing the things that happened before me over and over. Absolutely nothing makes sense anymore! And Judas? The snake! How could he? Yes, maybe we should have read the signs, but still - who would ever had expected that? When he disappeared during their meal - who would have ever dreamed that he was on his way to commit such an abominable act? But Jesus knew. "One of you will betray Me," He added. We were all shocked this. Judas? Judas, the villain! But am I ever better than him? I also did such a

treacherous thing!

And then, that terrible humiliation of the feet-washing. If I only knew what was waiting for my Master, I would rather have washed His feet! But it's too late, it's all too late! They crucified Him and now He is lying there, cold in the grave! ”

Raw sobs of sadness and self-reproach tore through Peter's chest. "If I only knew. But Jesus foretold all these things. He spelled it out clearly for us time and time again. How could we be so foolish to hear all His words and just let it pass us by, to wash over us? ” Peter is confused, sad, angry.

Again he thinks back to that miserable night. The images grind through his hazy mind. "I have only been with you a little while," he heard Jesus' words echo through his mind.

“If I only knew how small that moment would be! Oh, those were just a few miserable hours! And when I still asked Him where He was actually going, His answer was, that I

could not go with anyway. He said that I would follow Him later. I kept yelling that I wanted to go along now. Where was my mind? Did I really think I could follow Him to the cross? ”

Suddenly a terrible fear grips Peter's frightened heart: “Say now ..... that the Jews are planning to execute me in the same way? I was very quick to blurt out to Him that I would lay down my life for Him! Jesus' answer to this repeatedly threatens to rip my heart out of my body: "I tell you the truth, even before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times!" How did He know? ”

The raw sobs of remorse shook Peter's body all over again. He is raw from all the crying. There were no more tears. self-reproach jerked through him. He did not want to think about the rest, but like a dream that played over and over, he saw every little detail again: the overwhelming great number of soldiers who came looking for Jesus in the dark garden; Judas' taut face in the torchlight

when he pointed Jesus out to them; Jesus, his Master who, like a Lamb lead to slaughter, just submissively surrendered Himself to them. Peter tried in a powerless rage to attack the hundreds of soldiers with his sword - a poor slave had to pay when his ear was cut off - almost laughable!

Shocked, he and a few of the others followed the crowd from a distance. Eventually, only two of them had the courage to follow as far as the high priest's house. "Let us go and see what they are doing with our Master," John urged him. At first Peter did not want to - he was scared. Very, very scared! What if they were recognized? And then his worst fears came true. A simple maid! She was standing there at the door, and when Peter still wanted to sneak in, she blurted out, "You're one of this Man's disciples, aren't you?"

The scene plays out over and over in front of him. "Of course I denied it! What else could I have done? Should I then have said to her:

"Oh yes, I am Peter, the leader of that Jesus' disciples?" They would have killed me just there and then! Oh, how can I still try to justify my cowardly actions? Jesus' words echo over and over in my head, my whole being: 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times, Peter!' I want to go crazy!"

It was a bitterly cold night. Peter was thankful for the fire that the men were putting together in the courtyard. Carefully he approached to try and drive the cold out of his body. He could feel the heat warming his body, but his heart still felt like a block of ice. Suddenly it felt as if someone is hitting him with a sledgehammer: "Are you not also one of His disciples?" Just right out of the blue, the question came and for a second time Peter had to deny it and later for a third time. And then, that awful sound of the rooster crowing.

"That cursed rooster crowing, as if he had finally condemned me! I just ran blindly into the night and cried and cried. How could I

have so shamelessly denied my Master? And that while the high priest was interrogating Him? ”

The Sabbath is over. Somewhere a rooster crowed to say that the new day, Sunday, has arrived. Will there be a glimmer of hope somewhere in this day? Peter makes a decision: “As soon as it gets light, I shall go to the tomb to pay my last tribute to my Master. I will beg Him for forgiveness. Maybe, just maybe, this day will bring me new hope .....

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that Peter's hope was not put to shame, and that today we can rejoice: "You have truly risen!"

# Pilate

## John 18: 28-40

Pontius Pilate, the Governor of Judea, was the man who was in control of the situation! He was known for being an inflexible, ruthless man who was often guilty of violence and corruption. The people hated him because he often made life very difficult for them. At the same time he lived in fear that he might be charged by the people with the Emperor and that he might lose his post.

Oh yes, there was also a king in Judea, Herod Antipas, but he was just a pawn of the Roman Empire. On top of that, he only ruled over a part of Israel - the rest was ruled by his two brothers.

And the Jewish council? They were also not in control of their own country. On internal matters they could make decisions themselves, but the Romans were actually the boss!

It was very early Friday morning. During the

night, the Jewish Council found Jesus guilty. But their power was limited and the Jesus case became too big for them, therefore He was taken to Pilate to be sentenced.

The Jews gathered outside Pilate's palace - they did not want to enter the house of this heathen, because it would be a big dilemma for them. That night they would celebrate the Passover and if they had defiled themselves during the day, they could not take part in this important feast!

How ironic, that while the Passover lambs were slaughtered in the temple that Friday, Jesus, the Lamb of God, would be hanging on the cross. Is it a coincidence? No, very definitely not! God's counsel plan has been worked out to the second!

At Pilate's palace, Jesus is presented as a criminal. Once again the terrible irony comes to the fore, because Jesus came to do God's works. Everything He did, He did in public so that everyone could see it. And time and time again, what He does reflects the wonderful

Light of God. No single crime can be attributed to Him.

To Pilate's question, why could they not just execute Jesus themselves, they claimed that they as Jews did not have the right to do so. Here we also see their double standards, because only just before they wanted to stone the very same Jesus. Later, Stephen was executed by being stoned to death. What we must always keep in mind, however, is that God has been prophesying through His prophets for centuries that Jesus would be crucified. It was something only the Romans could do. So these Jews unknowingly did exactly what God wanted them to do.

Pilate wanted to know if Jesus was the "King of the Jews." The rumours about Jesus must have reached Pilate's ears. There was a very strong Messianic expectation amongst the Jewish people. However, they expected a Messiah who would fill the shoes of His ancestor David as king over Israel. But first

He would throw off the heavy yoke of the Romans from the oppressed people's sore shoulders in order to lead them to freedom. A lot of excited people were under the impression that they had found this King and they accompanied Him triumphantly in Jerusalem. However, they were disappointed because He did not take up the sword.

What would have happened if this Messianic King had come to rule over the Jews? For how long would they have peace? Until the next world ruler would simply walk over them again? No, God's plan of salvation worked totally differently. The government of the true Messiah would not be based on violence, but on love. Nor would it be limited to the Jewish people only, but would extend over the entire world. His followers would also not fight with swords, but with Truth and with the Word of God. Most importantly, however, this Kingdom that is being established is not based on earth, but in heaven.

Pilate soon realized that Jesus posed no

danger to the mighty Rome. He also realized all too well that Jesus was innocent and desperately tried to free Jesus by having a replacement executed, the robber Barabbas. There is an old story that says that Barabbas' first name was also Jesus and that Pilate would ask: "Which Jesus should I release - Jesus Barabbas or Jesus of Nazareth?" However, the Jews chose the wrong Jesus! Barabbas was a hero to them, because even though he was a robber, he was a gang member of a freedom movement, which at least tried to free them from the Romans.

As believers, we must also be very careful that we do not try to make of Jesus Someone He is not. So often Jesus is only there for us for emergencies. If we're in trouble, we know very quickly where to run! When we have the wind from behind us, we forget about Him conveniently. Jesus is our King, at all times and in all circumstances! Our very first priority is to serve Him with all that is in us. The question is, how do we serve Him? By

living out His commandment of love, not only to God, but also to our fellow-man and then especially to our fellow-believers.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You are my King. I want to serve You with my whole life!

# **Crucify Him!**

## **John 19: 1-16**

The greatest drama of all time unfolds - a drama that touches the heart of every person who experiences it. There are four parties in this gripping drama – no, five! In the lead role we see Jesus, the King of the universe. Here he does not look like any kind of ruler at all - dejected, exhausted, in handcuffs, seemingly totally powerless. Opposite Him stands one of the most powerful men on earth, the man who has total control over all of Judea. His word law, and he can do as he pleases. Even the king succumbs to his bark! But even here, not everything is as it seems at first glance, because beneath that rock-hard shell a scared and bitterly insecure person hides.

The third character is actually a group - the cursing, mocking, cruel, rock hard, fearless soldiers. They do what they have to do and the more cruelty they can put into their day job, the more they enjoy it. But even the commander among them has a heart

somewhere under all that armour.

The fourth group is a pious, God-fearing, law-abiding group of men who on a spiritual level lead the people of Israel like a shepherd leads his sheep. Day-by-day we see them in the temple and in synagogues, where they teach the people about God. Beneath that sparkling white robe of piety, however, lurks a dirty-black robe of hatred, vengeance, murder and pent-up anger.

And the Fifth Player? God Almighty! With a single word, He can destroy all these players - make them go up in smoke. But He does not do this, because the greatest plan of redemption of all time must be carried out within hours. He therefore allows each player to live out his power, hatred, revenge and cruelty, because only in this way can God's plan of salvation succeed.

As is customary with all prisoners who are crucified, Jesus was first flogged. If you ever saw the movie "Passion of the Christ," you'll understand what it means. I could no longer

handle that bloody scene of Jesus' flogging, tears streamed down my cheeks. Pieces of raw meat were ripped from my Master's back, every time that whip with the lead balls hit Him. The terrible pain He had to endure is inhuman, gruesome and cruel. Over and over the lashes strike Him. And the soldiers laughed and mocked and cursed. And because He was now supposedly a King, He must wear a crown - a crown of pain that pierces poisonous thorns into His scalp - thorns that burn and caused the blood to flow through His eyes. Even the purple cloak that mocks His so-called kingship is not spared Him.

The powerlessness and indecision of the mighty, unapproachable Governor Pilate is becoming clearer. He thought he had all the power in his hands, but now he realizes that he is in trouble with whatever he decides. In his heart he knows that this Man is innocent, but then there are the Jews and the Emperor, in whose bad books he certainly does not

want to come. He tries hard to get out of the mess, but he just gets more and more entangled in it. Then there is this battered, bloodied Man here before him who just as calmly wants to tell him that he, the mighty Pontius Pilate, has absolutely no authority over Him and that he can only do what he does because God allows it. What audacity! But what if it's true ...? Again he tries to worm himself out here, but he is powerless!

Then there were the Jews. "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" their blood-curdling screams echoed through the corridors of Pilate's lavish palace. "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" It echoed right into the holiest of the temple where the "pious" priests performed their holy service.

It's twelve o'clock in the afternoon. A long, grueling night and day of torture, accusations, court cases, insults already weighs heavily on the bloodied shoulders of Jesus. From the crowd that had rejoiced only days before: "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

now comes the reproachful screams of hatred: "Take Him away! Take Him away! Crucify Him!" When asked by Pilate whether he should crucify their King, the shocking answer from the chief priests is: "We do not have a king! We only have the emperor." They choose the emperor - a wicked man who hates them with a passion, over the holy King of Heaven. Shocking! Incomprehensible! And so those Jews finally cut themselves off from the King of the Jews, and so also from God. Tragic - extremely tragic.

Would it ever be possible for God to forgive them this horrible act? I hear a chorus of voices go up: "Never in eternity!" Not long after, one of the bell-wethers, a hateful Pharisee, marched to Damascus to persecute more Christians. There Saul of Tarsus met the risen Jesus and he became the greatest missionary ever. God's forgiveness for him was complete! Are you perhaps sitting with sin that you think is

unforgivable? If He could forgive that terrible sin - no one's sin is too great for Him! Not yours either. Bring it to Him today!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for being willing to forgive even the greatest sin.

## **King of the Jews**

### **John 19: 17-27**

In the other three gospels, the events of the cross are described very graphically. However, John tells the story of the cross by quoting only a few important details and concentrating on them. We see, for example, that most of John's story revolves around the heading on the cross.

At that time, basically four methods were used to execute criminals. They could be beheaded or burned. The Jewish specialty was to stone such a person, to stone him to death. And then there was crucifixion, the cruelest form of execution. It was used only for the most hardened criminals. The great purpose of crucifixion was to deter people so that they would not try crime as a career. Therefore, the crosses were planted just outside the city, along a busy road, so that everyone could see them, almost like a living billboard against crime. A note describing the convict's crime was nailed to the cross.

Those who have read it should know that if you were to commit this crime, you would be exposed like that too!

The Jews demanded that Jesus be crucified, but Pilate had the last word in the matter: He wrote the note on Jesus' crime. His crime? "The King of the Jews!" Just that! Of course, the Jewish leaders were bitterly upset about this, because here they are now directly involved in the whole filthy affair. "Please change the charge sheet," they pleaded with Pilate. "Rather write that He said He was the King of the Jews." Their reasoning was that Jesus was certainly not their King.

You will remember that during Jesus' trial, Pilate asked Him if He was a King? Jesus' answer was unequivocally: "Yes!" Pilate took this to heart! Jesus was a King and therefore He had to die. "What I wrote, I wrote!" so Pilate stood firm and with that the matter was settled.

Why is this heading so important to John? So much so that he even neglects the other

dramatic events at the cross to bring this one home?

At the cross we see that the soldiers mocked the charge sheet. The Jews were of the opinion that this was not true. However, the judge found that this was indeed the case! Jesus therefore dies as King of the Jews.

This leaves you with a question, because if the Jews were to deny that He was their king, then there must be another "Jewish people", right? But who are these people? In John 3:16 we see that God came to save the world and not just the Jews. In John 4 we read of the incident where Jesus talked to the Samaritan woman at the well. To the dismay of His disciples, the Samaritans then arrived in their hordes to meet Jesus. Then we come to the conclusion that even the so-called "unclean" Samaritans are part of God's people! Not very long after these events, we see the first gentiles becoming part of this nation and before long people of all nations and cultures were part of the Kingdom! And

the King? Jesus! If the Jews did not want to accept it that way, they were simply no longer part of God's people and therefore no longer children of Abraham. Please read John 8 again.

As usual, the crucified man's clothes were distributed among the soldiers as a kind of reward. Fate was cast upon His garment, that Psalm 22:19 might be fulfilled. God pays attention to even the smallest detail! When David wrote this Psalm, Jesus' death on the cross had been planned for a long time! It was certainly not something that just happened on the spur of the moment and every little detail was meticulously planned.

John mentions the incident where Jesus entrusted Mary, His mother, to "the disciple who loved Jesus" (John?). It actually illustrates practically what Jesus came to do. Actually, His brother should have taken care of her, but Jesus appointed someone else - a spiritual brother. When He declares John to be Mary's son, He shows that it is not the

earthly family that matters, but rather the heavenly. Both the "beloved disciple" and Mary now become part of this heavenly family of which Jesus is also a part - the family that He came to establish on earth. What is the one great feature of this family? Love. It is spelled out practically, because among other things it means that they care for each other and take care of each other. The "beloved disciple" then added the deed to the word and took Mary into his house.

I experience that wonderful, selfless love practically in my own life. Only the day when you are in need do you see how fellow believers care about you and with how much love they overload you, without expecting anything in return. In recent years, I have only been amazed every day when I have experienced the caring love of fellow believers toward my family in Jesus.

By living out love practically, you not only fulfill the commandment of love, but something also happens that is even more

important. You reflect the love of Jesus! You are basically like a mirror, in which people do not see you, but Jesus. After all, this is what is important in life, that Jesus should be glorified!

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for wonderful believers who live out Your love daily in my life. Please help me to do the same.

## **It Is Finished!**

### **John 19: 28-42**

Jesus' last moments dawned. "I am thirsty," came the soft words from the cross. A little sour wine on a sponge is held out to him on a sprig of hyssop to wet His dry lips. And then Jesus dies with these words on His mouth: "It is finished!"

Short and powerful! But in this scene lies a treasure chest full of symbolism and truth. We must keep in mind that Jesus was crucified on Friday. According to Jewish custom, the Sabbath would begin at sunset that evening. But this was a very special Sabbath, because the Passover also fell on this Sabbath, as well as another Jewish feast: the sacrifice of the sheaves. Thus, while these crucifixion events were taking place, the priests were busy in the temple slaughtering the sacrificial lambs for the celebration of the Passover.

If we look back in the history books, we

notice that when the Israelites withdrew from Egypt at that time, they had to smear the blood of the Passover lamb on their door frames with a hyssop twig. And now the soldier also uses a hyssop twig to smear Jesus' lips with sour wine.

What does all this tell me? Just as the blood of the Passover lamb that was slaughtered saved the Israelites from death at that time, so Jesus is now also slaughtered as the Passover Lamb. And there are also many similarities. There were specific precepts for these lambs to be slaughtered: They had to be without defect in the first place. Jesus was also without blemish, in the sense that He had absolutely no sin. There was also a stipulation that no bones of the lambs may be broken during the slaughter process.

The crucifixion process was a painful and slow death, which could sometimes take days. Because this particular crucifixion happened on a Friday and it was also Passover, the Jews demanded that these

men's death be hastened. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 specifies that anyone who is condemned to death and crucified is cursed by God. He may not hang there after dark that day, for then the land will be defiled. He must therefore be buried before dark. And therefore the Jews' haste to get the three crucified dead. The result was an extremely painful and traumatic act, in which the soldiers broke the men's legs. The trauma of this was probably already enough to cause them to die summarily. If this did not happen, then death came quickly anyway, because without legs to support them on the cross, they now had to hang on by their arms only, causing them to be unable to breathe. They simply suffocated.

However, when the soldier comes to Jesus, he sees that Jesus is already dead. Just to be sure, he stabs Jesus in the side with a spear. The blood and water that flowed out gave this soldier the assurance that Jesus was definitely dead and that it would be a

waste of time to break His legs as well. And so the Scripture as well as the precept for the Passover lamb are fulfilled.

"It is finished," were Jesus' last words. Everything that the Father expected of Him, He had done, down to the last letter. His task was completed. The Greek word used here implies that His task was completed and that the consequences of it would never cease.

Now two very important men emerged, both members of the Jewish Council, the very Council that condemned Jesus to death. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus decided that Jesus should have a proper burial. Joseph requested Pilate to get Jesus' body. A convict would never be buried in a family grave, because he would "desecrate the graves." Joseph, however, stuck his neck out because not only did he disregard the risk of dishonor, but he endangered his own honour and position in the Jewish Council and society. He put absolutely everything at stake because he had faith in Jesus.

Nicodemus, too, risked everything when he brought more than fifty kilograms of spices to prepare Jesus' body for burial. Only very important people got the honour of being able to have so many spices at their funeral. In Nicodemus' eyes, Jesus was such an important person and therefore deserved the honour.

Jesus was buried in a new tomb near the place where He was crucified. This is important, because when Jesus' followers ran to the tomb that Sunday morning and emptied the tomb, they would have known that they had not made a mistake in going to the wrong tomb. In the brand new tomb, where no one had been buried before, they found the cloths in which Jesus was wrapped. They had to know that this was the place where Jesus was buried.

But now it was late Friday afternoon. The sun was on the horizon and the Sabbath was at hand - and so was Easter. For Jesus' followers, it was surely the saddest Sabbath

ever! And the Passover meal they ate unwillingly. What dark and uncertain future awaited them? Their Master was dead and now the Jews surely had their knife in for them. Would they ever be able to survive it?

Prayer:

Lord, sometimes I also feel so lost and dejected, and it feels like I have been forsaken of God. Thank you for taking me by the hand and picking me up at such times and showing me again that you are in control and still alive!

# He Lives!

## John 20: 1-18

Have you ever had a dreadful night wishing every pitch-dark moment to disappear and that tomorrow must please arrive? Yes, I have experienced several such nights. But there was one in particular that now gives me another lump in my stomach when I think back on it. That night I slept under the stars with some young Voortrekker kids in the bush in Marloth Park. It was a great idea - at least that's what I thought. But when the lions started roaring nearby and the hyenas' giggling "Hoeeee" sounded too close for comfort, I started to get uncomfortable. As the night progressed, these dangerous noises moved closer and closer to us. Here I was with the children under my care and I was exposing them to such danger! That night, shifted painstakingly slowly..... When the first rays of the sun began to colour the horizon, I was able to close my eyes for the first time and sleep for a few minutes, before

the exuberant children woke up the whole bush!

I think that Sabbath was surely the longest one in the whole life of Jesus' followers. They wished every moment to be over! On Sunday morning it was still pitch dark, when Mary Magdalene was on her way to Jesus' tomb. What she wanted to do there so early, only she would know. Maybe she just wanted to be close to her Master, even though He was dead. The night was too long and she needed comfort. I see in my mind's eye the weeping woman struggling in the dark - grieved because she could not even assist her beloved Master in His darkest hour.

And then the terrible shock, when she arrives at the grave and sees that the stone has been rolled away. With her heart beating wildly, she ran to Peter to tell him the shocking news. Someone stole Jesus' body! I can imagine the shock and horror on poor Peter's face. "How could they!" he surely shouted. He and John jumped up and ran as

fast as they could to go and see what was going on. With panting breath, John was first at the tomb. When he looked in, he saw something very strange, that the tomb was indeed empty, but that the cloths wrapped around Jesus' body were still lying there. Peter also arrived panting and crawled into the tomb. What he found there put a huge question mark on his face. He could not understand it! No thief would steal a body and leave the death-cloth behind! Even the cloth that was wrapped around Jesus' head lay aside, neatly folded. Something was very, very strange here! It just simply did not make sense! I would very much like to have heard the conversation between the two worried men as they walked home.

Meanwhile, Mary arrived at the tomb again, crying. Not only was her Master dead, but now His body was also stolen! What a sad situation! Full of anticipation, she peeked into the grave. Did she perhaps expect a miracle - that Jesus would still be lying there? And

then, the shock when she sees two very strange men in pure white clothes sitting in the grave. It was only much later that she realized that they were angels. Heaven truly opened with Jesus' resurrection, just as Jesus foretold in John 1:51. When she turned around, she saw someone standing behind her. Through her tears she did not even recognize Him at all - He was the very last Person she would expect there. But when Jesus addressed her with compassion by her name, it was as if the peels had fallen from her eyes. He's alive! She wanted to grab Him and never ever let go again! Mary Magdalene was overwhelmed with joy - then everything happened as He foretold! In my mind's eye I see the picture in front of me, of Mary probably falling at the feet of her beloved Rabbi, her Teacher, grabbing Him by the legs and holding and pressing with pure joy. She would surely have kissed his feet uncontrollably and cried with joy!

Then Jesus gave her a command. She

should not cling to Him here, but first had to go and tell others what she had seen. She had to be a witness of the risen Jesus. Later, Jesus Himself would come to confirm this testimony of hers. But now she first had to go and convey the incredible news.

Mary did not let grass grow under her feet. "I saw the Lord!", It bubbled over her lips when she came to the others, "I saw the Lord!" When she calmed down, she continued: "He said that He was going to ascend to His Father. And He also said that His Father is our Father, and that His God is our God!" Over and over again, Mary surely told this wonderful testimony to everyone she encountered. She simply could not keep quiet about this. The Lord had truly risen!

Is it not ironic that a simple woman who means nothing in society becomes the first powerful witness for the risen Jesus! And then we involuntarily think back to the Samaritan woman at the well, the one with the most dubious character! Yes, she had a

whole town in turmoil with her testimony about Jesus. Then you and I have absolutely no excuse to be a witness either. Let us make work of it and be witnesses of that Jesus who is risen and who lives and reigns today!

Prayer:

Lord, please make me a powerful witness for You. Please give me the courage to testify for You to all who I meet.

## **Peace to You!**

### **John 20: 19-30**

It's Sunday evening and a pathetic group of frightened, insecure, sad people are gathered behind closed doors. This group is officially the first church to stand in it's infancy. They are afraid of persecution because the same Jewish leaders who persecuted Jesus are now persecuting them. They had spread the story that Jesus had risen from the dead, so the Jews now want to eradicate this "sect" root and branch before it pollutes the whole community. What is their conversation about? Of course, the focus of the discussion is all the events of this past Easter. Every little detail of it is still freshly etched in their memories. The fact that Mary Magdalene saw Jesus alive makes everyone wonder where He is and all sorts of questions about Him are circulating. But there is one empty spot, that of Thomas. He is confused about all this. Mary's story upset him deeply: How is it possible that Jesus

could come back to life? He's dead! After all, everyone saw Him dieing! The soldier confirmed this. He was buried. He's dead! It's all over!

Then suddenly Jesus stands here among them. Everyone is terrified!

How would you feel if your loved one, who had been buried just a few days before, suddenly stood in front of you with a smile on his face?

"Peace be with you" Jesus said in a soft voice. What wonderful soothing words in the midst of this horror that was tearing their hearts apart. Yet it was so sad that Thomas was not there to experience this peace too, because it is precisely he who needs it most of all.

How often does it not happen that when you were not in church on Sunday for some reason, someone came afterwards and said to you: "I so wish you could have experienced that sermon ....."! Then you want

to kick yourself for not being there. I think Thomas often wanted to kick himself because he missed that incredible, special day!

Not only did Jesus bring peace to His followers, but He also commanded them, "As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you." They had to go and preach the Gospel just as He did, this frightened group of followers who even locked the doors behind them when they gathered - they now had to go and preach the Gospel to the same people who had persecuted them. It sounds absurd, but Jesus equipped them with the Holy Spirit. They did not need to do it alone, because the Holy Spirit was with them. They did not need to be afraid of what they had to say, because the Spirit would put the words in their mouths. The Gospel they had to preach would be a message to the world, that God is merciful and that He forgives all your sins. The only condition would be that you had to believe in Jesus. But if you had not done so,

there would have been no forgiveness and you would have been condemned to eternal punishment, so simple!

Indeed, these things affect each one of us, for today it is you and I who are Jesus' disciples. What was true for them at that time is exactly the same for us today. In fact, we are in a much more privileged position than they were at that time, because they were the pioneers of evangelism. They had to start from basically nothing to work things out. They did not really even realize what was going on. They had not even realized the implications of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection and here they were already being sent out. Perhaps the most difficult of all, was that they did not even have a Bible as a guideline, a "textbook" like we have today! For you and me, there are courses and books and many people you can turn to for help. But the one great Help we both have is the Holy Spirit, because without Him all the modern aids we have are useless! And with

Him even the most inexperienced believer is a competent witness if he listens to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Even the unbeliever Thomas becomes a witness whose testimony echoes through the ages as he addresses Jesus as "My Lord and my God!"

We have almost worked through John's Gospel and there are only a few daily passages left. Here, as we now approach the end, John writes that he wrote this book "..... so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you can live in his name." It has been an incredible privilege for me to be able to share this series of meditations with you, but the question is, after reading all this, do you believe in Jesus as your Saviour? Have you already surrendered to Him, and receive the forgiveness of God for your sins? Or do you still stand with one foot in eternal damnation! Over the years I have shared the Gospel with several people - people who said that they wanted to become Christians too. If you still

have doubts, I want to plead with you: make your decision today, because tomorrow may already be too late .....

Prayer:

Lord, You sent me to spread Your Gospel. Help me to carry out Your commission with passion!

# **Fishers of Men**

## **John 21: 1-14**

For three years the twelve chosen men left their jobs and followed the Master. They sat at His feet day by day, learning about the Kingdom of God. He took them on numerous practical excursions and showed them how to preach the gospel. The purpose of this whole exercise was to train a core group of church leaders. They were the people who had to carry the gospel when He was no longer there to do it. They were also the men who had to take over from Him to further train people to spread the gospel. And now suddenly He was no longer there to guide them. They sit around and no longer know what to do with themselves, because suddenly they are leaderless.

Then Peter wonders if it might not be wise to return to his old profession now? "I'm going fishing - who's coming along?" Soon he has a willing crew. "Tonight we are going to have a good haul of fish!"

But things do not go as planned, because as is the case with many angling expeditions, they get very disappointed about it - the hard work of the whole night does not yield even a single little sardine. Peter is discouraged. Everything in life goes awry for him. Nothing makes more sense. He, the great fisherman, the one who takes the lead everywhere - his world has collapsed. Every time he thinks that he is now moving forward, he comes back hard to earth. When he told Jesus that he would never leave Him, he honestly meant it, but Jesus told him that he would deny his Master. How horrible that night still haunts him - the night when he had to hide like a scared dog so that people might not recognize him. Three times that night he had to lie and that to a mere maid. And then he lost everything that mattered to him in life when they killed his Master there on the cross!

And now this humiliation: he thought he could still fish, but now he could not even get hold

of a single fish!

And then the miracle happens. In the twilight, someone is standing on the beach, shouting for him to throw the net out on the other side. What will it help now? If there are no fish on the left, there will be no fish on the right! But he obeyed. He tells the men to throw in the net on the other side. The next moment it's full of fish - not just sardines, but big fish! Suddenly the realization permeates to Peter that it is none other than Jesus standing on the beach. He hurriedly put on his shirt and jumped into the sea to swim the last distance to the beach.

Suddenly, Peter now regains his confidence. Something is now beginning to take hold in his mind: it is not he who is strong, but Jesus! It is his Master who gives him that strength! Every time he wants to do something without Jesus, he fails, but when Jesus joins, he stands strong as a rock. Indeed, a few weeks later, Peter had to find out that what he had experienced so far was nothing, because

when the Holy Spirit first took over his life, this rock, Peter, ascended as the steadfast, fearless man of God who could even take on the mighty Jewish Council with bare fists!

Indeed, early that morning, there on the beach, Peter also learned that fishing in your own strength is not worth it. With Jesus you can catch many fish. Jesus also explained to him that these fish in the sea were not what he had in mind for Peter, but that he would be a fisher of men in abundance. These few (there were 153 fish) that they dragged out onto the beach were still nothing against the multitude of human fish that would be caught there. Yes, on the day of Pentecost alone the catch was three thousand!

We are also fishermen (and women). However, Peter's story teaches us a very precious lesson. Why is it that our best evangelistic efforts are often a total failure? All our planning and all our hard work often yields absolutely nothing. Peter had to learn the hard way that he could get nowhere on

his own. The moment the Lord came, there was success!

On the day of Pentecost, the great miracle happened when Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to His church. It was meant not only for the people of that time, but also for the church through the ages - also for us today. Through the Holy Spirit, we experience today the same power of Jesus that Peter experienced then. He is in every believer! The big secret is to just give Him a chance in your life.

The question often arises: Why do some people experience the Holy Spirit more successfully in their lives than others? The secret is that the closer you live to God, the more opportunity you give the Holy Spirit to control your life. The less sin there is in your life, the more room there is for Him.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You that Your Holy Spirit dwells in me. Please help me to live in such a way that He has a lot of place in my life.

## **Do you love Me?**

### **John 21: 15-25**

We have come to the end of this wonderful book that John wrote. For the past four months, it has been a wonderful privilege for me to share with you this message of God's wonderful Light shining in the dark. Every day was a surprise to me, because often I myself did not even know what the message of the meditation was until I wrote the last lines. The series of reflections is now summarized in an e-book entitled: "Meet Jesus!" The book is unique, in that you have the choice to read it, listen to the meditations or watch video recordings of it. It's free! Take a look at our website.

Jesus and his disciples are sitting on the beach eating breakfast. On the menu is bread and fish, fresh from the sea, after Peter and his men dragged out the heavy nets that were full to overflowing. It's a quiet scene, with the small waves gently lapping the beach. A great calm has also descended

on the fishermen after this great catch with which they had to wrestle. And then, out of the blue, Jesus asks Peter this penetrating question: "..... do you love Me very much ...?"

What would be your answer if Jesus had to ask you that question today? Of course you will answer just like Peter: "But of course Lord, You know that I love You!" Of course you and I love Jesus. We often say this to Him when we talk to Him. We even say that to other people.

When Jesus asks Peter this question a second time, disturbing thoughts begin to go through Peter's mind: "Why would the Master ask me this question twice? Maybe He knows something about me that I hide very well?" An awkward silence fall over this group of men. Each is busy with his own thoughts. "Take care of My sheep," Jesus says to Peter.

This is a very big assignment that Peter gets here. Jesus gathered a large "flock" over the three years of His public ministry, a huge

crowd that followed Him and hung on to His lips day by day about the wonderful things He said. It is now Peter's duty to take care of this flock. Peter is still chewing on this great command when the bomb explodes, because a third time Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him.

Peter burst into tears: Why would the Lord ask him three times if he loved him? The Lord knows everything- EVERYTHING! Of course He knows of all his failures! Of course, He knows of all the times he has failed so miserably! Of course, the Lord knows of that terrible night when he denied Him in His hour of need. He knows about every little thing that goes on in Peter's mind - even that which no one else knows about! Peter is just a sinful man, but in spite of all his weaknesses and shortcomings he still receives the command from Jesus to take care of His flock. How can Jesus trust him so much in spite of his lovelessness and all his other weaknesses?

This morning Jesus speaks just as clearly to

me and to you, dear friend. He has been speaking to you through the meditations every day for some time now. I know some of the readers personally, but you I probably do not even know at all and have never seen even! I wish so that it could be different, and that I could meet every reader and that we could talk together about these things over a cup of coffee, but that is of course totally impossible!

But Jesus knows you and me through and through. The Lord knows everything - EVERYTHING! Like Peter, we can only stand before Him in tears this morning and pour out our hearts, because our love for Him is so terribly lacking. Day-by-day we sadden Him with our unloving actions and our many sins. But in spite of all this, He still loves us so immeasurably. He has already forgiven and forgotten every sin of ours.

His assignment to us this morning is to go and look after sheep. How you are going to carry out that commission is a matter

between you and Jesus. Some of us have got many sheep to look after and some may just have one sheep, but the Lord gives to each one according to his own ability. He only asks that we take good care of those sheep He has given us, with love.

I want to conclude this series of reflections on the Gospel of John with a summary. God sent His wonderful light to this dark world. It cost Him dearly, because in the process, His Son, Jesus, had to be humiliated and paid with His life. It has proven how incredibly great God's love is for you and me. You and I are the mirrors that must reflect this Light so that everyone we come in contact with can see Jesus. In this way we also show our gratitude and say that we also love Jesus.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, after reading this Gospel, I cannot help but fall down in worship before You, the Creator of heaven and earth. You are the wonderful Light that shines brightly. Thank You that I can know that Your love for

me is infinitely great. Teach me to truly love  
You too, and to carry out Your commands.

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