



## **Beckenham Baptist Church**

A CARING CHRISTIAN CHURCH AT THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

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# **Bible Reading Notes**

## **October 2009**



# **JUST GIVE ME JESUS**

**[STUDIES IN JOHN'S GOSPEL]**

**Rev Julia Binney BA, MTh**

## INTRODUCTION

### JUST GIVE ME JESUS!

I am sure many of you will remember the video clip we played in church a few years ago entitled 'That's My King'. It had been played at the Baptist Union Assembly that year to a rousing reception. It contained some images of Jesus to a backing track of music and six and a half minutes of amazingly powerful words about Jesus by Rev Shadrach Meshach Lockridge (1913-2000) from a sermon he first preached in 1976. Included among all the wonderful things he said about Jesus was the regularly repeated question, 'Do you know him'? Like many others I found it truly inspirational and memorable. Rev S M Lockridge served in various churches in America and lectured at the Billy Graham School of Evangelism. Anne Graham-Lotz, Billy Graham's daughter wrote recently in her book entitled 'Just give me Jesus' that she wanted to be more focused on Jesus. Reflecting on some of the words of Lockridge's great sermon, she offers this tribute to Jesus:-

*His office is manifold and His promise is sure.  
His life is matchless and His goodness limitless.  
His mercy is enough and His grace is sufficient.  
His reign is righteous.  
His yoke is easy and His burden is light.  
He is indestructible, He is incomprehensible.  
He is inescapable, He is invincible.  
He is irresistible, He is irrefutable.  
I can't get Him out of my mind.  
I can't get Him out of my heart.  
I can't outlive Him and I can't live without Him.  
The Pharisees couldn't stand Him but  
they found they couldn't stop him.  
Satan tried to tempt Him but found he couldn't trap him.  
Pilate placed Him on trial but couldn't find fault in Him.  
The Romans crucified Him but couldn't take His life.  
Death couldn't handle Him and the grave couldn't hold Him.  
Just give me Jesus! That's the cry of my heart.*

It is an old trick question to ask how many times John refers to the Church in his gospel. The answer is none. There is a debate about when it was written but the traditional view is towards the end of the first century. It is as if already people were getting preoccupied with the Church instead of focusing on Jesus. Jesus accused the Church in Ephesus of having forsaken their first love (*Rev 2:4*). John is wanting the church to get back to their first love - Jesus. He writes his Gospel with this great aim that all the miracles and all the events should be taken as signs of who Jesus is and what he had come to do. It has been said that 'Jesus Christ is the key to the understanding of God, the universe and humanity'. We can sometimes get so bogged down in life, and maybe even by the Church at times, that we lose sight of the person and work of Jesus Christ himself. Amid all the stuff that is going on in our lives, in our community and in the world - *let us fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2)*.

These bible reading notes have been written to help us spend a little time everyday to come nearer to Jesus. Following on from our study of the prayer life of Jesus from John 17:1-26, each day a different title for Jesus is taken from a section of this gospel. Hopefully, we will be able to get to know Jesus in a deeper, more intimate way or perhaps, reacquaint ourselves with some aspect of him and allow that to be a spring board into a more meaningful relationship and a closer walk with him. We are called to be followers of Jesus, we need to learn all we can about the one we follow. We are being transformed into his likeness, may our prayer be that God would make us more and more like Jesus everyday.

I have included a song of worship at the end of the comments about the title and/or passage that came into my mind as I was thinking about the particular title of Jesus. You may think of another but let the truths contained in these notes be an inspiration to you for worship, devotion and prayer and may we experience in our minds, hearts and souls a greater assurance of the reality of Jesus' love and presence with us – as He said *I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Mt 28:20)*. May the cry of our hearts also be - Just give me Jesus!

**Julia Binney**

**August 2009**

Thursday 1st October 2009

# THE WORD

*John 1:1-14*

As a child I used to be taken to our local parish church in the village where I grew up in Leicestershire. I particularly remember the Christmas services because we had to hang around afterwards to wait for my Father to finish counting the money. What a bore! What really infuriated me was the gibberish that was read from the Bible every year especially the beginning of the Gospel According to St John from the Authorized Version - *In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* What on earth was this about? I did not have a clue and it only proved to me what a complete waste of time church was anyway.

In my late twenties by God's grace and mercy, I became a Christian and these verses are now so precious to me. They speak of Jesus, the Word of God. They purposefully echo the words in the opening book of the Bible, Genesis, - *In the beginning God created... And God said.* God, the Father, created the world out of nothing by speaking the creative word. The deep truth that these verses contain is that Jesus is that Word; God's agent in creation. Jesus' existence did not begin when he was born in Bethlehem's manger but before everything that exists - the earth, the skies, the planets, the stars, the whole universe - He was. This preexistent Word (*Logos* in Greek) is the same person as Jesus. He is none other than God himself, the second person of the Trinity, the one responsible for the whole of creation. It is through Jesus that God is revealed (v.14). This *Logos* became a human being and lived among us for a while - *The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood (The Message).*

*At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,  
Every tongue confess Him King of glory now;  
Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,  
Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.*

Friday 2nd October 2009

# THE ONE FULL OF GRACE & TRUTH

*John 1:14-18*

Two people were talking across the aisle in a bus one day. One of them, a young woman, was reading M. Scott Peck's book about the meaning of life, *The Road Less Traveled*. 'What are you reading?' the man opposite her asked. 'A book a friend gave me,' the woman answered. 'She said it changed her life'. 'Oh yeah?' said the man, 'What's it about?'. 'I'm not sure,' she said. 'I haven't got very far but the chapter titles are Discipline, Love, Grace...' The man interrupted her, 'What's grace?' he asked. 'I don't know,' the woman answered. 'I haven't got to grace yet'.

'Grace' is one of the great Christian words which, according to Matthew Henry, is 'the free, undeserved goodness and favour of God to mankind' and that John Stott describes as 'love that cares and stoops and rescues'. Jesus embodies and overflows with this grace because in Him God has reached down to us and done everything for us to meet even our deepest needs. In the Old Testament *grace and truth* are often translated as 'unfailing love and faithfulness'. God proclaimed that He is *The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness (Exodus 34:6)*. The covenant love and faithfulness of God that is declared in this verse is revealed in the incarnate Word. In Jesus Christ that identical grace and mercy, faithfulness and loyalty are completely and uniquely expressed. In fact everything about the character of God is revealed in Jesus - *'He is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15)* - he makes God visible. By looking to Jesus, the One full of grace and truth, we see that God is who He says He is - the God of covenant love - gracious, merciful, faithful and true.

*O for a thousand tongues to sing  
My great redeemer's praise!  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of his grace!*

Saturday 3rd October 2009  
**THE LAMB OF GOD**  
*John 1:29-34*

*Agnus Dei* is Latin for 'Lamb of God' and is the name given to a simple liturgical prayer in the Roman Catholic mass and Anglican Eucharist that is said or sung during Communion.

*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world; have mercy on us.*

*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world; have mercy on us.*

*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world; grant us peace.*

It is entirely appropriate that it should be included during the breaking of bread as the bread represents Jesus' torn and broken body, his flesh which he has given for the life of the world (*John 6:51*). The Lord's Supper is prefigured by the Passover meal where unleavened bread was eaten with a slaughtered lamb (*Exodus 12:21*). The blood of the slain lamb protected the houses of Israelites on the night they left Egypt (*Exodus 12:11-13*). Jesus is our cosmic Passover lamb, *For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:7)*. Every morning and evening a lamb was sacrificed in the Temple for the sins of the people (*Exodus 29:38-42*). But *we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Hebrews 10:10)*. This is the ultimate fulfillment of *Genesis 22:8* that *God himself will provide the lamb*.

So much is contained in this phrase John the Baptist uses when he sees Jesus. *Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (v 29)*. 'Lamb of God' contains all the love, the sacrifice, the suffering and the triumph of Christ. No wonder the vision is given in Revelation of millions of worshippers encircling the throne of the Lamb singing *Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain (Revelation 5:12)*.

*Jesus my Redeemer,  
Name above all names,  
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,  
O for sinners slain.*

Sunday 4th October 2009

# THE MESSIAH (THAT IS THE CHRIST)

*John 1:35-42*

Yves Congar, a French Dominican theologian said 'There is nothing more urgent than doing all we can to know and make known the true God, the God whose last name is pronounced Jesus Christ.' Andrew had responded to John the Baptist's declaration of who Jesus was, and had followed him. When he had learned more about him, the first thing he does, with a sense of desperate urgency, is to rush off and find his brother Simon to tell him everything that he had heard. You can almost hear the breathlessness in his voice - come on, quick! *We have found the Messiah (v.41).*

The Jewish readers of this gospel would know exactly what Messiah meant i.e. 'anointed one'. In the Old Testament, it is used as a title referring to certain historical persons chosen and anointed by God for the service of God's people. At the time of Jesus, Messiah indicated either someone sent by God, as in the Davidic kings, in a political sense, or someone of the priestly tradition. The Messiah, however, was not an anointed one but the anointed one, the great conqueror ushering in a new age of power and prosperity including liberation from Roman occupation. Jesus was aware that the general view of Messiahship was not the same as his and that his mission and ministry may be misinterpreted. This is why after Peter's powerful confession of Jesus being the Christ *Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him (Mark 8:30)*. While the political overtones for the title would have been clearly appreciated by first century Palestinians, they would have been entirely lost on a Greek audience. So Messiah is translated as Christ, the Greek word for Messiah. Jesus is *the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16)*.

*Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna to the King of kings!  
Glory in the highest heaven, For Jesus the Messiah reigns.*

Monday 5th October 2009

## SON OF GOD

*John 1:43-51*

In response to Jesus' miraculous insight, Nathanael by faith declares, *Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel (v 49)*. Jesus is often referred to as 'the Son of God' signifying his unique relationship with the Father. Jesus said *I and the Father are one (John 10:30)* and again, *When (a believer) looks at me, he sees the one who sent me (John 12:45)*. When Philip asks *Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us*, Jesus replies *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father (John 14:8,9)*.

As Jim gets older, he says he sees himself getting more and more like his father. As I never met his father, I don't know whether this is a good thing or not. It has been said, 'Don't try to make children grow up to be like you or they may just do it!' But to see Jesus is to see his Father and ours, *The Son is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being (Hebrews 1:3)*. Jesus is described as the *only begotten Son (John 3:16)*. Does this mean that there was a time before Jesus existed? Arius (the original Jehovah's Witness of the fourth century) wrote, 'If the Father begot the Son, the One who was begotten has a beginning of existence; and from this it is evident that there was when the Son was not'. At the Council of Nicea (AD 325), this view was thoroughly condemned and Christ's divinity was affirmed in the great creedal statement of the Church - 'We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father.' By declaring Jesus *Son of God*, Nathanael is saying Jesus is God. This was the main reason why John wrote his gospel, so that people *may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing... may have life in his name (John 20:31)*.

*Jesus, you are the radiance of the Father's glory,  
You are the Son, the appointed heir,  
Through whom all things were made.*

Tuesday 6th October 2009

# MIRACLE WORKER

*John 2:1-11*

Whilst I think we need to accept the reality and validity of the miracles of the New Testament and those that have been recorded ever since, there are some Christians who seem overly keen on seeing extraordinary supernatural occurrences. Charles Colson, the disgraced American politician who found faith in prison, recognised this saying, 'it is absurd to constantly seek new demonstrations of God's power, to expect a miraculous answer to every need, from curing ingrown toenails to finding parking spaces; this only leads to faith in miracles rather than the Maker'. This tendency was alive and well at the time John wrote his gospel. He includes Jesus' chiding of the Galileans who were getting stuck on the miracles, *Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders... you will never believe (John 4:48)*. For this reason, John does not use the usual Greek word for 'miracle' but uses the word for 'sign'. A sign is something which points towards something else. John wants to point away from the miracles to Jesus himself, the one who works miracles.

This everyday event of a wedding, of which little is known, is recorded because, with Jesus present, it turns from something ordinary into something extraordinary. I always find this the most surprising miracle because it is such a commonplace situation. The embarrassed host of this wedding encountered a very human, ordinary problem, the wine had run out! It was a catering disaster, nothing more. Yet it became a life-changing event for the people who witnessed the changing of the water into wine as they *put their faith in him*. It revealed Jesus' glory and that God was with him, as Nicodemus later observed, *no-one could perform the miraculous signs (Jesus was ) doing if God were not with him (John 3:2)*.

*Jesus is Lord!*

*God sent his Holy Spirit*

*To show by works of power that Jesus is Lord.*

Wednesday 7th October 2009

# TEACHER

*John 3:1-15*

Nicodemus is rather an enigmatic character, an important Pharisee possibly even the leader of the ruling council, who seeks Jesus out at night, either to have an uninterrupted talk with him or because he was afraid of being seen. The darkness may be symbolic of his spiritual state as an unbeliever but one seeking understanding. It could be that he never found it but I prefer the happier outcome suggested by his later defence of Jesus (*John 7:50,51*) and by the help he gave Joseph of Arimethea with Jesus' body after the crucifixion - (*Joseph*) *was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who had visited him at night (John 19:38)*. What Nicodemus did understand was that Jesus was a uniquely gifted teacher - *Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God (v 2)*.

What do you think of the teachers you had either in school or university? During my time at Spurgeon's College training for the Ministry and in recent study, I was (in the main) taught by some exceptional lecturers who managed to make the most complicated doctrine understandable. Perhaps this was not everyone's experience like the chap who once said after a class, 'before I came here I was confused about this subject. Having listened to your lecture, I am still confused. But on a higher level'. We read in Matthew's gospel that the crowds were amazed at Jesus' teaching because he *taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law (Matthew 7:28,29)*. This authority came from his knowledge, experience, life and person. Jesus lived what he proclaimed. This was no second hand doctrine gleaned from other rabbis or sources. Jesus' teaching came directly from God.

*Spirit of truth, lead us, we pray, into all truth as we obey,  
And as God's will we gladly choose,  
Your ancient powers again will prove  
Christ's teaching truly comes from God  
He is indeed the living Word*

Thursday 8th October 2009

# THE ONE WHO COMES FROM ABOVE

*John 3:22-36*

I do recall that there was one subject in my college course that, to be honest, did leave me still confused but on a higher level, and this was the Philosophy of Religion. We raced through all the 'isms' at break neck speed but landed on Dualism for a while. It did make a bit more sense largely because it is foundational to the Greek philosophical thinking on which much of our Western civilisation is based. This thinking holds that reality exists of two basic and conflicting principles such as good and evil, light and dark, flesh and spirit. Essentially, the Greeks held that all physical stuff, including our bodies, was evil and everything ethereal of the mind and spirit was good. The inferior world of time (below) is only a copy of the superior, real, invisible world beyond time (above). In the same way that we are heavily influenced by the prevailing thoughts and world-views of our culture, so was John, which is why Jesus is described as *the one who comes from above* (v 31). Jesus also said to those who opposed him *You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world* (John 8:23).

There is of course, only one reality, God's reality. Jesus came from above not so much in a dualist sense but that he was sent by God from heaven (v 34), that is from the very heart and most intimate presence of God. We tend to think of heaven as being somewhere else, perhaps it is, but is it not also to do with entering into God's presence in perfect intimacy and union? Maybe that is why we are able to taste something of heaven right here, right now.

*It is a thing most wonderful,  
Almost too wonderful to be,  
That God's own Son should come from heaven  
And die to save a child like me.*

Friday 9th October 2009

# THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD

*John 4:27-42*

Many Samaritans believed in Jesus through the testimony of the woman he had met by the well (v. 39). Even a woman with her background (4:17,18), could be used by God to spread the good news that Jesus is indeed the Christ. There is hope for us all! Her apostolic ministry to the people of her town meant that Jesus was welcomed and listened to, so unlike the antagonistic reception he received from another Samaritan village, as recorded in *Luke 9:53*, which prompted James and John to ask Jesus to *call fire down from heaven to destroy them*. Needless to say that Jesus did not want to do that but gently suggested that they go somewhere else. This highlights the compassion of his ministry and the purpose of his mission - *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:17)*.

The Samaritans of *John 4* heard and saw for themselves and came to the right conclusion that Jesus *really is the Saviour of the world* (v. 42). This was quite some confession because the word *Saviour* was reserved only for God. They made the discovery that all they had longed and hoped for was fulfilled in this man. Jesus, God the Saviour, is the mediator of the kingdom of God, bringing life and salvation to all who receive him. He is not just the Saviour of the Jews but the Saviour of the whole world - *the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14)*. Jesus does for us what he did for that Samaritan woman and her town, he rescues us, saves us from the wrath to come (*Romans 5:9*), helps us to break away from the past and opens up a whole new future full of love, hope and purpose.

*Mercy and grace are mine, forgiven is my sin;  
Jesus, my only hope, the Saviour of the world.  
'Great is the Lord' we cry; let your kingdom come.  
Your Word has let me see, thank you for saving me.*

Saturday 10th October 2009

# HEALER

*John 5:1-15*

'Bethesda' was once a popular name for churches, especially in Wales. The Hebrew name is very apt for a church because it means 'house of mercy' or 'house of grace'. It is certainly God's grace and mercy which is being revealed here in this episode of Jesus healing the man who couldn't walk. This man has been an invalid for thirty-eight years but he is singled out by Jesus from all those seeking a cure. Jesus speaks to him and heals him. The helpless man is given power to obey the word of Christ to stand up and begin to live (v.9). He does not even know who Jesus is and does not appear particularly desperate to find out. So Jesus goes to find him at the temple later and encourages him to leave his life of sin (v. 14). Jesus brought physical healing to this man and offered him spiritual healing as well. Which is the greater miracle?

The people by the pool are described as *blind, lame and paralysed* (v. 4). The healing of these infirmities was one of the prophesied ministries of the Messiah - *The eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like deer* (Isaiah 53:4-6). Jesus, the great teacher and author of salvation, touches people with compassion - *Jesus went through Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people ... (they) brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon possessed, those having seizures, and the paralysed, and he healed them* (Matthew 4:23, 24). Jesus knows the need for physical healing. He overpowers the forces of evil that threaten our lives and brings wholeness.

*Proclaiming Jesus, only Jesus -  
It is Jesus, Saviour, healer and baptiser,  
And the mighty King,  
The victor and deliverer –  
He is Lord, He is Lord, He is Lord!*

Sunday 11th October 2009

# JUDGE

*John 5:16-30*

In our rapidly changing world, death is increasingly being talked of in the media as the only certainty of life - *It is appointed for all people to die once and after that to face judgement (Hebrews 9:27)*. The responsibility for judging the world has been given to Jesus. So here is another certainty - everyone who has ever lived, no matter who they are, will one day stand before Jesus to be judged by him. Jesus is our judge - *the Father judges no-one, but has entrusted all judgement to the Son (v. 22)*. *He is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42)*.

Yet Jesus is our Saviour, He said *I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for those who reject me and do not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day (John 12:47,48)*. Can He be both Saviour and Judge? In the city of Hyderabad in India, there was a judge who, on his way to court one day, saw a child on the railway line right in the way of a fast approaching train. Taking his own life in his hands, he dashed on to the line and drew the child into safety just in time. He went on to the court, and an hour later sat as judge in the criminal court, listened to the jury's verdict on a murderer and pronounced the death sentence. He had that day been both a saviour and a judge. Jesus is both Saviour and judge with the power to give life and the power to condemn. Salvation was the purpose of his coming but judgement is the other side of salvation. It is not the purpose of the sun's shining to cast shadows, but when the sun shines, shadows are inevitable. To those who accept him, he is Saviour. To those who reject him, he is judge. The resurrection of the last day will reveal the decision that each of us has made in life.

*Rejoice in glorious hope; Jesus the judge shall come,  
And take his servants up to their eternal home.*

Monday 12th October 2009

# PROPHET

*John 6:1-15*

In 1950 a fisherman from North Holland named Louwrens van Voorthuizen declared that he was God. Lou, as he preferred to be called, gathered a small but very committed group of followers around him, saying that his role was similar to that of Jesus, but greater. He predicted that the end of time was near and assured his followers - mostly middle aged and female - that, as he was immortal, they would be too. His claims rather lost their credibility when Lou died in 1968, and the group died out not long afterwards.

Similarly, at the time of Jesus there were plenty of Messianic pretenders who sought credibility by either re-enacting or matching Old Testament miracles. This is what the crowd who witnessed the feeding of the five thousand must have presumed, so the rumour began to spread, *surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world (v. 14)*. They were referring to the prophet that Moses said would come - *The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me (Deuteronomy 18:15)*. The context in which this promise was made was the wilderness wanderings of Israel when they were being fed daily with manna, bread from heaven. Here was this Messianic figure performing a dramatic, public miracle to match anything that had been witnessed before. Jesus is indeed this Prophet. They were right but then they immediately go on to cast him in another role - *Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him King by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself (v. 15)*. They expected the Prophet to come to provide food and water as Moses had done in the desert but maybe they sensed that Jesus is more than that. He is the true witness, the mediator, the Lord who is the servant, the servant who is Lord of all - i.e. Prophet, Priest and King.

*Jesus! My Shepherd, Saviour, Friend,  
My Prophet, Priest and King,  
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,  
Accept the praise I bring.*

Tuesday 13th October 2009

# THE BREAD OF LIFE

*John 6:25-59*

Here, Jesus is revealed as the giver and sustainer of life both spiritually & physically and the supplier of all human needs. As well as people's material needs, He came to satisfy our deep-seated needs, even those that are not recognised or acknowledged. By the phrase *I am* (v. 35), Jesus declares himself to be God Incarnate, the promised Messiah. Rabbinic tradition said that manna from heaven would be given again in the last days. The first redeemer, Moses, brought down manna from heaven and the last redeemer, Messiah, will again bring down manna. Jesus affirms this tradition but says that this new bread from heaven is not literal manna as in the Exodus but living bread - *I am the bread of life* (v.35).

Bread is the staple substance in our diet (even though for some of us it is the gluten-free variety). Bread sustains us, but life is more than mere physical existence, it is spiritual as well. Jesus also sustains our spiritual life. It is very unhealthy to starve physically and so it is spiritually. There is an aching, a void, a deep inner longing when we are spiritually starved. There is an insatiable hunger for spiritual meaning and fulfilment evident in our society today. I saw a poster once saying, 'Jesus is the answer, now what's the question!' Jesus is saying to everyone, 'what you are searching for, I alone am the answer. The needs you don't even understand, so can't begin to know the solution to, I am the answer, its me! I am what sustains you, I am what meets your innermost needs, I alone can feed your spirits so that you'll never hunger and thirst again'. Once we come to know him, accept him and receive him, all our unsatisfied longings, insatiable desires of heart and soul are met. The restless soul is at rest, the hungry heart satisfied.

*I am the bread of life.*

*He who comes to me shall not hunger,  
He who believes in me shall not thirst.*

Wednesday 14th October 2009

# THE HOLY ONE OF GOD

*John 6:60-71*

In the 1950's an American evangelist working in Japan showed a gospel film to the police cadets of Nagoya. Afterwards, others preached and gave testimony and then the cadets were invited to give their lives to Christ. Everyone responded! The evangelist wrote enthusiastically about how revival was breaking out in Japan. What he did not know was that the chief of police had instructed the cadets that when the missionary asked for a show of hands, they were to respond because he wanted a good relationship with the United States! Before this point in Jesus' ministry, it looked as if masses of people were responding to him: when he was first in Jerusalem, many saw the miracles and believed in his name (*John 2:23*): the numbers for baptism had started to get embarrassing (*John 4:1-3*): in Samaria, great things had happened (*John 4:39,45*): the crowds had flocked to him only the day before (*John 6:2*). But now the tone changes; many of the so-called followers desert him.

Jesus asks the disciples whether they are sure they really want to stick around (v.67). Peter speaks for them all saying, *there's no-one else to go to, you alone have the words that will bring life*. He then makes this dramatic confession - *you are the Holy One of God* (v.69). Peter is not alone in this exalted revelation. The demons also call him by this title (*Mark 1:24, Luke 4:34*), recognising that His essential holiness and their own evil nature are eternally opposed. *Holy* refers to that which is in unique relation to God and sent by Him. 'Jesus stands over against the world as the One who comes from the other world and belongs to God' (R. Bultmann). Peter's worshipful *you are* is a direct affirmation of Jesus' *I am*.

*O Holy One, our hearts do adore you:*

*Thrilled with your goodness we give you our praise.*

*Angels in light with worship surround Him,*

*Jesus, our Saviour, forever the same.*

Thursday 15th October 2009

# THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*John 8:12-30*

The context here is the Feast of Tabernacles. It was a reminder to them of God's goodness during the wilderness wanderings of their forefathers. The celebration took place over seven days in the Temple when the people camped out in shelters made of branches. The two major ceremonies were the drawing of water in the morning and the lighting of the great candelabra at night - a reminder of the water from the rock and guidance by the pillar of fire at night (*Exodus 13:21*). These were visible symbols of God's presence with them. Jesus used both to illustrate how he is himself the full and final provision, in God's economy, for believing people of these promised events of the past. This is why he described himself as the source of living water (*John 7:37,38*). Then, at the climax of the Feast, when the ceremony of 'The Illumination of the Temple' had taken place for the last time, after the people had watched the holiest men in Israel dance and sing praises before God, Jesus speaks out these words, *I am the light of the world* (v.12). In the absence of lights, Jesus' claim to be light stands out all the more impressively. He is declaring that he is the very light of God himself.

Light is defined as 'the medium of illumination that makes sight possible'. Light is invisible, God is invisible. We only know of the existence of light as it manifests itself by bouncing off dust and through atmospheric mists. God would not be known apart from the medium of illumination shining in person of Jesus Christ. Light brings sight to all people; Jesus can bring spiritual sight to all people. He is the source of the light of spiritual illumination and understanding. Jesus brings life and light to the world.

*Arise, shine, your light has come,  
The glory of the Lord has risen on you!  
Arise, shine, your light has come,  
Jesus the light of the world has come.*

Friday 16th October 2009

# 'I AM'

*John 8:31-59*

Jesus is doing some straight talking to the Jews who are starting to put their faith in him (v. 31). He encourages these aspiring disciples in the truth but soon finds them to be of the 'rocky places' variety (*Matthew 13.20*). They are not happy with the insinuation that they were in bondage prior to Jesus setting them free (v. 33). Nothing changes, as Reinhold Niebuhr remarked, 'no amount of contrary evidence seems to disturb humanity's good opinion of itself'.

The insults start to fly. Jesus is accused of being racially inferior and a total nutter, to use modern parlance (v. 48). They get so mad with him that they look for stones to throw at him (v. 59). The reason why they are so upset is because Jesus is claiming to be equal with God. He tells them that *before Abraham was born, I am!* (v. 58). As we learned in the Sunday morning sermons at the beginning of the year, in using the words 'I am', Jesus is deliberately taking to himself the words of God to Moses at the burning bush - *I am who I am (Exodus 3:14)*. God became known through his acts and words on Israel's behalf, especially as the One who liberated them from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land. This has finally found fulfilment and completion in the supreme revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ - *If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed* (v. 36). Jesus uses the phrase 'I am' several times to say something about himself. It is a solemn and emphatic statement and he knows exactly what he is alluding to. The implications of this statement are obvious and would have been to his audience. He is clearly claiming to be, not just a good man, teacher or prophet, but Messiah, Son of God, God in the flesh, God Incarnate!

*Lord of Lords, King of Kings*

*Maker of heaven and earth and all good things, we give you glory.*

*Lord Jehovah, Son of Man,*

*Precious Prince of Peace and the great I AM, we give you glory.*

Saturday 17th October 2009

# THE MAN THEY CALL JESUS

*John 9:1-12*

Jesus had faced the Jews who opposed him with their spiritual blindness and he follows this with the miraculous gift of physical sight to a beggar born blind. The ridiculous denial that the same man who was blind could now see (*v.9b*), highlights the way in which it seems easier for some to deny the obvious than have to deal with the claims of Christ - *The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4)*. They asked the man how it had happened. He tells them - *The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes (v. 11)*. The one who gave him sight was a man called Jesus. He did not know much about him but knew what his name was. It reminds me of a Wycliffe Bible Translators leaflet I saw recently that quoted a man from the Philippines' who responded to the question of whether he had heard of Jesus by saying, 'Jesus Christ? We've heard that name somewhere, but we've never met the fellow. I don't think he's been through here!'

The name of Jesus is actually very well known even if the person and work of Jesus is not. It is amazing to me that people who claim to know nothing about him still manage to say his name an awful lot! It may not mean much to them but it does to us who believe, as John Newton put it - 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear, it soothes his sorrows heals his wounds & drives away his fear'. There are over 208 names for Jesus in the NT with seven being listed in John 1 alone. But Jesus was specifically given two names at his birth - *Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21)* and *Immanuel - which means God with us (Matthew 1:23)*.

*Jesus, name above all names,  
Beautiful Saviour, Glorious Lord;  
Emmanuel, God is with us,  
Blessed Redeemer, Living Word.*

Sunday 18th October 2009  
**THE SON OF MAN**  
*John 9:13-41*

The man who could now see stands up to the powerful religious leaders who question him about Jesus, answering with incredible boldness and courage under the threat of excommunication from temple worship. This meant that he would be cut off from family and friends and become a social outcast. Do we take our stand for Jesus regardless of the cost to us? The man cannot believe how the authorities are trying to twist things and talk about irrelevancies. He doesn't know much about the man who healed him but they can debate all they like, for him it is simple, *One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!* (v. 25). The Pharisees don't see beyond the Law and are deliberately shutting their eyes to the grace and truth in Jesus. But Jesus came primarily to open the eyes of the spiritually blind. As John Newton, the ex-slave trader who, after his conversion, became a famous Anglican vicar and writer, wrote in his most famous hymn, 'Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see'.

Jesus goes to look for the man and asks him a question (v. 35), essentially, 'Do you put your trust in the Son of Man?' This is Jesus' favourite title for himself. It is an interesting phrase with a range of meanings. In the Old Testament, it is a Messianic term used of the heavenly figure of the last days who is entrusted by God with authority, glory and sovereign power. The man doesn't know who the Son of Man is but he wants to (v. 36). Unlike the time when the crowd asked the same question in *John 12:34*, Jesus openly reveals to him, 'It's me. You can see me' (v. 37). This is such a poignant moment when the formerly blind man sees Jesus for the first time for who he is and bows down and worships him (v.38).

*Word incarnate, truth revealing,  
Son of Man on earth!  
Power and majesty concealing  
By your humble birth:*

Monday 19th October 2009

# THE GATE

*John 10:1-10*

I sometimes enjoy the adverts on TV more than the programs. One that sticks in my mind is appropriate here. It was a clever, simple advert with a no nonsense type of man with a tin of Ronseal wood protecting paint. He held it up to the camera saying, 'it does exactly what it says on the tin' and this phrase has now taken a firm hold on our national consciousness. This plain speaking is a bit like Jesus in this passage. Now he is not saying that he is 'a movable barrier, usually hinged for closing an opening' (Collins Concise Dictionary definition of a gate) but is actually saying two very simple and obvious things.

Firstly, he is saying that he is the gate to eternal salvation - *I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved (v. 9)*. He is emphasising that he alone is the way in; there is no salvation through any other gate, he is the only means of entry. On the hills, the flocks were enclosed together by a barrier with just one narrow opening. The shepherd lays down across the opening - he is literally the gate. He alone permits entry to the sheep and keeps the wolves and robbers out. To receive eternal salvation we must, as Jesus said, *enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life (Matthew 7:13)*. Secondly, Jesus is saying that he is the gate to *abundant life (v. 10)*. This life of blessing is described in terms of secure pasturage i.e. the absolute best for the sheep. The sheep that enter the fold through Jesus have all their needs met (v. 9b). Unlike the thief that only comes to destroy and steal, Jesus came for the benefit of the sheep that they may have life, security, care, comfort, abundant provision i.e. life to the full.

*O come and sing this song with gladness, as your hearts are filled with joy  
Lift your hands in sweet surrender to his name*

*O give him all your tears and sadness, give him all your years of pain,  
And you'll enter into life in Jesus' name.*

*Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.*

Tuesday 20th October 2009

# THE GOOD SHEPHERD

*John 10:11-18*

A shepherd conjures up a timeless rural image as 'sleepless, far-sighted, weather beaten, leaning on his staff, every one of the sheep on his heart'. The Victorians were very keen on this picture of Jesus and often (mis)represented him as a blue-eyed, fair headed European man ethereally looking over an idyllic pastoral scene with a few cute little lambs. Is this picture a helpful one? Do other pictures of Jesus have more resonance for today in our largely urban, multi-racial environment such as 'lover' or 'wounded healer'?

However, in the Old Testament God is often pictured as a shepherd with Israel as his sheep. In *Ezekiel 34* God promises to be their true shepherd and exposes the false shepherds of the day. The picture was familiar to the Jews to whom Jesus says *I am the good shepherd* i.e. I am the fulfilment of this promise. Throughout the whole New Testament, the imagery of the shepherd is retained and applied to Jesus. He is the Shepherd who risks his life for the sheep to rescue the one that is lost (*Matthew 18, Luke 15*). Peter describes Jesus as *the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls* (*1 Peter 2:25*). He is *the great Shepherd of the sheep* (*Hebrews 13:20*). Sheep in the East were largely kept not for meat but for wool, so the shepherds knew them well as individuals, often giving them names such as brown leg or black ear. In the same way Jesus knows his own sheep (v. 14) individually and personally. Eastern shepherds were often called to sacrifice their own lives to protect the sheep from predators. Jesus is the one who *lays down his life for the sheep* (v. 11), and leads them through danger to the best pastures. The true Christian follows Jesus because they trust that the good shepherd knows what is best.

*The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.  
He makes me lie in pastures green.  
He leads me by the still, still waters.  
His goodness restores my soul.*

Wednesday 21st October 2009

# THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

*John 11:1-44*

In *Children's Letters to God*, one child writes, 'Dear God, What's it like when you die? I just want to know. I don't want to do it!' Death is a big mystery. It would be wonderful to see what is beyond the grave. Perhaps we would be able to enjoy this life a lot more if we could. Jesus takes some of the mystery out of death for us who believe. In the face of the meaningless death of a young man, a friend of Jesus and the brother of Mary and Martha, Jesus brings life, hope and meaning - *I am the resurrection and the life* (v. 25). The sisters are full of grief. They wanted answers and we do too. Jesus is the answer to death, as he is to life. He is alive - Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again!

When Jesus died on the cross and rose again to be our living Saviour, he broke the power of Satan, sin and death over us - *He too shared their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death* (Hebrews 2:14,15). Death, the last enemy, has been conquered, *Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 15:55,56). As Christ died and rose again, so those who die in Christ, will rise again to eternal life. The light does not just go out and we are no more, there is life beyond the grave. Through Jesus' victory over death, what is mortal is clothed with immortality (1 Corinthians 15:54). 'Death is not extinguishing the light from the Christian... it is putting out the light because the dawn has come!'

*Thine be the glory,  
Risen, conquering Son;  
Endless is the victory  
Thou o'er death hast won!*

Thursday 22nd October 2009

# THE ONE ANOINTED TO DIE

*John 12:1-11*

I met a woman once who went every day to a Benny Hinn conference because of 'the anointing'. What is this? In his book *'The Anointing'*, Benny Hinn describes it simply as 'the power, the power to serve God'. Biblically, there is actually more to 'the anointing' than this. In the Old Testament, both people and things were anointed with sacred oil to signify holiness or separation to God. It is an act of God (*1 Samuel 10:1*). Kings and Priests were anointed as those favoured by God (*Psalms 23:5*) and appointed for a purpose (*Isaiah 45:1*). The Messiah is also the *Anointed One* (*Daniel 9:25*). Jesus quotes *Isaiah 61:1 - The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me ... (Luke 4:18)*. Paul writes, *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power (Acts 10:38)*.

In this passage, we are presented with another understanding of 'the anointing' as Jesus is pictured as the One who is anointed to die. Jesus is anointed with fragrant oils for a specific purpose and this is shown practically and dramatically. The anointing of Jesus by Mary with incredibly expensive, luxurious perfume is by way of a consecration to royal service. The service that he is anointed for is to die on a cross to save humanity from sin. Even though Mary anoints him before his death, the end of his ministry is inevitable because Jesus was born in order to die. Mary's act is one of personal worship, humility and selfless devotion. She reveals to all the others just who Jesus is and what he has come to do. As we offer ourselves to God in his service, dying to sin and our old way of life, we are anointed *with the Holy Spirit and with power* and, as a Nicaraguan Christian called Laureano has said, 'We can offer our lives as Jesus did. Then it'll be also for us, that perfume that the woman poured on Jesus'.

*All the glory, honour and power  
Belong to you, belong to you.  
Jesus, Saviour, Anointed One,  
I worship you, I worship you*

Friday 23rd October 2009

# SERVANT

*John 13:1-17*

Peter the Great of Russia (1672-1725) had a big idea to improve Russia. So he left his exalted position, became first an apprentice, then a skilled workman and finally a teacher and demonstrator. He worked as a shipbuilder in Holland and at Deptford in London and studied military science in Austria. The result was St Petersburg. It rises out of the marshes, the capital and harbour for ships which Peter often piloted in himself. He was an outstanding example of humility and diligence to his subjects.

In this passage, we read of an even greater example of humility and service. Jesus washed his disciples feet and having washed them, exhorts his followers to do the same (*v. 14*). He set us an example that we should follow. Is he suggesting that we must all become chiropodists or reflexologists? No! In hot climates like Palestine foot washing was a regular custom and a necessary but lowly task. People walked around in open sandals which meant that their feet and legs got dusty and dirty. In richer homes a servant would wash the guest's feet but in poorer ones the husband or wife would do it. When Jesus took off his outer clothes, which was how a slave would have done it, he is showing himself as a servant. Jesus said *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45)*. *(Our) attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant (Philippians 2:5,6)*. We are to follow Jesus' example of taking the lowly position of a humble servant.

*This is our God, the Servant King,  
He calls us now to follow him,  
To bring our lives as a daily offering  
Of worship to the Servant King.*

Saturday 24th October 2009

# THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

*John 14:1-14*

In Bewdley, Worcestershire, one side of the river Severn (where our house is!) is called the Christian shore, and the other side (where the Baptist church is!) is called the pagan shore. The only way to get from one side to the other is over Bewdley bridge. The only way to get from where we are to God is over the bridge that is Jesus. Jesus is the only way to God - *I am the way, the truth and the life. The way to the Father is through me (v. 6)*. Jesus is the only way to get through life. He gives us guidance through the maze of life when we do not know the way. When we are lost and cannot find our way home, Jesus is the way home to our Father in heaven.

Jesus, on trial before Pilate testifies that *I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me (John 18:37,38)*. Pilate then asks him the age old question - *what is truth?* One of the problems of our society is that people reckon that there is more than one way home - unfortunately this has resulted in an awful lot of people getting lost. Truth is seen as relative - if it is true for you then it is true and has as much validity as anyone else's truth. In this world view, there is no absolute truth.

Jesus said *you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free (John 8:32)*. Jesus reveals and embodies all truth. Jesus came *to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10)*. He came for those who do not know the way and are lost, those who know that they cannot find God for themselves through religion, manipulating the truth or their own good works. He came for the sick not the healthy, for the unrighteous not the righteous. Jesus came to bring life, eternal life, abundant life, real life, God's quality of life to all who trust in him.

*Beautiful Saviour, Wonderful Counsellor  
clothed in majesty, Lord of history,  
you're the Way, the Truth, the Life.*

Sunday 25th October 2009

# THE TRUE VINE

*John 15:1-17*

Jesus is talking to his disciples in the Upper Room just before he is arrested and put on trial. He describes himself as the true vine - *I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener (v. 1)*. Jesus is using a well known picture of the vine and its branches to explain the whole purpose of Christian living and how the Christian life can be lived successfully. Vines were grown all over Palestine at the time and the vine itself was the national symbol. Viniculture was a common means of earning a living because vines need a lot of care and attention. The main stem is the source of life for the whole vine but it is the individual branches that bear the fruit. Jesus is saying here that he is the true vine and the only source of divine life for the branches i.e. the church. Israel thought of itself as the vine because they had the Law and they presumed that divine life flowed out to the world through them. The Old Testament describes Israel as the vine but one that has become corrupt, diseased and fruitless fit only to be uprooted, stripped and burned (*Ezekiel 19:10-14*). Jesus is saying that he is the true vine not Israel.

In Christ, we are grafted onto the vine - *I am the vine, you are the branches (v. 5)*. The picture is of the Father as the vinedresser keeping the church healthy and fruitful, cutting off dead and fruitless branches. He cuts the sin out of our lives that prevents growth to make us healthy, strong and fruitful. The vine has only one real purpose - to bear fruit - otherwise it may as well be used for burning. The whole point of the church and the purpose of Christian living is to bear fruit - *fruit that will last (v.16)*. Otherwise, we are of no more use than a vine that bears no grapes!

*You are the vine, we are the branches,  
Keep us abiding in you.*

*You are the vine, we are the branches,  
Keep us abiding in you.*

Monday 26th October 2009

# JESUS OF NAZARETH

*John 18:1-11*

This incredibly poignant and profound moment of history is packed full of drama and tension. Jesus, in the quiet and peace of the olive groves of Gethsemane, is waiting for Judas and the soldiers to come for him and take him back to the city, to all the suffering he was about to endure there. Judas guides some Roman soldiers, garrisoned in Jerusalem during the festival in case of riots, and some Jewish temple police, to where he knows Jesus will be. Jesus had deliberately sprung the trap himself and now offers himself in this ideal, remote setting. It is dark and away from the crowds, so avoiding any possibility of inciting violence by his arrest. Jesus takes the initiative - *Who is it that you want?* Perhaps it is the surprise of this question, or his divine majesty shining through or the fear of actually getting hold of this infamous miracle worker, but when the soldiers have identified Jesus, they fall over or 'lurch backwards'! They totally lose control of the situation. In the face of the divine Son of God, earthly authorities are, and always will be, in chaos.

Jesus is calmly in control of the whole thing and willingly submits. They ask for 'Jesus of Nazareth' and three times he tells them 'I am he'. We can have a tendency to think that because Jesus is God that his suffering was not really real. But Jesus of Nazareth was a first century Jewish carpenter from a remote, obscure rural town near Galilee in the north of Palestine with an often mocked, rustic accent who became an itinerant preacher. The Son of God was born a human being, in a particular place, at a particular point in human history. Jesus was flesh and blood, who really suffered and died the most appalling execution ever devised by man.

*But this I know, that He was born of Mary,  
When Bethlehem's manger was His only home,  
And that He lived at Nazareth and laboured,  
And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.*

Tuesday 27th October 2009

## KING OF THE JEWS

*John 18:28-40*

When we read about what passed between Jesus and Pilate, we wonder how it could all have happened. Who in their right mind could shout for Barabbas, a well known rebel and murderer, to be released instead of Jesus? But, here again, Jesus is the one who is in control - *this happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled (v. 32)*. Jesus had told the disciples that he was going to be crucified and this interview with Pilate is part of the journey to the cross. Jesus knew what was going to happen, he knew it had to happen and he was permitting it to happen. God was actually in charge here; this is what is meant to happen. However, this in no way takes away from the guilt of those who wanted it to happen, those who clamoured for his death.

Pilate's interrogation of Jesus opens with a question - *Are you the King of the Jews? (v.33)*. Jesus wants to know if this is Pilate's idea or whether this has been prompted by the Jewish leaders. If Pilate asked it, it would have meant, 'are you a political king conspiring against Caesar?' but coming from the High Priest, the question would have been, 'are you the Messianic King of Israel?' The answer to the first would have been 'no' but to the second, 'yes'. In response to Caiaphas' demand, *Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One* Jesus replied *I am (Mark 14:61,62)*. Pilate would interpret the title 'King of the Jews' in a political sense, as was intended by the Jewish authorities. The Jews made up this absurd charge. According to Josephus, only Herod the Great had ever claimed the title. Jesus is not interested in an earthly kingdom but is King over all creation - *the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings (Revelation 17:14)*.

*King of Kings, majesty God of heaven living in me.  
Gentle Saviour, closest friend. Strong deliverer, beginning and end.  
All within me falls at your throne.*

Wednesday 28th October 2009

# MASTER

*John 20:1-18*

Justin Martyr (c.100-165), was a famous 'apologist' - not someone saying sorry all the time, but a defender of the Christian faith! He had a bold and attractive ministry cut short by martyrdom in Rome. At this time, Christians were accused of being atheists because they did not worship Roman gods. Justin's courageous response to this was, 'We are not atheists, for we worship the creator of the universe. The master who taught us this worship, and who was born to this end, was crucified under Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius Caesar'.

Jesus is the 'master who taught us'. He is the One who was 'crucified, dead and buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again'. Death could not hold him because he conquered death and rose to be our living Saviour. He appeared first of all to Mary *whom he had delivered of seven demons (Luke 8:2)*, the one who, because she had been forgiven so much, loved Jesus so much (*Luke 7:36-50*). The first message of the Risen Lord was a missionary message entrusted to this ex-prostitute - *Go ... to my brothers and tell them, I am returning to my Father, to my God and your God (v. 17)*. Mary is in the garden, absolutely devastated. She has lost her beloved Lord. She is aware of someone, turns and recognises Jesus. He speaks her name. She responds with the word *Rabboni*. The Hebrew word 'Rabbi' means master as in contrast to a slave and was usually used as a polite title for a teacher. It is often applied to Jesus. *Rabboni* is an Aramaic form of this title. This is the language that Jesus himself would have spoken. It means 'my great master'. He is our great master too.

*At break of dawn, poor Mary, still weeping she came,  
When through her grief she heard your voice  
Now speaking her name.  
Mary, Master, Mary, Master!  
You're alive, You're alive, You have risen, Alleluia!*

Thursday 29th October 2009

# MY LORD AND MY GOD

*John 20:19-31*

The nineteenth century hymn-writer Fanny Crosby (of Blessed Assurance) was blind. She was among those who introduced the music of music-halls into the church and brought storytelling into hymns. She once wrote 'My soul was flooded with celestial light... for the first time I realised that I had been trying to hold the world in one hand and the Lord in the other'. Perhaps it was after this that she was able to write the verse that begins, 'Perfect submission, perfect delight, visions of rapture burst on my sight'. She could not see the world but she could really see Jesus.

Thomas was able to see and he did see the risen Christ standing in front of him, holding out his nail pierced hands and his wounded side for Thomas to touch. Thomas is overwhelmed. He bursts out his declaration in a spirit of abject submission - *My Lord and my God (v. 28)*. The word for *Lord* means master or owner. It soon came to be used exclusively for God and the Lord Jesus and this was in a monotheistic culture, before the doctrine of the Trinity was understood. Jesus is indeed God and he is also a man. Both are true. Thomas fulfils the Lord's words, *that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father (John 5:23)*. Thomas is not just using a title here or even an exclamation of the praise of God or giving a theological definition of the person of Christ. What he is doing is confessing to Jesus from the very depths of his soul - *You are my Lord and my God*. The revelation of the risen Christ comes to us by the Holy Spirit, without physical sight, so we declare the Lordship of Christ - *If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9)*. And Jesus says here that we will be blessed (v. 29).

*Jesus is Lord!*

*O'er sin the mighty conqueror,*

*From death he rose and all his foes shall own his name.*

Friday 30th October 2009

## FRIEND

*John 21:1-14*

Jesus, the Word, is God. The main purpose of John writing his Gospel is *so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:31)*. The thrust of early church theology was to defend Christ as God amid a plethora of heretical views threatening the Church. The deity of Christ was always uppermost in the thinking of the Church until relatively recently. It was always stated, for example, that Jesus performed all the miracles because he was God. This made him such a remote figure who could not possibly identify with us and many looked for a more obviously human figure to plead for them, hence the popularity in some circles of the cult of Mary, the mother of Jesus. However, we are told that *in Jesus we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one how has been tempted in every way, just as we are (Hebrews 4:15)*. It is through Jesus alone that we approach God's throne of grace. Jesus is the only bridge between us and God.

Since the nineteenth century, the humanity of Christ has also been emphasised in the church. Jesus performed miracles and lived the way he did because he was a man constantly filled with the Holy Spirit. As the church today we need to emphasise the humanity of Jesus. People may not be interested in church but the person of Jesus always fascinates. He is our living Saviour, not some dead hero. *He ever lives to intercede for us (Hebrews 7:25)*. Here, in this passage, is the most human of situations. Jesus is on the beach cooking breakfast for his friends. I can almost smell the fish on the BBQ and the freshly baked bread! *Jesus no longer calls us servants but friends (John 15:15)*. He is the *friend who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24)*.

*What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!*

*What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!*

*Friendship with Jesus, fellowship divine.*

*O what blessed sweet communion. Jesus is a friend of mine.*

Saturday 31st October 2009

# THE KNOWER OF ALL THINGS

*John 21:15-17*

The beach where Jesus and his disciples enjoyed this al fresco meal was a favoured picnic site at Tabgha. It was a special place for Jesus and his disciples but especially, perhaps, for Peter. It was here that Jesus had first commissioned him after his confession of faith in Jesus as *the Christ, the Son of the living God* (Matthew 16:16). Using the play on words inspired by Peter's name (in Greek 'Peter' is petros and 'rock' is petra), Jesus said that on this rock – Peter – he would build his church. It is interesting to consider whether it was the man, Peter, or his inspired confession to which Jesus is referring. They were most probably standing on the large rock at Tabgha which is now the entire floor of a small chapel built on the site to commemorate this event. It is entirely fitting, therefore, that the re-commissioning of Peter after his three-fold denial of Jesus after his arrest (Matthew 26:69-75), should take place in exactly the same spot.

As with the denial, Jesus asks Peter three times whether he loves him. The Greek word for 'love' in Jesus' first two questions is different from that in his third question and in all Peter's answers. The conversation could be understood as: 'Peter do you love me? I like you Lord. Peter do you love me? I like you Lord. Peter do you like me is even that true? Yes, Lord I really do like you.' Peter had claimed a greater devotion than the others (John 13:37; Matthew 26:33) but at last he is honest with himself and with Jesus. This was the turning point. Jesus is the knower of all things (v.17). When Jesus saw Nathanael, he knew all about him (John 1:43-50). He knew all about Peter and he knows all about us. Jesus is asking – do you love me? Do you? When we face up to ourselves and are real with God it can be the turning point in our life of faith as well. As Peter realised, there is nowhere to hide from God. He is everywhere and knows all things. Honesty is our only option.

*It is most wonderful to know His love for me so free and sure;  
But 'tis more wonderful to see my love for Him so faint*