

*Reading the Gospels 2010*

# **4 - Public Ministry around Galilee 1 & 2:**

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**[1] In Galilee Part 1**

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*John Baptist: the friend of the Bridegroom*

**David Boan**

# nt 22 – Mark 1.14a, 6.17-18

## John the Baptist's imprisonment

*Read Matthew 14.3-4, Luke 3.18-20*

*22-1 – John the Baptist is taken off stage.*

*22-2 John and Jesus*

*22-3 Both share an active ministry and a passive ministry*

*22-4 An Elijah ministry with a different triumph*

### 22-1 – John the Baptist is taken off stage.

Before he deals with the imprisonment of John the Baptist by Herod, Matthew has a record of Jesus teaching. The occasion is that Herod the tetrarch had been hearing of Jesus and thought it was John the Baptist come back from the dead. So, by the time we are reading Matthew 14, John had been executed.

Luke [and Matthew 14.4-12], explains why it is that Herod has thrown John into prison. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us [Antiquities 18] that Herod registered John's amazing popularity and was afraid of an uprising. So he had John imprisoned in the citadel of Machaerus, on the eastern coastline of the Dead Sea.

The issue was that Herod Antipas had a wife who was the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia. But, being attracted by the beauty of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, he took her as his own wife. John the Baptist had rebuked him concerning this.

### 22-2 John and Jesus

These two cousins had extraordinary prophecies that accompanied their births – John being 6 months older than Jesus. John is an introductory person who stands at the junction of the old and the new. He is, according to Jesus, the last of the prophets of the old Covenant. The Gospel writers all bear witness to the ministry of John, for his baptism of Jesus marks the public announcement of Jesus' ministry to Israel.

Equally, they all bear witness to both men, so that there is no confusion between them in the minds of their readers. Indeed, Mark will spend a full chapter recording for us the circumstances of the death of John the Baptist, and will set that death of such a triumphant Elijah figure as a forerunner of Jesus in his death. They did to him as they would.

## 22-3 Both share an active ministry and a passive ministry

That John had the courage to stand up to Herod and prophetically rebuke him concerning the taking of his gentle brother's wife indicates the power of his zeal and the righteousness that he spoke in such an even handed way to high and low, religious and lay people alike. This was the active period of his ministry.

But now John was in prison, and he was taken out of action in such a way that even later, in his own attempt to understand the gentleness of Jesus' ministry, he must send a message by the hands of his disciples. As we shall come to see, John was subject to the actions and judgements of others – his passive ministry had now begun and it would come to a violent end at the hands of his aggressors.

Jesus had a similar movement in his ministry. He was just entering into it at this part of the reading of the Gospels. We shall soon see Him striding through Galilee rebuking demons, healing, making statements and calling to account the religious folks. Later, as He moves resolutely towards Jerusalem, He will come to a passive ministry, when others take the initiative and do with Him what they will.

## 22-4 An Elijah ministry with a different triumph

Jesus made much of this parallel between John's life and his own. When Jesus came down down from the mount of transfiguration the issue before the disciples was "will Elijah come"? Jesus identified John the Baptist with the prophesied and coming Elijah. What John the Baptist testifies by his Elijah-type ministry is that the triumph here, for the Messiah whom John foreshadows, would come to be worked out through death.

# nt 23 – Luke 4.14-15

## The Good News first proclaimed

*Read Mark 1.14-15, Matthew 4.12-17, John 4.1-4, 45*

*23-1 Victory over the Tempter by the Spirit*

*23-2 Entry of light into a dark region of blinded people.*

*23-3 John the Baptist leaves centre-stage; Jesus makes an entry.*

*23-4 The "time" is fulfilled, the kingdom of God [heaven] has drawn*

*near*  
*23-5 Repent and believe in the gospel*

## 23-1 – Victory over the Tempter by the Spirit

Luke in his narrative structure stresses the return into Galilee after the temptation. Jesus has resisted the devil for us, and he has left Jesus. Luke presents the return in the power of the Spirit from this encounter. Luke records that the ministry now exercised around Galilee was “teaching” and it takes place in the local synagogues. Jesus teaching is welcomed; later we shall see this has much to do with the authority that attends his teaching, in sharp contrast to the local scribes and Pharisees.

## 23-2 – Entry of light into a dark region of blinded people.

Matthew has the timing, as does Mark, of the coming into Galilee as dictated, not so much by the victory over the devil, although that is mentioned in their previous story-line, but by the imprisonment of John.

Matthew has an interest in the fulfilment of the Old Testament, a matter central to his presentation of the Gospel. He sees that in Jesus himself, in his very person, there is such significance that even where he walks and teaches is anticipated in the Old Testament.

Matthew brings forward the quotation of Isaiah 9.1-2 about light coming into the North. Zebulun and Naphtali were the two Old Testament tribal territories that approximate to Galilee of Jesus’ time. In his coming to them, Jesus is the light dawning upon the peoples of that region, a region that includes both the Jews and the Gentiles. In that sense, Matthew takes us beyond the immediate short-term fulfilment of the return from the exile to the double fulfilment that includes the coming of Jesus into Galilee.

Like Isaiah 7.14, as Matthew uses it concerning the coming of a child who is obviously God, Isaiah 9.1-2 has the setting of looking beyond the Babylonian exile of the Jewish people. The northern regions of Galilee had suffered great humiliation under the Assyrians, but here Isaiah prophesies of them being restored to their honour after the exile in Babylon. By the eighth century BC, so many foreigners had come into this northern region that it was known as a Galilee of the Gentiles.

Matthew follows the Septuagint [LXX] translation but improves it to bring it more into line with the Hebrew of the Massoretic Text [MT]. He uses the word “land” before both Naphtali and Zebulun. He omits the clause about the “way of the sea” which the LXX had added. He substitutes “sitting” and “walking” and “dwelling” which leads us to think of Psalm 107.10 and Isaiah 42.7.

Messiah's ministry brings light into corners that are both dark for Jew and Gentile alike. People of either background, in following the Messiah, will find life and light.

### 23-3 John the Baptist leaves centre-stage; Jesus makes an entry.

Mark has the departure of John from public life and ministry as the signal for Jesus' public "preaching" ministry to begin. If Luke is speaking of a teacher in synagogues, Mark has in mind an authoritative herald of a great king who is making a public announcement to the people of the land. Something has to be heard, and this message is summarised by Mark as having three major elements: the time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.

### 23-4 The "time" is fulfilled, the kingdom of God [heaven] has drawn near

Both Mark and Matthew are speaking of a kingdom. Behind this announcement is an awareness of the rule that has arrived, and it has arrived in the presence of the person of Jesus. It is not said quite that bluntly, in the truncated, summary way in which Mark introduces it – but it becomes unmistakably clear as we go along.

What we mustn't miss here is that there are two major themes that are being brought together.

[a] the timing of the announcement speaks of fulfilment of the promises of God as made to his people long before this. So there is a clear continuity with the former revelation of God to the Jewish people – what we call the Old Testament. And this is what Matthew is drawing our attention to by the quotation from Isaiah.

[b] the rule of God has "drawn near". That is, the coming of the kingdom has not come because people have met certain conditions – it comes of its own initiative. God has sought out his people. Whenever God comes near to his people it is a gracious act establishing that people can now be addressed with a command. This command could only be given to them in the light of the gift of the kingdom of God graciously drawing close to them.

The kingdom is present wherever the king is. The Person of Jesus constitutes the presence of the kingdom of God. That the initiative lies with God in bringing his rule has been amply stated by the arrival of the Word of God taking flesh as man in the womb of the virgin by the Spirit. Yet this "drawing near" is a

kindly, gracious coming that is not overwhelming but nevertheless present.

This coming of the kingdom is accompanied by the preaching of Jesus. He comes to bring words of announcement. As we shall see later, His words are veiled and carefully adapted to the hearers; they leave room for the hearer who has ears to hear, and to whom the mystery of the kingdom of God is given to understand. But, as we see, they are spoken in parables so as to achieve this gentle approach [*nt 87-98*].

## 23-5 Repent and believe in the gospel

There are two imperatives, two commands. Both of them arise in the light of the grace already given in the fulfilment of the promises of God, and of the coming near, in an accessible way, of the rule of God through the presence of the Person of God.

The fulfilment of the promises of God has already been outlined for us in the early readings of Luke [*nt 4-6,9-12*] as he records for us the birth and infancy of John the Baptist and also of Jesus. The prophetic words spoken over these two infant boys are testimony to the arrival of a time of fulfilment of previously indicated actions of God on behalf of his people. Just what God has promised through these boys is outlined in those early readings.

The call of Jesus to the Galilean inhabitants is that they should “repent and believe”. Opportunity for repentance is itself a gracious gift. For the possibility of changing one’s mind about a matter is not always given by God, nor is opportunity always presented which can attract us to turn from one way of living and embrace another that requires a total turn-around.

Insofar as repentance is associated with “believe” then it may be inferred that the repentance is directed towards a changing of mind about trusting [believing] God concerning the good news that He is bringing to pass in the coming of Jesus. In that respect, we can see that, as Mark has Jesus “preaching” this good news, it is the announcement of a gracious opportunity which has come upon the people of God at that time. In that sense, Jesus is the bringer of the message of it – He is speaking on behalf of Another. John’s gospel makes clear throughout its presentation that that person is the Father and that the announcer of the message is His Son.

It is in this latter understanding we are led further, to see that Jesus is not only the bringer of the message He is, at the same time, the content of the message. The good news cannot only be proclaimed by Jesus as God’s herald, He *is* the message in Who He is, both in relation to the Father as His Son, and in relation to us as the Father’s Saviour provided by Him for us. This is what the title of Mark’s Gospel is intimating – what Mark has written for us is “the Gospel of

Jesus Christ, Son of God". Jesus is not only the bringer of a message from God, He is the message in His Person.

## nt 24 – Matthew 4.18-22

### The call of the first disciples

*Read Mark 1.16-20, Luke 5.1-11, John 1.35-42*

*24-1 – Simon and Andrew, James and John*

*24-2 – The gracious honour of the call to "follow me".*

*24-3 The call according to John 1.35-51*

#### 24-1 – Simon and Andrew, James and John

Matthew appears to have followed Mark's order and to have abbreviated the material as well. Both evangelists record the local calling of two sets of brothers; Peter and his brother Andrew and also of Zebedee's sons, James and John.

Luke has expressed the order differently. He has the beginning of the Galilean ministry extended. We encounter this section again later, with the Lukan emphasis [*nt 35*].

Matthew places this call of the two fisherman directly after the coming of Jesus has withdrawn into Galilee [1.12] following the arrest of John. It says that from that time Jesus began to preach [1.17] and after the preaching of "the time is fulfilled" the call of the two fisherman is introduced.

The apparent casualness, at least from the point of view of Jesus, of the setting of the call, is striking. Jesus was "walking by the sea of Galilee". There is no sense of purpose conveyed in Jesus being there. It records that He "saw" them, and He saw then at work, actually "casting their nets into the sea".

He speaks to them to follow him. In doing that He declares that they shall become "fishers of men". Their old work is not spoken against, it being modest and useful. It is referred to as a picture of the new work but in such a way that we must look through the picture of fishing for fish to the kingdom work whose goal is to bring men into the kingdom. The focus of the kingdom of God is people.

The difference with James and John is that they were not active in catching, they were mending their nets in the boat with their father Zebedee. He

called them as well. They leave the boat and their father.

What is striking of these encounters is that there is an immediate laying down of their nets at the call to follow after a man. What we shall see, [nt 47] as is intimated by 1.4, is that they are called to “be with him, and that He might send them out to preach, and to cast out demons” [Mark 3.14-16]. Insofar that they are called to be “with Him” they are to be witnesses of what they see. Whether they understand or not - and it is recorded that there is much they don’t understand at the time - they are to speak of what they have seen, even if they do it after they have come to understand.

## 24-2 – The gracious honour of the call to “follow me”.

It was customary for a rabbi [teacher] of those days to allow disciples to accompany him; in following him they would learn his way of life, and they would share his convictions so as to propagate his own peculiar teaching and slant on the Scriptures. When approached by a volunteer who desired to attach himself to his group, a rabbi would select the very best of the young scholars that he could find. He would examine them thoroughly to see if they passed his scrutiny in learning and life. In this way, it was very clear that entry to a rabbi’s following was something to which the ambitious and clever youngsters would aspire. Anyone accepted by the rabbi would understand that they had made it; their kudos in the eyes of others was established, they had passed the test. Upon admission to the group they would leave their parental home and follow wherever their rabbi went, eating what he ate, living as he lived, saying what he said. They would adopt his teaching as a “yoke” which they would then spread as they quoted their master far and wide.

These Galilean fishermen have no rabbi; for they would hardly qualify, nor would they have a view of themselves that they could, educationally or morally. They are plying their trade, which is no disgrace, for even rabbi’s had a trade by which to earn their living. But they are Galileans, they are men at work with no illusions; no rabbi would desire them and they would never think to apply for such an honour as to follow a teacher.

The gracious call therefore, to these local fishermen comes as an astonishing gift. Not only does this man seek them out and then graciously takes the initiative to ask them to be his disciples, there is also no exam; in fact there is nothing, it seems, they need as pre-requisites which are the grounds that they could qualify. Indeed, the boot is on the other foot; instead of them thinking that they can bring him honour by their cleverness and suitability to his cause and teaching, He has honoured them, lifting them up in the eyes of the local people. They have someone to speak of as “their” rabbi, their Teacher.



## 24-3 The call according to John 1.35-51

The call to “follow me” is not stated in this section, which introduces the disciples [although it is clear in the rest of the gospel, see 8.12,12.26,21.22]. And the order of the persons is different - first we have Andrew and the unknown disciple [John?], then Andrew’s brother Peter, then Philip and then, with some resistance, Nathaniel.

If none are called verbally, nevertheless there is a deduction involved that they are called, for they follow him spontaneously.

It is this freedom to take the decisive step which John wants us to understand. {Later in 15.8 he will make clear the other side of it}. Simon, the son of John, is already addressed by the surname “Cephas” [= stone, rock] which in the Synoptists only comes when his function in respect of the church is stated.

The encounter of these men with Jesus is something strong enough to bring into effect the discipleship between Him and them. He calls them, as it were, by his presence.

It is not said what they are called to do, their function is not stated. Although what they all do is bear witness - they make a confession of who He is. In this way John puts the confession of the Christ in the mouths of these disciples. John then presents the Baptist’s word concerning Jesus as the one who baptises in the Holy Spirit [33], who is also the Son of God [34], and the Lamb of God [29,36]. It is through their statements that we have Jesus presented as Rabbi [teacher, 38], Messiah [41], the Prophet that Moses anticipated [45], Jesus, the son of Joseph [45], Son of God and king of Israel [49].

Similar to the Synoptists, Jesus “sees” Nathaniel, and this is enough to draw from Nathaniel belief in him and a confession. Shall we understand this “seeing” [5.18] as a response to a perception by the Son of what the Father is doing [17.6-10]? The Synoptists record that Jesus spent all night in prayer to the Father [Luke 6.12-13] before he called them apostles.

Notice that not all the disciples are to be called apostles. This was not only clear in the Acts record of the early life of the church in Jerusalem [Acts 1.21-23], it was so in the Gospels.

# nt 25 – John 2.1-11

## Sign 1: The marriage at Cana of Galilee

*25-1 Signs*

*25-2 The book of signs [John 1.19-12.50]*

*25-3 Mary and Jesus at a feasting celebration [John 2.1-5]*

*25-4 Jesus and his disciples*

*25-5 Jesus, the Son of the Father*

*25-6 Jesus directs the servants*

*25-7 The head steward delivers a verdict about the wine*

*25-8 The servants know the source of the wine*

*25-9 The beginning of signs with which Jesus manifested His glory*

*25-10 A contrast with the way of traditional religion*

*25-11 The Bridegroom [see also John 3.29; Mark 2.18]*

### 25-1 Signs

The signs and wonders which God did through the hands of Moses at the time of the Exodus were clear actions designed to demonstrate to both the Hebrew people and to the Egyptians that they were dealing with a gracious, yet powerful God. Signs are works of God that accompany and confirm His previously spoken word.

For the Hebrews at that time, Moses' signs were a gracious provision accompanying the revelation of God's Name, "I am Who I am" [Yaweh/Jehovah]. They had never heard that Name before and their reception of Moses required a confirmation that he came from God [Exodus 4]. Similarly, when Ahaz refused to ask God for a sign, even when encouraged by Isaiah to do so in order that he may know whether he should stand firm against the king of Samaria, God graciously provided one in the promise of Immanuel [Isaiah 7 10-17].

For the Egyptians, and Pharaoh in particular, the signs are for unbelievers, who are encountering for the first time the wonderful power of God calling His people out of slavery and to Himself. When God is foreshadowing judgment upon nations, or the world, He often gives a sign [a portent] of that judgment in advance; again, a gracious provision. So we see in Isaiah 20.

## 25-2 The book of signs [John 1.19-12.50]

John's Gospel falls into two halves, of which the first is a presentation of seven signs that Jesus did, directed particularly to the Jewish people.

In chapters 2-4, we have the first three signs:

[1] The turning of the water to wine at the local wedding in Cana shows the barrenness of Judaism as contrasted to the celebratory excitement of the coming of the Messiah.

[2] The cleansing of the Temple by Jesus warns of coming judgment to the Jewish people.

[3] The healing of the royal official's son [*nt* 37, John 4.46-54] is the occasion for Jesus to make clear to the Jewish people that they are dependent on signs, preferring the external relations with God rather than the intimate obedience of him.

In the chapters 5-10, set against the backdrop of the increasing controversy and opposition to Jesus by his religious Jewish opponents, there is a second set of three signs.

[4] The healing of the man, sick for 38 years, by the pool of Bethesda leads to a controversy about the Sabbath. Jesus speaks of how his own works are those of a faithful Son who is simply expressing the common life he shares with his Father.

[5] The feeding of the people in the desert opens up the "bread of life" teaching of chapter 6. The OT record of God feeding the Hebrew people in the wilderness under Moses is the backdrop for the open discussion of Jesus being that very bread from heaven, coming to them now.

[6] The healing of the man born blind, as recorded in chapter 9 is an obvious statement of blind Israel receiving revelation of who Jesus is as the Son of God. Those religious opponents, who think they see, find that they have become culpably blind in their refusal to embrace Jesus. This leads into a presentation of the contrast of the true Shepherd with the false shepherds of chapter 10.

The final sign, [7], which is the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead, bridges us into chapters 11-12 where the hardening of the Jewish leaders against Jesus, sets the backdrop for the chapters 13-21, which is the book of His suffering.

In the first half of the Gospel, John states, by the titles of Jesus in chapters 1 and these 7 signs and the discourses which accompany them, what he said was the intention of his Gospel – that Jesus is the Son of God and that we may, as we receive that revelation have life in his name; declared in John 20.30-31; . [As we saw at *nt* 19, John had foreshadowed this presentation of Jesus by the titles he had heaped up following the testimony of John the Baptist in chapter 1].

### 25-3 Mary and Jesus at a failing celebration [John 2.1-5]

Mary had such sympathy for the happy occasion: and as a mother she knew that there must be provision for the celebration for the guests. Our Gospel writer simply says that she “was there”. She shared an understanding with her neighbours of the need for provision. A wedding is true cause for joy. The provisions for celebrating it must be met.

That they “have no wine” was a serious deficit. The resources for celebration were not there. This is the central theme of our writer. The embarrassment of Mary’s neighbours was also implied but not taken up in this exchange.

She turned to her eldest and ever-reliable son. Here was her trusted ally in the provision of many family needs. He also would understand that there is another responsible man, the groom in this case, who had a lack which perhaps Mary’s son could supply.

Jesus and Mary would have conferred over many issues of family life and provision. All the more so, for perhaps Mary was a widow by now – with her eldest son taking up his social responsibilities. Theirs was a relationship of mutual acceptance of shared life. We are to understand that our Gospel writer as setting such a scene as this when he refers to Mary as the “mother of Jesus”. Our writer presents this relation of a ‘mother and son’ to us: but as a backdrop for two other sets of relations Jesus was also maintaining here. This would call Jesus to balance and prioritise, for there were others to consider and other purposes into which this new claim must be integrated.

### 25-4 Jesus and his disciples

The first of these other relations is that “Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the wedding.” He was also a Leader and Teacher to those who follow him. Further, they had not attached themselves to Him; He had called them. Mary’s request would not clash too much with the disciples being there as well. And the fact that they had been invited to the wedding as a group, makes it clear that this is publicly known and recognised matter. The wedding party had asked Him along with those who are with Him. It is in the sympathetic setting of this occasion that the disciples will come to see His glory.

### 25-5 Jesus, the Son of the Father

The most important relation which Jesus was maintaining is towards His Father in heaven. This relation would not inhibit Jesus in meeting Mary’s request; for we must recognise He does meet it! But it was Mary’s claim on Him personally which must be set in order in regard to Father and His purposes for Jesus.

For the Son never does anything except what He sees the Father doing. Mary had seen this before, and she had remonstrated with him then. When both she and Joseph had found Him, at the young age of 12, in the temple answering questions, Jesus had made it clear then that He must be about his “Father’s business” [nt 15, Luke2.41-51]. So it is here. He reminded her of this grand theme and charge upon His life. There was the will of the Father that had a timing for Jesus and He must fit that public timing. His “hour” had not yet come. Such is something of the meaning of Jesus’ immediate reply to Mary.

We shall see that our Gospel writer develops the phrase “the hour” as “having come” or “not come” in the whole Gospel. So this phrase has a wider meaning than this conversation with Mary.

Jesus’ reply to Mary had been received and understood. She did not direct Him, but she placed those she may direct at the readiness of Jesus’ command. It was to the servants who serve the wine that Mary turned. She placed them under the direction of her eldest son; “Whatever He says to you, do it”. Implicitly, she has already obeyed Him herself.

## 25-6 Jesus directs the servants

John the writer of the Gospel directs our attention to 6 stone jars which are full of water used for washing by the Jews in a rite for purification. They each hold a large volume, about 20-30 gallons, or 75-113 litres. Jesus directed the servants to fill them with water; and they did to the brim. Then they were to draw out the liquid and take it to the head of the feast.

## 25-7 The head steward delivers a verdict the wine

The steward in charge of the ordering, provision and dispersal of the wine recognised its quality but did not know its source. He called to the bridegroom and attributed it to him. He made a generalisation from his experience in that every man usually served the good wine first and then the poor; but this good wine had been served at the last, at the end.

## 25-8 The servants know the source of the wine

The servants at the wedding had simply followed the orders of Mary that they should obey Jesus. Perhaps they assumed that, since the wine had run out, they were now serving water; we are not told of their thoughts at all on the way to the chief steward. But, when the steward declared it to be good wine, they could connect the dots to go back to the word of Jesus, whom they obeyed on the instruction of the word of Mary.

## 25-9 The beginning of signs with which Jesus manifested His glory

Our writer makes clear the order of his Gospel. There is a set of seven signs that he presents for us, all of which show the glory of Jesus. That is, they indicate who Jesus is as the Word of God come in the flesh.

Jesus' miracles are presented by John, the writer, as the work of the Son who never does anything "unless He first sees the Father doing it" [John 5.16-19]. So we are not surprised to see that the turning of water into wine is something that God does time and again in every vineyard. It is something of God's work in upholding the material world which He has created and is dependent upon Him for its sustained life. That Jesus, as the Son, does what His Father does, manifests his glory. For it is the glory of an only Son seen as He shares the common life He has with the Father. In this sense the "miracle" declares Jesus as the Son of God.

These "signs" will evoke faith in his disciples. As here they "believed on Him". Their faith is placed in the person of Jesus. It is the beginning of their school of learning Who He is and learning to trust Him about life matters.

## 25-10 A contrast with the way of traditional religion

The old way of the Jews was beset with the awareness of their sin and ritual uncleanness. Their method of approach to God was through external activities and rites, such as ritual washing. Perhaps this family home has gone a bit "over the top" in this activity. Jesus, in using the 'old covenant' vessels of ceremonial washing water as the basis for the new celebratory arrival of the Bridegroom of his own people indicates that God's people have come to a new celebratory time – a time characterised by the presence of the king had arrived. There is a continuity of the old with the new, but only insofar that the fulfilment of the old was declared, as it was superseded, in the arrival of the Messiah.

## 25-11 The Bridegroom [see also John 3.29; Mark 2.18-20]

The words of the steward are spoken to the bridegroom at the wedding, who has, perhaps of his poverty, failed to provide for the wedding feast. But we the readers, who share in the knowledge of the wine's source, understand that it is really Christ who is addressed by the steward, even though he knows it not. The coming of Jesus among his people is a cause for great rejoicing just as the shepherds found on the night He was born. It is a matter of celebration.

And the presence of Jesus among his people places them in the relationship

of the Bride, who are focussed upon their bridegroom and the coming shared intimacy and life together. It is a powerful image of personal focus, hope for the future, and the awareness that there is a relationship of care and acceptance of responsibility by this Man on our behalf. He will give us Himself, make a life for us by the way His incarnate life prepares for us to share in it by the Spirit, He will clear our debts and become the source of reconciliation with God Himself. He will become for us a true husband.

## nt 26 – John 2.14-22

### Sign 2: The Cleansing of the Temple

*Read also Psalm 69, Matthew 21.12-13,23-27,  
Mark 11.15-17,27-33, Luke 19.45-46, 20.1-8*

*26-1 The temple at Jerusalem*

*26-2 Jesus' attitude to the temple*

*26-4 "Zeal for his father's house" Psalm 69*

*26-3 The "clearing out" of the temple*

*26-5 The "Jews" question Jesus.*

*26-7 The disciples believe the "scripture and the word Jesus spoke"*

### 26-1 The temple at Jerusalem

John tells us of Jesus now, who after a brief stay in Capernaum in Galilee, moving to Jerusalem for the Passover – the first Passover John records in the public ministry of Jesus. This forms the setting for the second sign that John wants to present to us. The Temple, as first conceived by David who, on the arrival of the ark in Jerusalem, wanted to house the ark of God [2 Samuel 7.2].

David's zeal for God's house [Psalm 69] and his desire to build it was brought to fruition by his son Solomon who built it [1 Kings 6-7] and brought the ark into that house [1 Kings 8]. This house did not contain God but it was where He caused His Name to dwell [1 Kings 8.22-53]. This original Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in the summer of 587 BC and was subsequently rebuilt, along the lines of Solomon's temple but with smaller dimensions, by Zerubbabel in 520 BC during the reign of the Persian king Xerxes 1. Zerubbabel was encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The project was com-

pleted in the spring of 515 BC.

Following the defilement of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes IV, Judas Maccabeus re-dedicated the temple in the December of 165BC . The second temple was fortified by the high priest Simon II during the time of the Hasmoneans [142-63 BC]. Under the rule of Herod the Great the temple was reconstructed and enlarged with a Greek style of building adding an impressive system of porticos. Beginning in the year 20BC, the basic structure was completed by 18BC, but the rest was still in progress 50 years later and may not have been finished even at the time of its destruction in 70 AD by Titus during the reign of Vespasian.

## 26-2 Jesus' attitude to the temple

The Gospels show us that the Lord had a love and reverence for the temple in that he fulfilled the duties which every God-loving Israelite would have done. In his observance of the Law he was presented there by his parents [nt11] and he was taught to observe the Passover feast which he did, even though we have no record of Him ever offering a sacrifice there. He taught concerning the fulfilment of the law of sacrifice [Matthew 8.4 and his reference to the shewbread are important here [Mark 2.26, Luke 6.4]. He had, as a young man a desire to be in "his Father's house" [nt11] which he saw as a "house of prayer" [Luke 19.45-6].

At the same time, we notice that he saw himself as "greater than the temple" [Matthew 12.6] and he stressed, echoing the prophets, that God is requiring mercy and not sacrifice [Matt 9.13]. To those who lavished praise upon the temple building itself he made clear that it would come down [Matthew 24.2, Mark 13.1-3, Luke 21.5-6]. As to the nature of worship he made clear that it was not the place which was crucial to worship of God, whether it was the Samaritan Mt Gerizim or Jewish Jerusalem [John 4.21]. He saw that, in comparison to his own presence [coming], temple worship was of minor importance and was in process of being displaced. He predicted its destruction and in that context laid out the signs that would preambule his own second presencing [coming] among his people.

## 26-3 The "clearing out " of the temple

Apart from the passion narrative, the record of the cleansing of the temple and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem are recorded by all four Gospel writers. Central to the essence of practical Judaism was the observance of the Sabbath and the observance of the sacrificial system. Holding to the spirit of the law however, Jesus abrogated the prevailing Jewish interpretation of the Sab-



bath. In the case of the sacrificial system, his own death and resurrection would overwhelm that.

Placed at the passion-end of the Gospel narrative, as it is in Matthew, Mark and Luke, the cleansing of the temple is directed to the restoration of one of its original purposes; that of being a house of prayer for the nations. That is, the emphasis falls on the availability of God's house for all.

Placed at the beginning of John's Gospel, a different note is struck concerning the corruption of the worship of God with commercial endeavours. The selling of animals for the sacrifices would have been useful to the worshippers. It provided a ready, available supply. But it caused the worship of God and his house to be corrupted by other agendas of financial gain. They had made the house of God an ἐμπορία – a Greek word from which we get the English word "emporium". So, in this sense we can think of a corrective "cleansing" or "clearing" of the temple.

## 26-4 "Zeal for his father's house" Psalm 69.9

The Gospel of John describes a powerful outburst of anger in Jesus. When the disciples of Jesus later reflected on this they recognised the motive on that day was a "zeal" – a jealous pre-occupation with God's interests - in regard to the temple at Jerusalem. This was seen as being referred to by the text of Psalm 69, a psalm that majors on the description of David as the righteous sufferer who was enduring the reproaches of men and women who were really reproaching God himself.

"Reproach" is an old word we hardly use today. It is a spoken word that takes issue with someone's actions. It seeks to blame them in a way that states that they should be punished for what they are doing. In that sense it is an announcement of a judgment, in the eyes of the speaker. The Jews reproach Jesus now; for they are offended by this action and ask for a sign to corroborate Jesus' evident use of authority.

The sign Jesus speaks of is that if they destroy this temple in three days, He will raise it.

## 26-5 The "Jews" question Jesus.

We now enter an exchange in the form of a dialogue, which follows up the sign and its non-reception. This is a pattern in John's writing that repeats. First, there is an action of Jesus, then a response. This engenders an exchange in which deeper things are said that fill out the meaning of the sign and during which the attitude of the questioners of Jesus is exposed – or judged.

"The Jews" are a group of authoritative people constantly portrayed by

John, the writer, as opposing Jesus. Here, at the beginning of his ministry, they are upset, but they are open to a sign. They do not want to offend God should He be acting through this man. But in asking for a sign they betray their unbelief.

John also shows that their misunderstanding, their inability to see comes about not only because of their unbelief but also because of their mistaken pride that, in their own estimation, they do see. So John shows that the blindness of the Jews is culpable. This becomes more apparent and intense as the Gospel unfolds. They are not abandoned to blindness by God as if, in some arbitrary way, He has simply condemned them to that. It is the reverse. Because of their wilful refusal to obey what is before them, they cannot see what is already an open secret to those who are soft towards God and yielding their will to Him so that they see what He is doing [John 3.36; 4.48; 5.30,38-40; 7.17]. In that sense, after their refusal to be open to Jesus, they may find themselves becoming “blind” [John 9.39-41].

## 26-6 The temple of His body

The obvious meaning of the rejoinder by Jesus of verse 19, is that He is speaking of the destruction of his own body in his death, understanding the three days to be “over the duration of three days” in which he was in the tomb.

We have already had this theme presented to us by John in the reply of Jesus to Nathaniel [*nt* 24-3]; Jesus is a walking Bethel, he is the house of God, the habitation of God made flesh. In that sense a “greater than the temple” is present among them [Matthew 12.6].

## 26-7 The disciples believe the “scripture and the word Jesus spoke”

The disciples of Jesus form a contrast to the “Jews” in that they trusted the *word Jesus spoke*. They took that word [λόγος] to themselves as people open to the logos that Jesus spoke. John, our writer, distinguishes between the “words” of Jesus [lalia] and the “word” of Jesus [logos].

Later, in the Gospel Jesus states, “Why do you not understand my speech [lalia], because you cannot hear my word [logos]?” [John 8.43]. The relation between understanding the speech of Jesus has to do with the word [logos] abiding in the person who is listening. The word [logos] of Jesus if kept [=obeyed] brings eternal life, never seeing death [John 8.51;15.10,20]. So here, in contrast to “the Jews”, the disciples are people who have the word [logos] of Jesus abiding in them. Hence they understand his reference to his body.

This means that they also come to believe the “scripture” [γράφη]; that

is, the Old Testament quotation of Psalm 69.9, as applicable to Jesus. For, as the word of Jesus abides within them, so the Old Testament Scripture was believed as applying to Jesus. As the revelation of Himself is being received, he is seen as the fulfilment of the covenant promises of God to his own people. Clearly then, for our writer John, the word of Jesus is the word of God. Jesus is the revelation of the Father in that he “opens the scriptures” so that we see they concern Himself [Luke 24.44-47].

## nt 27 – John 2.23-25

### Ministry in Jerusalem

*27-1 Many believed on his name because of the signs*

*27-2 Faith that leads to obedience is lacking here*

*27 -3 Christ does not trust Himself to them.*

#### 27-1 Many believed on his name because of the signs

At this first Passover feast in the record of the public ministry of Jesus, John presents that many people honoured Jesus and believed in his name. This belief was based on the fact that He was doing miracles.

Miracles do not command belief in a person, they are simply arresting evidences. They catch the attention and demand either an explanation which makes them non-miraculous, or, if an explanation is not forthcoming, they attest to the mystery which surrounds the person who does them. It is this last sense, the one of mystery, which we have here.

#### 27-2 Faith that leads to obedience is lacking here

The persuasion that people have concerning mystery and miracle, in this case, does not penetrate to the heart of the object of their faith. No obedience to the person of Jesus is offered. There is no understanding of His ministry.

The children of God are often helped to faith by miracles in the first instance. But nevertheless there can be a faith that is intellectually founded but where the heart may not be moved.

## 27 -3 Christ does not trust Himself to them.

It is not so much that Christ distrusts them in the sense that he is on his guard about them. It is rather that he did not regard them as genuine disciples. In Christ's estimation, it is not simply the profession of his name that means they are his.

He also did not need to trust them, for He had no need of their estimation of him. What witness they would give of him was to him irrelevant; he had not come that they should commend him, or form and opinion of him – but that they might know, through the revelation of the Father, who He was.

# nt 28 – John 3.1-21

## Conversation with Nicodemus

*Read carefully Ezekiel 36.22-27, Numbers 21.4-9*

*28-1 Confidence of the Jews and Pharisees who "know"*

*28-2 Need for God's Spirit to show; only God can reveal God.*

*28-3 Need for an inward renovation*

*28-4 The renewal of the inner being of Israel [Ezekiel 36]*

*28-5 A spiritual re-birth*

*28-6 Jesus bears witness of heavenly things*

*28-7 The fiery serpents of Numbers 21*

*28-8 The brass serpent on the pole; mercy in the midst of judgment*

*28-9 The voluntary "lifting up" by God of the Son of Man*

*28-10 God as a loving, holy Father*

*28-11 Experiencing mercy through faith in the Saviour.*

*28-12 Salvation from the Jews but to the world*

*28-13 God "so" loved*

*28-14 The meaning of "not coming into judgment"*

*28-15 The meaning of "judged already"*

*28-16 To "do" the truth is to receive the grace of God who is Jesus Christ*

*28-17 A deep divide in humanity*

## 28-1 Confidence of the Jews and Pharisees who "know".

Nicodemus, a man of the night, comes to Jesus speaking of what the rulers of the Jews and the Pharisees, ["we"], know about Jesus. Addressing Jesus as a teacher [rabbi], he announces that his group, aware of the signs Jesus does,

have assessed him to be a teacher who has come from God. This they know for sure; it is a confident assertion.

There are a number of contrasts that John presented concerning the people who engaged Jesus in conversation. In the opening section of the Gospel Nicodemus and the woman at the well state some differences.

[1] He is a Pharisee, she a Samaritan.

[2] He comes by night; she encounters Jesus in the daytime.

[3] He is a confident one who “knows” things; she is a hungry questioner whom Jesus satisfies.

[4] He takes the initiative to seek out Jesus in a confident way. She is first graciously approached by Jesus about his need for a drink. Jesus puts himself in her debt at the beginning. Jesus initiates the conversation.

[5] He is met by correction and rebuke; she comes to receive from Jesus the most open-handed declaration that He is the Messiah.

## 28-2 Need for God’s Spirit to show; only God can reveal God.

Jesus challenges such confident perception. He counters that what God is doing, as He expresses his kingdom rule on the earth, is not an open book. Men are able to perceive it, but not unless something has been done to them to allow them to see – a rebirth must happen, a creative work from above is necessary. Clarity about Jesus’ person is God’s work within man and is his gracious gift. What is meant, as we shall see later, is the impartation of the life of the Word. It has the effect of light in a man’s darkness. Nicodemus asks how can such a rebirth take place. It seems impossible to him to be born again, in the sense of a second time. For him birth, in the flesh, is surely an unrepeatable event. Jesus seems to be speaking of things impossible to men’s thinking.

## 28-3 Need for an inward renovation

The prophet Ezekiel brought the word of the Lord to the people of Israel just before and during their time of exile in Babylon. It was a time when the Lord, jealously valued his exclusive relationship with Israel and was aroused by their worship of the creaturely gods of the nations round about. Such a violation of their holy relationship was even happening in the sanctuary of the Lord in Jerusalem [Ezekiel 8]. While the Lord loved them, He said that He could not overlook this and He would deal with them according to their conduct [Ezekiel 7.27; 9.10; 14.22-23].

God had cared for them [Ezekiel 16] right from the beginning, making a covenant with them. They had played the harlot, as an unfaithful wife to Him.

Nevertheless, He would sustain his commitment to the covenant on their behalf.

Speaking of the need for each person to be accountable to Him for their own sins [Ezekiel 18.1-29] the Lord exhorted the house of Israel to repent and return to Him. He said that they needed to make for themselves a new heart and a new spirit! He did not wish them to die. He had no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies; He wanted them to repent and live.[Ezekiel 18.31-32]. The new heart and the new spirit was an exhortation to them to desire it themselves, but it was really a work of God [Ezekiel 11.19; 36.25-27; Jeremiah 4.4; 24.7; Psalm 51.10].

## 28-4 The renewal of the inner being of Israel [Ezekiel 36]

Read carefully Ezekiel 36.22-27. In this section of Ezekiel's prophecy, the Lord is speaking of how Israel will be renewed for His name's sake. Having scattered them throughout the nations, they had profaned His name wherever they went [36.17-21]. The Lord made clear that He intended to vindicate his holiness in the sight of the nations when He proved Himself to be holy in Israel's sight [36.22-23]. His promise was that He would take them from among the nations, gather them into their land and sprinkle them with clean water [36.25]. This word-picture referred to the water sprinkled with the ashes of the heifer. It had been provided by the Lord for Israel during their time in the wilderness [Numbers 19.2]. In Ezekiel the uncleanness that Israel had incurred was due to her idolatry.

Then the Lord made a promise to Israel, that He would, after cleansing them, give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them. By a new heart He meant a soft heart, one that was amenable to Him and was changed by Him, drawn to Him [Ezekiel 36.26]. This is a matter of dealing with the very fabric of their humanity. Recognising that they are straying because of their flesh that chafed against the holy relationship into which He had called them, they needed, in His estimation, a new inner being. Only God could work that for them.

He also makes clear that He will put His own Spirit within them. They would become a dwelling place for the Spirit of God. The effect this would have is that they would walk in his statutes and they would be careful to do what He asked. His Spirit would lead them into an obedience that came from the heart [Ezekiel 36.27]. See also a similar theme in Jeremiah 31.27-34.

Great themes of renewal of God's people, through the impartation of God's life are expressed in other pictorial ways within Ezekiel's prophecy. The valley of the dry bones [Ezekiel 37] that come to life after they are dead is a powerful picture of the re-animation of Israel. The river of life, ever deepening in

its flow [Ezekiel 47.1; and mirrored in Revelation 22.1] speaks of an immersion in God's Spirit, Who is the impartation of the life of God to his people.

## 28-5 A spiritual re-birth

Jesus, with the Ezekiel 36 passage in the back of his mind, makes clear that there is a promised, cleansing work that the Holy Spirit does within a person that is necessary for an entry, or access to what the reign of God is accomplishing. Again, Jesus asserts that this comes about entirely by the initiative of God. He goes on to explain that like gives birth to like. As the fleshly child comes out of the fleshly womb of the mother so it is also true that to be born of the Spirit of God is a work done on man's spirit, his inner being. He encourages Nicodemus that this is not a contradiction but a mystery. For, while the work of the Spirit cannot be predicted or anticipated, it is clearly obvious when it has happened. The changes the Spirit works can be registered and discerned by their result as it is with the wind that blows.

It is clear that Nicodemus does not see that such things are possible. His reply indicates that the work of re-birth is not evident here. Jesus expresses dismay at such darkness in a teacher of Israel. One from among the covenant people, experienced in God's wonderful works, should at least understand that such mysteries do take place. If Jesus has spoken of such earthly, verifiable, known, matters and they had not been grasped; how will it be that the heavenly-matters will begin to be understood?

## 28-6 Jesus bears witness of heavenly things

Jesus speaks of a witness which has been given to the rulers and the Pharisees. It has not been received. John, our writer, may mean by "our" witness, the Father and the Son - taking it as the witness of God to them. Or, he may mean the witness of the church of Jesus to the Jews, as the gospel can be construed; being a record of what Jesus did and taught as a Son making revelation of his Father. Jesus can bear witness concerning heavenly things, because his Ascension – his return into heaven after his resurrection – verifies that he came from heaven. He is the Son of Man [1.51].

## 28-7 The fiery serpents of Numbers 21

We need some background to understand what Jesus is about to say. The book Numbers records the wanderings of the people of Israel in the wilderness after their rescue from the slavery of Egypt.

Stop here and read carefully in the Old Testament the section Numbers 21.4-9. It records a journey of the people of God from Mount Hor in the wilderness to go around Edom on their way to the Transjordan, the eastern side of the River Jordan. The following things are clear in this section.

The people were grumbling at God and Moses. They were remonstrating about the wilderness and the lack of food and water. They found the manna which the Lord was providing tasteless – it was to them “miserable food”.

The Lord sent fiery serpents into the people. The serpents bit the people and some of them died. This was a judgement of God - a decision to discipline the people in order to set them right; and to draw them to understand what was wrong in their relation to Him. It seems extreme to us; but it turns out to be necessary, due to the condition of the people.

Significantly, the people discerned that they have done wrong, not through their own conscience or personal awareness of their heart, but by virtue of the judgment enacted among them. This points to an important issue. The people of Israel read their relationship to the Lord by the external circumstances of what was taking place among them. It is not until He acted, by sending the snakes, that they saw it and then inferred the state of their relationship to Him. This testifies to their dullness of heart and explains to us why God had to act this way to get their attention. Wherever people do not know God directly in their person then they interpret the state of the relationship by the external events.

The people’s response was to go to Moses and ask Him to intercede for them. This state of affairs actually reflected their desire, which had been expressed earlier at Mt Sinai [Exodus 20.18-21]. Not wishing to hear God’s voice directly, they preferred Him to speak to them through Moses. So Moses became their intermediary with God. This again emphasises the absence of personal access and relationship between God and the people.

Aware of their sin the people asked of Moses to intercede with the Lord for them. What they were asking was that the Lord may remove the serpents from them. That is, the serpents were not taken seriously as a judgment, they were understood to be a way of communication from God that they have sinned. Having got the message, the people now thought it perfectly reasonable that the serpents should be removed. In this way, they read the serpents in the light of their dull way of relating to the Lord. They do not see that He has sent the serpents as an expression of his holiness in reaction to their sin. His decision about them is expressed as his judgment. Like a caring father He has acted with a dull and unhearing people.



## 28-8 The brass serpent on the pole; mercy in the midst of judgment

The Lord commanded Moses to make a fiery [brass] serpent and to set it on a pole so that, when anyone was bitten, he could look towards the brass serpent and live. There was no removal of the biting serpents which He first sent – they stayed and they stayed biting. They were the expression of his wrath as a judgment for the people. They spoke of his holiness and unwillingness to wink at their sin. But while this judgment stayed active and operative, another side of God's character, his mercy, came into play. That He did not wish them to die, but rather to turn from their rebellion and live, was expressed through the gracious provision of the brass serpent and the promise of life if they looked to this one who was lifted up.

What they were asked to do, while they were experiencing the response of God to their rebellion, was to trust his gracious provision. They received life through trusting his word about the brass serpent as being his provision. A provision made without taking away the wrath of God already being expressed.

This latter point is vital, for the instrument of salvation from the wrath was the same instrument through which the wrath was expressed. Experience of wrath came through the serpents' biting where the people live; and the salvation from wrath's consequence was effected through the one serpent which was lifted up on the pole in their midst. He saved them through judgment.

The effect on the people in their anxiety of being bitten, and then as they looked up to the brass serpent, believing the promise of God's word, would be to know His mercy. This mercy would assure them of the love of God for them, and that he was no tyrant out to kill them, but a gracious Father who severely disciplines His dull children, so that they might hear and then live through His gracious provision for them. So we see that there is not only a reconciliation made between a merciful God and his rebellious people, there is, at the same time and through the same salvation, a revelation of the nature of the love of God for them. As stated before, revelation and reconciliation go together in Israel's experience as they will with ours as well.

This also means that God acts in such a way as is consistent with His nature. His being and His acts - who He is and what He does - are consistent expressions of His Person. For Him to act is to reveal His nature.

## 28-9 The voluntary "lifting up" by God of the Son of Man

Recalling the Numbers 21 record of the people of Israel under God's chastisement for their rebellion and His care for them, Jesus speaks of the Son of

Man, the man descended from heaven who is the Word who has taken flesh, as being “lifted up”.

Jesus makes clear that, like the brass serpent, he too will be “lifted up”, by which he means his voluntary death on the cross. He will be placed there by the will of God through the hands of rejecting men. Anyone anyone who will trust that He is God’s gracious provision for salvation in the midst of the wrath of God now being experienced in everyday life, will find that, as they trust God’s word about that, it will be so. They will pass out from death into life.

## 28-10 God as a loving, holy Father

This section has a number of implications for us as we read. First, the original setting in Numbers, as we have seen, is that of a covenant people of God. He chose them freely as His own and He covenanted to be their God. This is what made Israel so unique.

But dealing with a holy God was very difficult for Israel’s fleshy life – it contradicted their natural, fallen bias to live for themselves. But it did ask that they see themselves as provided for by God as a loving Father who cared for them. His discipline was often severe, as we see in the Numbers passage; but it was tempered with mercy. These merciful promises always required them to trust Him; such faith in his promise He reckoned as righteousness to them [Genesis 15.6].

## 28-11 Experiencing mercy through faith in the Saviour.

What is vital to see in the Numbers passage is that as the Israelites were complaining over God’s care and provision for them in the wilderness His discipline fell on them all. Those who perished under that discipline knew of the care of God whose mercy they heard promised but, through unbelief, never experienced it as mercy. But not to experience the mercy is by definition to know the judgment as present and standing. Their experience is that God is a judge and that He is not to be played with. Their testimony will be to the severity of God and His uncompromising holiness.

Those who trusted the word about the brass serpent found that they moved from an experience of wrath to one of mercy. They had a profound assurance of the mercy of God to them even as they saw others, in unbelief, bitten and die. So from this experience they knew God as a holy Father whose care is as merciful as His person is holy and uncompromising towards their sin.

## 28-12 Salvation is “from” the Jews but “to” the world

In this passage from John’s gospel the setting is the world, not just Israel. It is true that “salvation comes from the Jews” [John 4.22] but it is not for them only. Jesus has “other sheep” which are not of the Jewish fold [John 10.16].

The world is experiencing the wrath of God. What Jesus is saying is that God has a love for the world and has not sent his Son, in this first coming, to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him by His being lifted up on the cross. In this way He emphasises the sending of the Son is the matter that we must now take into account. In the midst of judgment a saving provision has been “lifted up”.

In other words, we are to view the world as being at this present time, in the same setting Israel was. Experiencing God’s judgement in being handed over to the darkness of what we want for ourselves, God has sent Jesus as a light into the world as a Saviour from the darkness. Our experience of God can be a continuing experience of darkness, of knowing of God’s own holiness and being unable to satisfy that. Or, on the other hand our experience can be of His mercy as we trust the gift offered through the provision of Jesus. In which case we shall come to know Him as a holy Father who loves us. This is to pass out of death into life.

The experience of the life is to share Jesus’ knowledge of his God and Father. From that day onwards, you would know God as a Person who is not to be fiddled with, but also as a Father who watches over our life to bring us to holiness.

## 28-13 God “so” loved

John, our writer now explains for us that the love of God for the whole world is extreme. He says that God “so” loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son. This means that He would engage the One who is his own life on a work involving Him to give Him up for us. To understand and value this we need to recall what we have seen about relational glory.

The reason He gave his Son is that whoever believes in Him would not perish. This makes clear to us that, not only does God think of us as perishing under our darkness as it intersects with his holiness, it also tell us that the love of the Father is the prime mover in the salvation which He has set going in and through His Son.

We need to be careful of dividing the relationship between the Father and the Son. Some people make the mistake of playing the Father off against the Son. They think of God as a mean and tyrannical, and they think of Jesus as warm and kind, who loves us when the Father does not. This is a travesty and a deep error. It is the Father who loves us, and always has, and He has sent His

Son to declare it, to work that salvation for us, at the cost of His own life. We need to always see this balance.

## 28-14 The meaning of “not coming into judgment”

In John 3.18 the person who believes in Him is “not being judged”. In the setting where it is stated, to believe in Jesus is to rely on God’s word that He is the “lifted up” provision of God. It is to look to Him to save us from the judgment of God we are already experiencing in this life. This believer, the truster in the provision, is said to be “not judged”. In the light of Numbers 21 this cannot mean that there is no calling to account by God, for that is already expressed by the biting serpents, by the death already evident. Rather, it is to not die but to enter the life of knowing God’s gracious salvation as provided through Christ. So it is to be “not judged” in the sense of not experiencing the condemnation that follows when God calls the life of rebels to account. This, then, is a mercy. It is a gracious provision for those in deep danger of the condemnation of God on their life.

## 28-15 The meaning of “judged already”

Now a serious issue confronts everyone in the world who hears this apostolic message. For although it is clear that the will of God in the sending of his Son was to save the world is known, it is also true that where the coming of the Son does not meet with faith a judgment has been expressed. Not to look to the merciful provision of God in a setting of judgment is to stay where we are and so to remain the judgment already on oneself.

## 28 -16 To “do “ the truth is to receive the grace of God who is Jesus Christ

And this is not because God is vengeful, the very provision makes clear that He does not desire the death of a sinner. It simply states a consequence that follows when a person has not believed in the only begotten Son of God. It is a choice to stay where they are. That is, he has not trusted God’s word in respect of the costly provision of a Saviour. And to not see the worth of such a provision is also to not have the revelation of who He is.

Who it is that God has brought to be “lifted up” for our sakes, is his only begotten Son. To speak of God’s “only Son”, expresses the exclusive relationship between the Father and Son. It underscores for us the cost, relationally speaking, to the Father in the sending of His Son for our sake. This is the main issue here in this context.

Our writer John, declares that the entry of light into the world in the person of Jesus has the effect of forcing a crisis, a judgment, upon the world; it reveals a secret love found in human hearts for the darkness within them. This love for the darkness rather than for the light is connected with the fact that their current deeds are evil.

He explains the reason. The person currently doing evil deeds hates the light and will not come to it. The reason is that the light will sift these deeds and show them to be what they are. This is why people do not come, of themselves, to the light; they do not want their deeds to be exposed. In the words of 1 John 1.6, they “walk”, or live, “in the darkness” and do not practice the truth”.

Those who are “doing the truth” they come to the light. And, by way of contrast to what we have just read, we expect John to tell us that this is because they know their own deeds are good and have nothing to fear by way of exposure. What John writes is quite different from what we expect. While there is a contrast, it is not in those straightforward terms.

John makes clear that he who is “doing the truth” and “coming to the light” is not coming out of a self-confident assessment of the goodness of his own works in simple contrast to the same way that those who are ashamed of their works don’t want them exposed.

To “do the truth” is to come to the light for a different reason. It is to make clear that his works have been worked in God. That is, what is being done has its origin and empowerment in God himself. In other words, when we look at those who are coming to the light they are concerned to show that they also do their deeds; but that their own life deeds are theirs, but not theirs. “Not theirs” because they are not their own, but are works that God is doing in them by his own operation. As they come to the light, they would have us look away from themselves and see what God is doing in them. To walk “in the light” [1 John 1.7] is to live empowered by the life of God which is made available through his Son, the Word.

## 28-17 A deep divide in humanity

So we have a contrast, a deep division that appears as the light comes into the world. People are in crisis, the light brings a separation, in a time of judgment.

A general group [“men”], ashamed of their evil deeds and fearing that they should be exposed, do not come to the light. They are seen to “hate” the light and “love” the darkness because of this fear of exposure. The extreme clarity of this separation is expressed by the strongly opposed relational terms, “hate” and “love”.

By contrast, there are folks who are testimonies to the grace of God shown to them – they have the Life working within them which is not their own.

They come to the light so that this Life may be seen. Their motive is to glorify God, that He should be honoured for what he is doing. What is really His work is to be seen to be His work, and so not theirs.

Interestingly, here we see the gentleness and the renovation of God. For all men and women, and in both of the contrasted groups here, human deeds fall under the judgment of God. For the inadequacy of human works, simply of themselves, to bring God pleasure is stated in both groups; those who will not come for fear of exposure, and those who come to show God's work in them as objects of grace.

Both groups know this, but their experience is sharply different. To have fear of exposure signifies that the knowledge of God as a Judge is experienced without the trusting of the mercy. As for the ones coming to the light, they also are gently led to know and accept that their own deeds are not worth anything. But this gentle work renovates them. For their knowledge of the useless nature of their own works to please God is gained at the same time as they find a work of God done in them which does please Him. It is a work they recognise that is "not theirs" because "His". It is the life of the Word, which is imparted to them. It is only recognisable as it comes to the person of Jesus – to come to Him will bring them to see what is at work within them.

## nt 29 - John 3.22-36

### Ministry in Judea. John Baptist: the friend of the Bridegroom

*29 - 1 The movement to Judea*

*29-2 Issues of order of narrative flow*

*29-3 The question about purification [ceremonial washing]*

*29-4 John is not perturbed by Jesus' work*

*29-5 He must increase: I must decrease*

## 29 - 1 The movement to Judea

Has Jesus and his disciples moving into Judea and records that they were baptising. It is the only place where this is mentioned in the Gospels, that Jesus and his disciples were baptising; and 4.2 says it was just the disciples who did it.

John the Baptist was also baptising, continuing with his ministry. He is working in Aenon, a town situated, according to Calvin, in the tribal area of Manasseh. Aenon and Salim are not far from where the river Jabbok runs into the Jordan River in the Transjordan area.

Modern writers locate it 7 miles south of Beisan in Samaria where there were seven springs of natural flow - hence the expression "much water was in the place".

## 29-2 Issues of order of narrative flow

Our Gospel writer John, speaks that this episode took place before John was cast into prison. So John the writer does know of the imprisonment of John, although he makes no further mention of it. We are a little bit out of synchronisation here; ideally the reading should follow *nt 19*; but we tolerate this to stay with the order as John's Gospel wants to deal with this testimony of John to Jesus before the movement onto Samaria, as the ministry heads back into Galilee.

## 29-3 The question about purification [ceremonial washing]

John's disciples get into a dispute with a Jew concerning the relationship between the baptising that Jesus and his disciples are doing and John's. Perhaps what is being raised is 'are they in competition?'

John makes clear that if he was envious of the Messiah he had born witness to then that would be contradictory. He points out that if Jesus is enjoying some success - in the eyes of the onlookers - then this is the gift of God to him.

## 29-4 John is not perturbed by Jesus' work

John points out that he has always said that he is not the Christ. Both Jesus and John have their roles to fulfill. Aware of the Old Testament pictures of Israel as the bride of the Lord, John sees himself as the friend of the bridegroom. A sort

of first century equivalent of the “best man”. He is thinking of Jesus as the person to whom the people of Israel are related as the One who is to husband them as a faithful King and Messiah.

The joy of the best man belongs to John. He rejoices in the attention which the people of God are paying to Jesus. John has the satisfaction of knowing that his own ministry - which was to point to Jesus - was successful.

## 29-5 He must increase: I must decrease

John expresses a powerful contrast between himself and Jesus: “he” and “I” are linked by the word “must”= it is necessary. He yields submissively to the will of God in the matter. The Bride belongs to Jesus, certainly not to John. The apostle Paul also concurs