

**“The Gospel”**  
**John 21:24-25**  
**August 26, 2001**  
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**Text Comment**

- v.24 This statement identifies the beloved disciple as the author of the Gospel. But who are the “we” in the second half of the verse. Many commentators think this is an addition by other hands, an added witness to the truthfulness of what has been written down in John’s Gospel, perhaps by the elders of the church where John resided when he wrote his work. Others argue that it is an editorial “we.” The use of “we” in that way is found in First John and so it is not impossible here. It is interesting that in 1:14 we have another “we.” “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. *We* have seen his glory...” It is difficult to know for sure how to take the “we” in either the first chapter or the last. But, it seems more likely that we are being told by John that he *and others* can vouch for the truth of what he has related.
- v.25 Now John has reverted to the first person. “*I suppose...*” He, after all, is the author of this work. His reference to the many things that he has not recorded harks back to 20:30-31 and the purpose of the book which is to commend to men and women faith in Jesus Christ that they might be saved.

Now we have finished the Gospel. Take a few moments and think back over the entire book. We come first to the glorious prologue with which the Gospel opens, setting forth Jesus as God the Son, the creator of all things, who, for our salvation’s sake, came into the world as a true man. Clearly we have there the thesis statement for the entire Gospel. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” And, then, review with me in your mind John’s account of the ministry. *First, think of the seven great signs* or miracles that he chose to record among the great many that Jesus performed and John might have related: the changing of water to wine at the marriage feast at Cana; his healing of the royal official’s son in Galilee; his healing of the paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem; his feeding of the 5,000 men in Galilee; his walking on the water; his healing of the man born blind; and his raising of Lazarus from the dead, each of which provoked controversy or conversation with the religious leadership or confession of faith on the part of those who were witnesses of these mighty works. Then, woven among the seven signs, are *the seven discourses*, longer sections of teaching or conversation in which the Lord Jesus reveals the meaning of his life and work and the true and only way of salvation. The first comes in his dialogue with Nicodemus, the second his conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria, the third his lengthy answer to the religious leaders who complained that he was making himself out to be equal with God, the fourth his great bread of life discourse following the feeding of the 5,000; the fifth, his teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem; the sixth his defense of his teaching in the face of the attacks of the Jews; and the seventh, his wonderful discourse on the Good Shepherd.

Interspersed among these alternating narratives of Jesus’ words and deeds, and part and parcel of them, are *the seven “I am” sayings*, by which the Lord disclosed the various dimensions of his

Messiahship, the different ways we are to think of Him as our Savior: I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world; I am the gate; the good shepherd; the resurrection and the life; the way, the truth, and the life; I am the true vine.

And, then, John gives us those immortal five chapters devoted to the night Jesus spent with his disciples in the Upper Room, preparing then for the future: the Lord's washing his disciples' feet; the new commandment; the long teaching on the coming ministry of the Holy Spirit, and his great prayer.

And, then, as with the Synoptic Gospels, a full account of the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of the Lord, his burial, his resurrection from the dead on the third day, and his appearance to his disciples. And, then, as so much else in this Gospel that is unique to John, his account of the Lord's appearance to Thomas a week later and to his disciples in Galilee some time after that.

And all along the way some of the most memorable texts in all of the Bible and some of the most precious to God's people:

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

“You must be born again.”

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

“...whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”

“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish.”

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”

“As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

“I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

And so many other great texts like those that have been forever fixed in the mind and heart of the church and of every serious Christian. What a treasure is this Gospel to the church of God! My father used to teach a course on the Gospel of John in the Bible department at Covenant College.

Through the years I have met any number of people who have mentioned to me that they took that course and that in it, for the first time, their faith as Christians became really clear to them and settled and firm. And why is that? Because the Gospel of John, from beginning to end, stays near the very center of things, that center around which any true Christian faith and life must always turn.

We just read John ending his Gospel talking about himself and what he has seen and heard. He wanted to impress his readers, at the end, with the eyewitness authority that lies beneath this account of Jesus Christ. But he cannot finish his Gospel there. He returns to Jesus Christ once more. His last statement, the final sentence of his great work, is about the immeasurable greatness of the Son of God, a greatness his Gospel, he knows, for all its eyewitness authority, has still reflected in only a partial and very limited way.

Alexander Moody Stuart, one of the brightest lights in that galaxy of wonderfully spiritual and powerful preachers of the Scottish Free Church in the middle and later 19th century, offered this reminiscence in a moderatorial address to the General Assembly of 1875.

“When I was a student under Dr. Chalmers an elder said to me, ‘You ministers should have more of the infinite in your sermons’. Showing me two family portraits by eminent painters, he said, ‘That is by an artist; this by a genius. In the one you have the whole before you but nothing beyond; in the other the lines run off into infinity. You will never reach the people by teaching us as if you knew it all, and giving us our lesson as if we were children. If you wish to move us, you must make us feel that you see more than you are able to express, and that you think and know that there is an infinite height and depth beyond what you see. But you go to the brim of the great ocean, you dip your tumbler into it, you set it down before us, and you tell us ‘that’s the Ocean.’” [K. Moody Stuart, *Alexander Moody Stuart D.D.: Memoir*, 273]

Well, John has set us before a great ocean and, lest we mistake him, he tells straight out that there is a great deal more about Jesus Christ than he could possibly tell and a great deal more than he can even understand. We are, after all, talking about the Eternal Son of God becoming a true and authentic human being, while, at the same time, remaining his divine self. How is this possible? How precisely are the divine and the human related in the person of Jesus Christ? No one can begin to say. It is the greatest and most wonderful mystery in the world!

And we are talking about the exquisite and pure holiness of God which is so terribly offended by the sinfulness of human beings – a sinfulness so prevalent that we are inclined to take it so much for granted that we hardly think about it, in regard to ourselves or others – that nothing short of the humiliation, the terrible mistreatment, the suffering, and the death of the Son of God, nothing short of his bearing in our place the divine wrath against us for our sin, could avail to pay the price of that sin and render God just in forgiving us for it. As C.S. Lewis reminds us, “It cost God nothing, so far as we know, to create nice things: but to convert rebellious wills cost him crucifixion.” [*Mere Christianity*, 179] He, who hates sin with a perfect hatred, was made sin for us. Who can begin to understand this?

And we are talking about a salvation that is accomplished in great acts of history, performed at terrible cost by the Lord Jesus himself, but which becomes a reality in any human life only by the secret and mysterious working of the Holy Spirit in the heart, drawing a sinner to Christ, giving him or her true faith in the heart, renewing the nature, implanting the imperishable seed of the Word of God, and setting that man or that woman, that boy or that girl, on the straight and narrow path that leads to the City of God. Jesus himself told Nicodemus that this entire process would always remain a great mystery. We could see its effects, but we would never understand the inner working of the Holy Spirit.

We are talking about a salvation that begins and ends with the love and the work and the gift of God and yet a salvation that takes up all of a man or woman's mental and physical powers into itself. These are mysteries indeed, and wonders indeed. And this is what John has set before us in his Gospel. Remember, "gospel," is an old English word that means, as does the Greek word it translates, "the good news." And that is the burden that drove John to write this immortal little book.

And, every Christian understands that burden. Without a doubt we admit and we confess that if God the Son became a man so that we men could become the sons of God then *the world must know that!* And if he performed those astonishing works of supernatural power, then the world must know *that*. And if he gave that surpassingly wonderful teaching about God his father, and about the meaning of life and about the way to heaven, then, surely, the world must know *that!* And if, in order to win eternal life for us, he had to pay such a terrible price himself, and if he did so because he loved us, and if he really prayed that agonizing prayer in Gethsemane and really prayed for those who were murdering him while he hung on the cross, then the world must know *that!* And if it is possible that all that he did and all that he taught and all that he was in his own perfect and beautiful life can become ours, our very own, and can by its power and its goodness transform our lives, and lift them up from earth to heaven, *then, without a doubt, the world must know that!* "They who have the torch," says an old Greek proverb, "must pass on the light." [J.S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*, 189] Which is to say that, for John and for us, the light that we must pass on to the world is the magnificent, magnetic figure of Jesus of Nazareth and all that he did when he came into the world to be our Savior.

And so John gave his life to spreading the gospel, the good news about Jesus, the Son of God, and when he was an older man and not much longer for this world, he wrote that good news down for posterity, so that all the world might forever be able to read the greatest and the most important story ever told.

There may be a great many people around us, there may even be a considerable number of people in the Christian church, people who call themselves and think of themselves as Christians, who consider the story recounted in the Gospel of John to be old hat; even if true, something that isn't as compelling as the stock market or the Mariners or troubles at home or hopes and dreams for one's life in this world. They might even admit that all that John has related is historical and true. But, still, they have no problem with leaving it in the background of their lives, crowded into the shadows by matters of more pressing concern.

They are like the man that John Newton tells us about, who once, while reading Paul in Ephesians, came across that wonderful phrase in the third chapter, “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” He was arrested by the phrase because he was honest enough to admit that he had never found much that was “unsearchable” in the Christian message – mysterious, wonderful beyond words, glorious, all that Paul means with his great word. And it occurred to him that if the Apostle Paul thought that Jesus Christ and the message about him and the reality into which one entered by faith in him were “unsearchable riches,” well, then, he must not have understood what the New Testament was talking about. It had all always seemed quite pedestrian to him. And so he set himself to reading and pondering the message of the Gospels and the Epistles until, by the grace of God he was finally gripped by the stupendous character of that message and came to see what was really being claimed – about his own sin and guilt and the impending judgment of God, about how Christ came to rescue him, and about the gift of eternal life and joy that was his for the asking – what was really being said about Jesus Christ. And, seeing it all now himself as unsearchable riches, he gave his heart and life to Christ.

As Dorothy Sayers memorably put it: “If this is dull, then what, in Heaven’s name, is worthy to be called exciting. We may call that doctrine exhilarating or we may call it devastating; we may call it revelation or we may call it rubbish; but if we call it dull, then words have no meaning at all.” [*The Man Born to be King* cited in J.S. Stewart, *Heralds of God*, 68-69]

The doctrines of Jesus Christ, his incarnation, his suffering, death, and resurrection, his sacrifice for our sin and salvation, his sending the Holy Spirit, all of this can – amazing as it may seem – come to seem common, well known, with nothing new and interesting and relevant in it for us and our lives today. It is why there are so many more sermons being preached on marriage and money in the evangelical church nowadays than there are sermons on the incarnation of the Son of God. Christians are tempted to pass these subjects by and go on to something having more to do with daily life. John would tell us that this is a lie from the pit of hell, a master temptation of the Devil. Christ for us is always new and always the most relevant, practically important matter we can consider. Nothing is more necessary for us to take to heart over and over again. Nothing is more important for our marriage, our children, our business, our peace, our happiness, our fruitfulness in life, than that our hearts are dominated by the truth that John wrote down in his Gospel. Christ is the meaning of life and no life can be lived well that is not lived in him and for him. Without him, John was careful to tell us, we can do nothing really wise or good or important.

And he reinforced the truth of that by reminding us, right here at the very end of this Gospel, in vv. 22 and 23, that the same Jesus whose career in the world John has so brilliantly recounted, will some day come again. Whether before we die or after is immaterial. What is important is that while we have lived in this world we have lived by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us. Then, when he returns, we will receive the full measure of his salvation, the complete and perfect integration of body and soul in the company of the good and in the presence of the glory of God, where we shall live forever and ever.

John has given us a great gift in his account of Jesus Christ. It is left to us, now, brothers and sisters, to make the best use of this great gift, and take to heart and to live by the truth that has been so brilliantly and compellingly and persuasively revealed to us. And how is that done? By giving that

honor and that place and that affection and that importance to Jesus Christ, in our lives every day, that he so richly deserves.

Let C.S. Lewis have the last word.

“ ‘What are we to make of Christ?’ There is no question of what we can make of Him, it is entirely a question of what He intends to make of us. You must accept or reject the story. The things He says are very different from what any other teacher has said. Others say, ‘This is the truth about the universe. This is the way you ought to go,’ but he says, ‘I am the Truth, and the Way, and the Life.’ He says, ‘No man can reach absolute reality, except through Me.’ ” [*God in the Dock*, 160]

And that is the obligation and that is the inestimable privilege of every Christian: to touch ultimate and absolute reality, not just once, but every day we live, to know and live with God himself by his Son.

Absolute reality in the entirety of life and absolute reality every single day that we live. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we beheld his glory.”