

JOHN 12:1–8

Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9

MARY ANOINTS JESUS

Story Notes

File no. 150

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem for Passover, as Jews did at this time of year, and the family of Lazarus invite him for a meal. Martha serves and the newly raised Lazarus sits at the table, but Mary must express her love for Jesus. Clearly, she is grateful for the raising of her brother, but Jesus himself is 'the resurrection and the life' (11:25). Perhaps, already, she is losing her fear of death and learning to love in a new way (1 John 4:17-19).

Whatever it is, she has a jar of pure nard. This would have been imported from India and could have cost the equivalent of a year's salary. We don't know how she comes by this treasure, but her whole being tells her this is the time to use it. John tells us that she anoints the feet of Jesus rather than his head (Mark 14:3) and he may recall this aspect to contrast her act with the disciples' reticence to even wash each other's feet just days later (13:14-15). It expresses the humility she has in the presence of Jesus, especially when she casts decorum to the wind and unravels her hair to wipe his feet with it.

The house is filled with fragrance. In fact, the fragrance of this story will be known wherever the gospel is preached (Mark 14:9), perhaps because it so expresses the love that arises for Christ when it is grasped that death and sin have been defeated. Love will become a central theme of John's Gospel for the next few chapters, and, love remains the vital mark of true faith (1 Cor. 16:22; Eph. 6:24).

Judas complains about the wastefulness of this act. He has no understanding of what Jesus is about, or of the love his life will give rise to, anymore than those to whom he will shortly betray Jesus. In fact, he has no interest in the poor at all and is mastered by his own greed. Jesus says that he, and the need for him to be acknowledged with love, are, for the moment, more worthy of this gift than any human need.

Mary may express more than she realises (like Caiaphas in another direction—11:49-51). Jesus says she intended to keep this nard for his burial but has not been able to wait until then. In effect, she has anointed him before his death (Mark 14:8). 'She has done a beautiful thing to me' Jesus says (Matt. 26:10). Clearly, this act, in the presence of so much misunderstanding and opposition, has helped Christ personally and will sustain him in the days to come.

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LUKE 19:28–48

Matthew 21:1–17; John 12:12–19; Psalm 132:13–14; Zechariah 9:9

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY / JESUS WEEPS FOR JERUSALEM / JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

Story Notes

File no. 151

Vv. 21-40

For a last time (others at 9:51 and 18:31), Luke tells us Jesus is leading the way to Jerusalem. He and his disciples approach the town of Bethany, the town that will become his home for the final days of ministry in Jerusalem.

Jesus has followers here already and tells his disciples to ask one of these for the loan of an unriden colt so that he can make his triumphal entry to Jerusalem as King. The disciples find everything as he has said, including the willingness of the owner to part with his colt for the one he knows as Lord.

Jesus chooses a donkey to ride rather than a horse because he comes, not in war but in peace (Matt. 21:3-5). The prophecy Jesus fulfills tells us that Jesus is coming to make peace (Zech. 9:9).

So, Jesus rides into Jerusalem. Many people now recognise him as their Messiah and they celebrate his taking up of his kingship. The crowd with him is mainly from Galilee and they remember the mighty works he has done there. Jesus knows everything depends on people recognising him, and says that even stones would take up this task if those who were blessed did not.

The song the disciples are singing comes from Psalm 118, which was traditionally sung as pilgrims approached Jerusalem for their festival. It includes the lines: 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' (v. 26). This Psalm tells us that, because God is Saviour, his people may enter the righteous city as righteous people, people accepted by God. Jesus has now arrived to be God's appointed Saviour. Together with the angels at the beginning of this book (2:14), a great crowd gives glory to God in the highest.

Vv. 41-44

It is good that people are so joyous, but they do not understand the seriousness of Jesus being rejected by Jerusalem. Israel does not know how to live in peace with God, and so, Jesus weeps. God's wrath is coming upon them (Rom. 2:4-5). Jesus will shortly spell these things out in more detail (Luke 21:5-48).

Vv. 45-48

Jesus, the Christ, is now in his capital and takes executive action to cleanse the temple (like the kings Hezekiah and Josiah before him). God wants the temple to be a place where all of us can come to him, not a private place for Israel's civic religion (Luke 19:45-46). Jesus leaves them in no doubt as to his authority, or as to his intention to purify the worship of Israel. God's people turned the temple into a den of thieves (Jer. 7:11), but Jesus comes to re-establish it as a house of prayer for us all (Isa. 56:7).

Jesus teaches in the temple every day (note the repeated observation that Jesus was teaching—19:47 and 21:37). He did so unofficially, but by God's appointment. He is acting as Israel's King should always have done—leading his people in righteousness.

MATTHEW 21:33–46

Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19

PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANTS

Story Notes

File no. 152

Christ's parable is a thinly veiled reference to Isaiah 5:1–7. Israel's leaders did not want the reign or kingdom of God at all. They wanted to determine and achieve their own destiny. This had been so for most of Israel's history because they ignored God's prophets who called for the fruits of God's 'sowing' among them.

Their hatred of God was now focused on murdering the Son of God. However, through this, they would lose their inheritance. They had abused God's patience with them and were now rejecting his Son. They were wretched and would come to a miserable end. They would find themselves outside of the blessing of God's reign and others would be brought into it, people who, accepting the central place of the Messiah, would bring forth fruit (John 15) and worship God truly.

In spite of the hatred of his enemies, God's purpose to have his Messiah established as centre stone in his building would still be fulfilled. David had predicted this event (Ps. 118:22-23).

The religion of these leaders was man made and needed sustaining by political expediency, so, for the moment, they could do nothing about removing Jesus. The leaders knew that the parable applied to them but it failed to awaken them.

Israel succeeded in killing Jesus, but God raised him up for our salvation. Peter was full of this when he preached to Israel (Acts 4:11; cf. 1 Pet. 2:7). So was Paul as he took the gospel to the nations (Rom. 9:33). The kingdom belongs to those who believe in the Son of God, and they are his temple and give to true worship (Eph. 2:20). How good for us that the stone we rejected is still established by God!

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LUKE 21:5–38

Matthew 24:1–51; Mark 13:3–37

'WHEN WILL THESE THINGS HAPPEN'

Story Notes

File no. 153

It is natural enough for the disciples to be enthusiastic about their temple. It is God's gift to them, and the structure is beautiful. We all like the paraphernalia of our worship to be well presented! But all was not well with Israel and Jesus knew the outward signs of grandeur could not survive God's searching eye. It would all come down, and the disciples needed to be ready for it so their faith was focused in the right place.

Jesus and the disciples climb the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24:3) and the disciples ask for some idea of when these things will happen and what signs to look for. From here, they can look down on the whole temple area, but Jesus paints an entirely different picture from the one before them.

Firstly, the gospel will go out to the whole world (vv. 8-19, with Matt. 24:14). If servants of Christ suffer, they may be tempted to look for respite in an early return of Christ. Jesus says there will be false claimants, and that there will be social and international troubles, natural disasters and cosmic disturbances. Even before this, disciples will be persecuted, by Israel, by the nations, and by their own families because they proclaim the gospel. Die they may, but not a hair will truly be harmed (so 12:7 and Acts 27:34).

Secondly, and more immediately, Jerusalem will fall, an event that we now know happened in 70 AD (vv. 20-24). Here, Jesus gives practical help for those who would live until that time. They should not hold out hopes for the maintenance of a city that has rejected its Messiah. It is time for God's vengeance as the prophets so often warned. When it is clear that Jerusalem is besieged, residents should flee, hopefully, not while mothers are pregnant. Like their forefathers in Jeremiah's day, they will be 'captives' among the nations. Jerusalem will be Gentile property until their day (of judgement) comes. ('The times of the Gentiles' in this setting must be the time for them to receive the gospel.) Those who heed this warning, will, of course be Christians, and, as they flee, they will take the message of Christ to the nations.

Thirdly, the fall of Jerusalem seems to be a foretaste of how history will be for all nations, until the Lord comes (vv. 25-28, with v. 35). Jesus has come for all nations and all nations will suffer if they reject their Saviour. Upheaval in the skies is used (apocalyptically) to describe the breakdown of all that makes creation a reliable home for us all, a breakdown of moral order and stability of the natural world. While the world views the break up of all they trust, and trembles for what is to come, Christians must look 'up' or anticipate *Him* whom they trust, the coming Christ, and be thankful for the redemption they will share with the whole creation (cf. Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21).

We are to seek the kingdom above all else (12:31-34), and those who look for the kingdom will recognise in this world's upheavals, not the demise of all that is precious, but the coming of what is most precious, and especially, the nearness of it all. New growth on a fig tree means summer is certainly coming. Do we see the gospel reaching the nations? Do we see God's people suffering? Do we see nations forever fighting and people wringing their hands in despair at the pain of it all? As surely as we witness these things can we be sure of the coming of Christ in his kingly power. Having hope is essential. If we forget what Christ is about in this present moment, this present world, its troubles and allurements, will overwhelm us.

Jesus continues his kingly, priestly, prophetic teaching in Jerusalem. He has come as King and his kingship consists in establishing his people in righteousness.

MATTHEW 25:1–13

PARABLE OF THE TEN BRIDESMAIDS

Story Notes

File no. 154

In the previous chapter, Christ's coming was always in view, and with reference to those who 'jumped the gun' by pretending they were the returned Messiah. Jesus said the kingdom would not come until the gospel had been proclaimed everywhere (24:14). We should not be deceived, no matter how difficult events may prove to be. How then should we wait? These parables are addressed to those who share, not only the kingdom, but also the patient endurance of proclaiming it (Rev. 1:9).

God's reign is likened to young women waiting with lamps to accompany a bridegroom to his wedding. If some did not come prepared for a long wait by bringing extra oil, others could not provide for them without missing out themselves.

We do not know enough about weddings at this time to be sure of why the bridegroom in this story is delayed. A bridegroom left his home for his brides' home. After certain ceremonies there, the party processed through the streets to his home for lengthy celebrations. The story may envisage them waiting at the bride's home for them both to emerge. Jeremiah suggests that the delay could have been caused by negotiations over the wedding price (France on Matthew, p. 351).

Jesus has suggested his relationship to Israel on several occasions by telling stories about or alluding to a bridegroom (Matt.9:15; Matt. 22:1–14; Mark 2:19–20). John the Baptist also saw this connection (John 3:27–30). God had described himself as Husband to Israel (Isa.54:4–6; 62:4–5; Ezek.16:7–34; Hosea 2:19) and Jesus had come to bring that relationship into fullness.

Given what Christ said about what must happen in the world, being prepared and alert must involve moral seriousness, and not just expecting a 'quick fix' provided by Christ's immanent arrival in splendour.

Whatever the reason for the bridegroom's delay, it is this delay that exposes the foolish from the wise. Those who are wise have listened to the teaching of Jesus about the kingdom (7:21-29). They continue to serve patiently even when others think they are free to serve themselves (24:45). In particular, they have learned to love, which, as Paul tells us, begins with patience (1 Cor. 13:4).

Paul also tells us that waiting for Christ's coming is a work of love for him (Eph. 6:24; cf. 1 Cor. 6:22) and his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). Without love for Christ and all his people, there could be no enjoyment of the kingdom of God, either now or then.

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JOHN 13:1–32; MATTHEW 26:26–30

Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14–20; I Corinthians 11:23–26

JESUS WASHES THE DISCIPLE'S FEET / ONE WILL BETRAY ME / THE FIRST LORD'S SUPPER

Story Notes

File no. 155

John 13:1–32

Vv. 1-17

John locates this event carefully so we know where we are up to in what Jesus has come to do. The Passover is imminent—Israel is poised to remember their salvation as a nation. The hour that could not come earlier (2:4; 7:30; 8:20) has arrived: Jesus will be glorified, the world will be judged and Satan will be cast down; by being 'lifted up', Jesus will draw humanity to himself (12:23, 27-32). What we are about to see in the coming chapters will be Jesus loving his own 'to the end'. It is also the occasion for the devil to focus his vitriol on Jesus, by stirring Judas to his evil deed.

This event, and what follows, is also located in the eternal relationship of the Father and Son. Jesus, having come from the Father for this purpose, now has everything in his hands, and will return to the Father.

Washing feet is a simple task, normally performed by a lowly servant, but Jesus has more in mind than ablutions. The disciples see what kind of things a Messiah does, and begin to see how low he must stoop to do it. The washing is a parable of the greater movement happening in the chapter.

Peter, yet again, becomes the person through whom we all learn how to relate to this Son of God. He must submit to being served by his Master in this way (and in all that will follow) if he wants any association with Jesus. On the other hand, he doesn't need a bath, just a foot wash. Jesus says he is already bathed (metaphorically) and clean—that is, except Judas. Jesus tells them later, after Judas has gone, that they are clean through the word he has spoken (15:3). What Peter needs to know is that his cleansing is something Jesus will have to do, and, as a hearer of his word, has effectively already done. Peter will later learn the truth of this when he is told that he will deny the Lord, and, that he should not let his heart be troubled (13:38—14:1).

Peter can't fathom this yet, because the events encompassed in this 'hour' are not yet concluded, but he will understand.

Now Jesus comes to what the disciples can and must understand now. Their Master has served them, and, as servants, they should do the same for each other. He has set an example to be followed. This is the way of blessing, and the way of love (v. 34).

Vv. 18-30

The betrayal of Jesus is not incidental, but necessary and predicted. Jesus, as true king and shepherd of his people is taking to himself all humanity's hatred of God, so David's experience of this (Ps. 41:9) now belongs to him. Jesus explains the turmoil to come so his disciples will not doubt that he is the Son of God when it happens. They are living in the midst of great and eternal matters, but the disciples should not think lightly of their own importance: if people reject them as his messengers, they are rejecting Jesus himself.

But Jesus' mind is on his betrayer. The disciples, so sure of their faithfulness a little earlier, now question which of them will do this. Clearly, Jesus loves Judas and offers him a mark of friendship. But it is not Jesus who, by love, enters into Judas. It is Satan. But even here, Jesus sends him on to his task.

Vv. 31-38

Jesus identifies himself as the Servant of the Lord (Is. 49:3) who will suffer deeply, but whom God will glorify and in whom God will be glorified. All this will happen in the events about to transpire, the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The disciples cannot travel with

JESUS WASHES THE DISCIPLE'S FEET / ONE WILL BETRAY ME / THE FIRST LORD'S SUPPER con't

Jesus in this strange glory at present, but Jesus tells them they must love one another. This is the true mark of belonging to him.

Jesus, ever mindful of his being shepherd of his flock, prepares the disciples, not only for what he will do, but also, for what they will do. Jesus is going from them and they, like the hostile Jews (7:34, 36; 8:21), will not be able to follow. 'You will follow later', he said, and later, 'I go to prepare a place for you', and even come for them (14:2-3). They would not die but live (14:19). But first, Peter, and the others, must learn that their relationship to Jesus does not arise from their devotion to him. In the midst of their predicted failure, Jesus teaches them to be untroubled, to believe in God and in himself. Peter learns that, far from being a worthy disciple of Jesus, he will be brought to the glory of the Father's home through the glory that is about to be revealed by Jesus. Then, he will live 'to the praise of the glory of [God's] grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved' (Eph. 1:6).

Matthew 26:26–30

Passover for a Jew recalled God's saving of them from slavery and establishing them as his people. Jesus takes parts of this feast to proclaim the new 'exodus' he will bring about by his death. He commands the disciples to eat and drink his body and blood. He has already taught that he will die violently and that believers will participate in the benefits of his death, but now, by referring to 'the blood of the covenant' he makes himself the fulfillment of Israel's sacrificial system (Exod. 24:8). By saying that it is 'poured out for many', Jesus reveals that he is the Servant of the Lord bearing the sins of many (Isa. 53:12).

For a Jew there could not have been a more significant moment: the final establishment of the eternal covenant, not through their obedience but through Christ's forgiveness. He signals his victory, and theirs, by saying that the next such celebration he would share with them would be in the kingdom of his Father. The Passover has been transformed: just as they had celebrated and shared in Israel's redemption from slavery in Egypt, so now, they will participate in the world's redemption from sin through Christ's sacrifice of himself.

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LUKE 22:31–34; JOHN 13:33–38; 14:1

Matthew 26:31–35

LOOK OUT PETER!

Story Notes

File no. 156

All four Gospels record the story of Peter being warned about his coming betrayal of Jesus, and we may look at these together to get an overall picture of what is happening to Peter, and what Jesus reveals to Peter and to us all.

It is Passover time and Jesus has gathered his disciples for the Feast. He has recast this Feast so that it will now proclaim his death and the making of the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The disciples have also heard, and been deeply disturbed by the prediction of a betrayal and a discussion about who may do this. They have also discussed who among them is the greatest. Clearly, none of the disciples yet understands what Jesus is about and what this Feast really means and have agendas quite different from the Lord's.

Now, the disciples move out into the night (Matthew, Mark and John) and it is here that Jesus further unsettles them: they will all fall away from him and be scattered (Matt. Mark). But they have just been told that they have stood by Jesus in his trials and that they will sit with him in his kingdom judging Israel (Luke). Their past is approved and their future is secured, but not their present.

The occasion of this failure, Jesus identifies by quoting Zechariah (13:7). The Shepherd will be struck and his flock scattered (Matt. Mark. John also alludes to this—John 16:32). In John, the occasion is identified in a manner more general, but also more grand: Jesus will be glorified and God will be glorified in him. But the disciples, as with the Jews generally, will not be able to follow him—not yet. But they are to love one another, and, in this way, not by their self-confident bravado, they will be identified as his followers. Perhaps the question for Peter and the other disciples is, 'Will they see or share in the coming glory?'

Peter wants to distinguish himself from the others (Matt. Mark, John), saying that he will not be one to deny the Lord; not ever! He will travel on with the Lord, even to prison and death. All the disciples say the same thing (Matt. Mark). The Lord warns Peter in particular, that Satan has demanded to shake all the disciples ('you' is plural) as in the sifting of wheat (Luke). Clearly, Satan would not do this to refine them but to destroy them. But Jesus has prayed for Peter ('you' is singular) so that this will not occur. He will be converted or will turn, perhaps, from his self-confidence and from the deep failure that is imminent. Then, he may truly strengthen his brothers, not with bravado, but with faith (Luke).

Peter will deny the Lord three times, but neither he or any of the disciples should let their hearts be troubled (John). Jesus tells them about his Father's house with many rooms, a home where they belong. The certainty of their being there will not be their self-confidence but the Lord who will come to get them and take them to be with himself. Here is the way they *will* participate in the coming glory, a glory that must first be revealed in the Lord's sufferings, but then, also, in his coming exultation.

Somewhere in this period (Luke), Jesus says the equipment needed for following him will be different from what he said earlier. The disciples had not been allowed to take money or extra clothing with them, but now they will need both, and a sword as well. Jesus will be numbered with the transgressors (quoting Is. 53:12). By his intercession for transgressors, he will come into his kingdom and share the spoils of his victory. It seems unlikely that Jesus is recommending swords as present protection for his disciples. Peter says they have a couple and Jesus says that that would be enough. His meaning must be ironic because he later reprimands Peter for wielding a sword in Gethsemane. Rather, Jesus tells his disciples, using this metaphor, that they should be ready with every provision and readiness for battle. Their readiness would not arise from their fear but from the One who had borne the iniquity of us all, and now 'divides the spoil with the strong'.

LOOK OUT PETER con't

After this, Jesus leads his disciples to Gethsemane where they are not even able to watch with Jesus in his trials. From here, Jesus is arrested, and, during the night, while Jesus is questioned by the High Priest, Peter does precisely what Jesus predicted. At the very time of his third denial, Jesus looks over at Peter, and Peter goes out into the night and weeps bitterly (Matt. 26:75; Luke 22:62).

We know that Peter's faith did not fail. An angel gave specific instructions to the women who discovered Jesus' empty grave to tell 'his disciples and Peter' that he would go before them to Galilee. Peter himself raced to, and into, the empty tomb to see for himself that Jesus was not in the grave. Peter was present with the disciples when Jesus met them on the first evening of his resurrection. He was present in Galilee where Jesus gave him opportunity to reverse his denials with confessions of love. His love was now, not what he knew, but what the Lord knew about him. Here was love formed by Jesus himself, faithful unto death.

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JOHN 14:1–31; 15:9–17

John 13:31–34

KNOWING THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT

Story Notes

File no. 157

14:1-15

The disciples are eager to know where Jesus is going, and eager to know they will be with him. On the other hand, they have an unwarranted trust in their ability to follow him all the way. Jesus tells Peter he will deny knowing him before morning, but now, adds, that the disciples should not let their hearts be troubled by this failure. They should trust in God and in himself. He is going home, to the Father's home, where rooms are being prepared for them, and that Jesus will return to take them there. For the present, it is sufficient for them to know that he is the way, truth and life of the Father. Philip thinks there is more to know but Jesus says they know all they need to if they are looking at him. He and the Father indwell each other and the works Jesus is doing are the Father's works.

Israel wanted revelation to be by signs (as Greeks wanted it by wisdom) and could not hear the revelation of personal love that Jesus is opening up. The disciples are being introduced to a new way of knowing.

The disciples need to know how they are involved in all of this, and, of course, they want to be involved. Jesus says they will do the works he does—Father works—and more, because he will be with the Father. He could have added that, by then, he will have defeated Satan and received his kingdom, but that will come later. For the moment, he expresses it as them asking and receiving from the Father, in Jesus name, or asking Jesus directly; and by their asking, the Father will be glorified in what he does for his Son.

The greater works are not the more impressive works. Jesus has spoken of 'greater works' earlier: the dead would hear the voice of the Son of man and live (5:20). This was the greater work that would begin at Pentecost, the Father giving Jesus greater works to do in the preaching of his gospel and the creating of a new people of God.

The disciples want explanations but Jesus wants their love. Can they not see the love of Father for the Son and Son for the Father? If they love Jesus, they will obey him and participate with him in the Father's bounty for the Son and for the creation.

14:16-20

Jesus has told the disciples that they know the Father—in him. Now he says they know the Spirit as another Helper, because he is already abiding *with* them. That is, collectively, the Spirit had been among them through the person of Jesus, and teaching them who Christ is. But Jesus will pray for the Spirit to be with them forever. He will be *in* them. Both now, and then, they know the Spirit, and the world, rejecting Jesus Christ, does not know him.

Jesus leaving the disciples is not his abandoning *of* them, it is going to the Father *for* them. He will not leave them as orphans but will be with them (after telling them earlier that he will go and that they cannot follow—13:36). As the Father is present to them in Jesus, so Jesus will be present to them in the Spirit. That is, the world will not see anything but they will both see and live. What would this knowing be like? They will know that Jesus is in his Father (as in 10:38; 14:10)—obviously, knowing the Father and the Father knowing him—but now, they will know this as participants, not confused onlookers but those who are in Christ and in whom Christ lives.

14:21-24

Again, all this will happen, not so much as something understood as obeyed. If we, like the disciples, know the Son (and see the Father in him), we will love and obey him. The Father and Son will both indwell us. Our questions will be met, not by answers but by a coming. Indwelling is the form of the love relationship of Father and Son, and it is the form of the love relationship we have with Father and Son by the Spirit. This is what Jesus means by 'knowing'. Indwelling of one person by another is how love works. The one gives freely to the other and sees their life

KNOWING THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT con't

fulfilled in the benefit the other receives. The other receives what is given, knowing that their life is not complete without receiving what the other gives.

14:25-26

So what will the Holy Spirit do in this time to come, when Jesus is not with the disciples? He will be their reminder and Helper. Right now, Jesus gives them his peace. Again, he reminds them, that they should not be troubled about his departure; he is going to the Father and the Father is greater than he is. Jesus is not just leaving but going to the Father for them and in their interests. If they loved him, this is how they would see his going.

14:30-31

Jesus cannot say much more because the world's ruler is coming. What can he explain about this, short of this false ruler coming and Jesus dealing with him (c.f. 12:31)? This ruler has no claim on Jesus because he is without sin. (Satan's power lies in our guilt and the accusations he makes.) The disciples will see how much claim he has on them in the coming hours. He has desired to have Peter. But Jesus must do the Father's will so the world can see his love for his Father. This, and not this present world and its powers, are the world's centre and future.

15:9-17

How may a disciple participate in the fruitfulness of Christ? The answer, as before (c.f. 14:14-15) is by love—love that flows from Father to Son, and so, to us. We respond in the way Jesus does to the Father, by obedience. The commandment Jesus give us is to love one another, so the eternal love of Father and Son now finds it's outworking in our relationships—even the eternal love of Jesus laying down his life for his friends. (This is illustrated when Paul says husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the Church—Eph. 5:25.)

We can participate in this fruitfulness because we are taken into the confidence of Christ. He shares with us what the Father shows him. We are chosen for this, not self-appointed. Our prayers will be heard and our fruitfulness will be eternal. So, Jesus says to them again, 'Love!'

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JOHN 17:1–26
JESUS PRAYER
Story Notes
File no. 158a

In this remarkable prayer, Jesus prays for the new community that will arise through his revelation of the Father. Almost every sentence reveals the relationship between himself and the Father, and this relationship is the basis and measure of the requests he makes for us—its glory (vv. 1, 5, 22), its oneness (vv. 11, 21) and its love (v. 23). Knowing the Father and the Son he sent *is* eternal life – knowing, not as spectators but as participators in what passes between them.

The Son's prayer is the asking of an equal (Gr. *aiteo*), and the prayer of one who has been given authority over all humanity (v. 2). We have good reason to know this prayer because our own experience and the world's history is the Father's response to it. He prays it in the hearing of his disciples for their joy (v. 13), and ours.

Two other themes are prominent in this prayer. The word 'gave' or 'given' is used 17 times and the word 'world' 18 times. Jesus is very aware of the Father's giving, to him in the first instance, but then, to us, his people, and we are a gift of the Father to the Son. In every section of the prayer, for himself (1-5), for the disciples (6-19), and for ourselves (20-26), Jesus speaks about us as those the Father has given to him. We would never have wanted to know the Father, and certainly not have brought the creation to unity under the Father, but the Father has drawn us to the Son with this purpose.

Because of the Father's giving to the Son and to us, we are no longer 'of' the world because we have received the word of Christ who is from the Father (vv. 6, 8, 14, 25), but then, everything we are given is so the world will know what we know (v. 8 with vv. 21, 23).

In every section of the prayer, Jesus also speaks of glory so we make this the theme to follow.

1-5

First, Jesus prays for himself. Everything hangs on this. '*Glorify* your Son that the Son may *glorify* you!' and '*Glorify* me in your own presence!' He wants his death to be a revelation of the glory or deity of the Father (12:27-28), but also, to return to his place of eternal glory with the Father (vv. 5, 24) where he will be able to enact the victory he has won.

When Jesus says he has *finished* all the Father has given him to do (v. 4), he must include revealing his name (vv. 6, 26) giving disciples his word (vv. 6, 8) and keeping the disciples (v. 12). But he must also include, by way of anticipation, all that he prays for here, to sanctify the believers (v. 19).

6-19

Next, Jesus prays for the disciples in whom he is *glorified* (v. 11; cf. Ep. 1:18). Jesus so gives himself to the apostles that he is glorified in them. 'Keep them in your name!' he asks. This is what Jesus has done for Peter. Now, he entrusts this keeping to the Father (vv. 11-13). The important thing to be 'kept' is faith (Luke 22:32). This is with a view to the disciples being one—as the Father and Son are one. The unity of the church is the result of being kept in Christ's revelation of the Father. In this way, the love-union of Father and Son is expressed in the life of his people.

'Keep them from the evil one!' he prays. Let there be no more Judases! There are only two fathers finally—God and Satan. By hearing the Father's word in Jesus, disciples belong to the Father, and not to Satan or to the world he controls. This, of course, draws the hatred of the world on them. But the disciples don't need to escape from this; they are sent to it as Jesus was.

'Sanctify them', Jesus asks, that is, for taking this word to the world. He does not simply oppose his 'troops' to the world's hostility, but sanctifies himself for the work he will do on the cross, because it is by this powerful action that he will secure his people as the Father's possession.

JESUS PRAYER con't

20-26

Lastly, Jesus prays for us all who have believed the word of the apostles, which is, of course, the word the Son gave the apostles. 'May they be one...!' (v. 21), he asks, so that we are caught up in the same fellowship as the apostles are (v. 11; 1 John 1:3-4). Again, he has secured this by giving to us all the *glory* the Father gave him. This includes his being the eternal beloved Son, full of grace and truth, for us (Jo. 1:14, 16). It includes all that Jesus has done and will do to gather us as his Father's people.

Oneness is love in action—the Father's love in the Son, and now, in us. Through this work of the Son in his people, the world is confronted with visible and persuasive evidence of the eternal love of the Father in sending his Son.

The last request secures the goal the Father has had in view all along (cf. 14:3): 'I desire that they also may be with me....to see my *glory*!' The Father's love gift of glory has been in the Son's mind all through this prayer (vv. 5, 24). He has given us his glory, but he wants us to see this glory in him, because this is the way it is secured for us.

The prayer ends with Jesus rehearsing the new situation created by this intercession. He has addressed his Father as holy (v. 11), and now, righteous, in the setting of a world that is angry and unwilling to know him. Jesus alone knows the Father, but—and here is the wonder—the apostles have seen that he is the Gift and Word of the Father (cf. 1:10-12). He will now complete this revelation of the Father's name with his death so that the eternal love of the Father for Son will be in his people. In a very real way, this prayer is continued in the intercession Jesus makes in his death (Is. 53:12), and continues now at the Father's right hand (Heb. 7:25).

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JOHN 17:1–26

JESUS' PRAYER

notes for the 5 – 8's group prepared by Helen Farmer

File no. 158b

Jesus knew the time had come for Him to go back to His Father.
That meant He would soon be going to die on the Cross.
This was a big thing to do and He wanted to do it so He prayed to His Father.
He prayed:
for Himself, for His disciples and for us.

(vs 1–5)

For Himself

Jesus asked for His Father's glory.
'What is the Father's glory?'
It is the outshining of who He is — His love, goodness and truth and all that He is.

So Jesus asked for His Father's love, goodness and truth to be given to Him,
so He could go to the cross.
By dying there for our sin, He would show the Father's Glory, His holy love and mercy.

At the cross we see who God is, and know Him.
(a child could read either v 1 or v 5)

(vs 6–19)

After that, Jesus prayed **for His disciples** saying,
'Father you gave these men to Me.
I kept them safe, but now I am leaving them.
Keep them safe in Your Name.
I want them to have My joy.
Joy which comes from You.

'I gave the disciples Your word and now the world hates them.
Don't take them out of the world, but do keep them from the evil one.

'Keep them as Your special people.
I give myself to You to use so that they will be Your special people.'
(a child could read either v 15 or v 11)

(vs 20 – 26)

Finally Jesus prayed for **those who would believe**.
That means that He was praying for **US**.
He was praying for those who would hear and read what the disciples had spoken and written.

He prayed that we would be one in heart and mind with the Father and the Son, living in one another, and us living in them.

Jesus has this glory in Himself and gives it freely to those who receive His word.
Let's remember what this glory is.
It is the outshining of who God is —
His love, goodness and truth and all that He is.

When the world sees this love in us, they will know God has sent His Son to the world.
(a child could read v 20)

After this, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane and was arrested and killed.
But we know that this is the revelation of God's glory in His love for us.

JESUS' PRAYER con't

Song:

*'I know not how to pray, O Lord,
So weak and frail am I.
Lord Jesus to your out stretched Arms
In love I daily fly,
For you have prayed for me.'*

*By James Torrence'
(New Creation blue book No 347)*

MATTHEW 26:30–32; 36–68

Mark 14:26–65; Luke 22:39–54; John 18:1–14

GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE / HIGH PRIEST'S COURT

Story Notes

File no. 159

Jesus told his disciples they would desert him. Zechariah (13:7) foretold the day when the Shepherd would be struck and his people scattered. No unity could be had without the Shepherd, and they needed to know this. People would never have the power to be united apart from the Shepherd, and, he would not have power to gather them until he had been murdered and raised from the dead. The disciples did not like hearing this truth about themselves but Jesus insisted on it.

Jesus had prepared the disciples for their hour of trial and told them that he would meet them in Galilee. Their failure through this time would not be the end of the kingdom or the failure of the covenant. In the garden, he took three disciples for companionship as he prayed about his own hour of trial.

Jesus was grieved and deeply anguished and told Peter, James and John that this was 'to the point of death.' *Luke* adds that, as he prayed, an angel strengthened him but that his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:43-44).

There were many reasons for Jesus' grief. He would 'save his people from their sins' (Matt. 1:21) and he had come to 'give his life a ransom for many' (Matt. 20:28 with Isa. 53:12). This identifies him as a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief and as one who would bear our sorrows (Isa. 53:3-4). He had already begun to do this (Matt. 8:17), but now, the full weight of it seems to press in on him. Peter would later say that 'he bore our sins in his body on the cross' (1 Pet. 2:24).

Our approach to this hour of Christ's sorrow should be modest. There are no sorrows like his sorrows. In this hour, his resolve to do his Father's will came to its climax. His temptation in the desert was an attempt by Satan to divert him from the cross. He opposed the temptation with Scripture (Matt. 4:1-11). The belief of Jesus that he should die on the cross was contested from first to last. He kept his course by deliberate choice and, finally, rested his life in the will and love of his Father by watching and praying. He would also have loved the support of his disciples.

The disciples succumbed to temptation and, when the time came, could not take up their cross. However, God's covenant purpose was never in doubt. It was, and is, as sure as Jesus' love for his Father and his will.

We should follow these hours of Christ's suffering with grateful joy. What follows is tragic if taken as a commentary on human actions, but as a revelation of God sending his Son to save the world, it is a revelation of love, a love which takes us to the Father. They also show that Jesus did not have his life taken from him (John 10:18). His life was upheld by the Father and Jesus directed all of the proceedings without recourse to this world's powers.

Jesus then had dealings with Judas the deceiver, Peter the zealot and the cowardly party coming to arrest him. In the first place, Jesus directed his own arrest. In doing so, he showed us the way to deal with opposition to him and his church: he called Judas his 'friend'; he ruled out the use of force; in this case, he even ruled out the help of angels; everything must fulfill God's word and purpose and nothing else mattered. Weapons, Peter found, were not for the church and it was shameful that weapons would ever be used against him or his people. Jesus had encompassed the deed of Judas in his own purpose, he had curbed the fleshly zeal of his own followers and shamed those who had acted in the dark, all in the hope that they would awaken to the evil they were doing.

The disciples were now out of their depth, and fled. While they could use fleshly powers they were bold, but not bold with the boldness of holy love which Jesus had.

GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE / HIGH PRIEST'S COURT con't

Jesus set the agenda for his own trial. In the High Priest's home, with Peter in the background doing his best to keep his promise, scribes and elders deliberately sought falsehood on which to convict Jesus; the truth would expose them rather than Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:18). Even a statement Jesus made about himself (perhaps John 2:19), now misapplied, could not convict him. They were false witnesses to whom Jesus did not respond (cf. Isa. 53:7). But his silence may have given Caiaphas the opportunity to ask if he presumed to being the Messiah or the Son of God. They knew that David's son (Messiah) would build a house for God (2 Sam. 7:14).

Jewish law required that Jesus respond to the question put to him in this solemn way, and Jesus had no reason not to answer. They had now come to his core business. He had come as Israel's Messiah. Moreover, nothing they did would prevent his completing his task. He would receive the kingdom appointed to him and to all who followed him (Dan. 7:13-14, 18). A claim to be Messiah by one, who, from Israel's point of view, did not qualify, was seen as blasphemy, and this was a chargeable offence, at least warranting a stoning. Israel's (and the world's) hatred had reached its peak.

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MATTHEW 26:57, 58, 69–75

Mark 14:53,54, 66–72; Luke 22:54–62; John 18:15–18; 25–28

PETER DENIES THE LORD

Story Notes

File no. 160

All of the Gospels record this story, showing that any view of Jesus and the gospel needs this story to make it complete.

Matthew and Mark tell us that Peter followed Jesus to Caiaphas' court at a distance, and that three people accused him of being a follower of Christ, that his denials were vehement and that, when the cock crowed, he remembered Jesus words and went out and wept bitterly.

Luke adds that the Lord looked directly at Peter after his third denial and that this was when he remembered what the Lord had said.

John tells us that a disciple known to the High Priest had access to the courtyard and got permission for Peter to enter as well. He also tells us that a relative of the man Peter injured in Gethemane recognized Peter.

Peter's self conceived piety crumbled. He could not bear to be identified when, on two occasions, a maid noticed him. Others recognised his Galilean accent and he let loose with oaths of denial. His collapse was complete.

The setting for this story is that Jesus was being accused and was helpless to defend himself, and he announced that he was the coming Son of Man to whom God would give all authority. By contrast, Peter was also being accused but took what action he could to defend himself, and found that he was no longer worthy to be called a disciple. Jesus found his life by losing it to save ours. The ones whom he came to save sought to save their lives; in the normal course of events, they would now lose them (Matt. 16:24-27).

Peter remembered what the Lord had said about all the disciples forsaking him and went away to weep bitterly. But the Lord had added that he would go before them to Galilee (Matt. 26:31-34). Did he also remember the promise that God would build his church on him (Matt. 16:17-19) or that those who spoke against Christ could be forgiven (Matt. 12:32)? He had been saved once before by Jesus, from a raging sea (Matt. 14:28-31). His lostness was not final. There was hope for him because the Lord had anticipated their failure and still announced his future for them.

Much had been entrusted to Peter. The Lord would build his church on this man, together with the other apostles (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:18). But he would not be any foundation at all if he did not know that everything depended on the Lord being Saviour and that he was the Saviour of those who were unfaithful to the covenant.

Our salvation has not depended on a human uncertainty. The covenant was never in doubt. It was, and is, as sure as Jesus' faithful love for his Father and his people.

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MATTHEW 27:3–5,11–26

Luke 23:1–25; John 18:28 — 19:16

JUDAS ISCARIOT / IN PILTATE'S JUDGEMENT HALL

Story Notes

File no. 161

Satan had entered Judas and moved him to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3), but Judas had not foreseen the guilty verdict to which his plotting would lead. In his own mind, he was more righteous than to betray innocent blood and sought to retrace his steps. He refused to participate further in the games of the Sanhedrin. Like Pilate later on (Matt. 27:24-26), he sought to 'wash his hands' of the affair.

Like Peter, Judas was close to Jesus, but, unlike Peter, he was far from seeing that Jesus was Redeemer. He refused to receive mercy of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 7:10). Jesus had angered him by allowing the anointing oil to be 'wasted', and now, Israel angered him by not receiving the returned money. He had not found God in Jesus, or salvation. The work that Satan had started, ended in death.

Israel's leadership, by purchasing a field (to launder the money?) unwittingly fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah (11:12-13). Effectively, they had paid a paltry 30 pieces of silver for their Messiah.

While Israel and Judas sought to build their own kingdoms, Jesus built the kingdom of God by saving those who would inherit it. He would bear a true witness before Pilate (1 Tim. 6:13), not an answer to every question but a true testimony to the Father who had sent him into the world.

The charge against Jesus, of claiming to be Messiah, was now phrased as 'King of the Jews' to gain maximum political advantage in approaching Pilate. A rival of Caesar would be executed in the manner of other insurgents, by crucifixion.

The term 'Son of God' had been used by the wise men (Matt. 2:2), and Jesus gave qualified assent to the title: he had ridden into Jerusalem as King (Matt. 21:1-9). However his idea of 'king' was different to theirs (c.f. John 18:33-37).

Jesus could have rejected the title in the political way that Pilate would have understood it, but being 'King of the Jews' fulfilled the prophecies concerning him (Matt. 2:2). He had ridden into Jerusalem as their King (Matt. 21:1-9) and now gave qualified assent to the charge (cf. the same phrase used in 26:25).

Beyond this, Jesus had nothing to add to the various accusations and his silence amazed Pilate. Jesus 'rested his case' and let the sins of rival powers take him to the death that had been appointed to him by his Father.

John tells us more but *Matthew* leaves us with the silent Christ.

Perhaps Pilate thought he would escape his dilemma by asking Israel to choose between Barabbas and Jesus. Surely they would prefer Jesus to be released. A political man like Pilate could recognise their envy of a rival power. If they acknowledged Jesus, they could not rule their own lives. His wife added to his dilemma because she was impressed with the righteousness of Jesus. Gentiles could see what was so, but Israel was blind with hatred. It was not difficult for the crowd to be stirred to ask for Jesus to be treated as an upstart against Rome.

Pilate sought innocence by 'legally' distancing himself from the moral decision made by Israel. Israel wanted a guilty verdict, and they were so sure of the rightness of their action that they welcomed any reprisal against them for their deed. They brought down on themselves the judgements of which Jesus had warned them (Matt. 23:34-36).

Later, Peter shows that we are all included in the accusation of conspiring to remove Jesus as a rival power (Acts 4:27). But it is murderers whom Jesus seeks to gather to himself and to protect (Matt. 23:37).

MATTHEW 27:31–66

Mark 15:16–47; Luke 23:26–55; John 19:16–42

WHEN JESUS DIED / FRIENDS BURY HIM

Story Notes

File no. 162

This Gospel, so full of what Jesus has done, is now full of what others do. Someone must carry the cross for Jesus. It seems he is exhausted from the vile treatment he has received. The cruelty of nailing Jesus to the wood is mentioned briefly because the emphasis is not on the physical suffering. He is treated as a wicked man among others (cf. Isa. 53:12). He is offered a bitter drink, seemingly a mockery (judging by Psalm 69:21). Whether because of the spite involved, or because he would be sedated by taking it (cf. Prov. 31:6-7), he refuses the drink. Then soldiers show their disdain for the whole affair by dividing up Jesus' clothes. Little do they know that they are fulfilling Psalm 22:18.

The action of others continues, but the scorn expressed in those actions serves to reinforce who Jesus was and what he had come to do. The accusation that Jesus was 'King of the Jews' is placarded for all to see. He is King in his dying.

Passers by recalled his claiming to rebuild the temple they would pull down. They were, in fact, dismantling their only means of access to God, but Jesus was, right then, destroying the hostility of sinners so they would be a holy temple in himself (Eph. 2:16, 21). Revilers also recalled his claiming to be the 'Son of God' and suggested he do the one thing he said would destroy his mission—'Save yourself!' (Cf. Matt. 16:25).

All the ranks of Jewish leaders joined in the call for him to save himself, using the high title 'King of Israel'. Then they would believe in him, little realising that, before long, many of them would do so (Acts 6:7). They entirely misunderstood the title of 'Son of God' as putting God under obligation to save him, whereas, for Jesus, being Son of God meant living by every word of God, and not putting God to the test (Matt. 4:3-7). Both criminals (at first) joined in with the taunts.

Mark tells us that the crucifixion happened at 'the third hour' or 9 am (Mark 15:25). Matthew simply wants us to know that now, at the sixth hour or midday, darkness settles over the land. Mankind has had its day, but God now shows his displeasure (cf. Amos 8:9). He is treating his own land like those who persecuted his people (Exod. 10:22). So it remains for three terrible hours, so that Christ cries out at its end, 'Why have you forsaken me?' He is bearing the curse on the land and its people.

Yet even in this black hour, and though this is the one time he does not address God as his Father, he calls on 'my God' and is quoting from Psalm 22. His suffering is not because of his sins and is inexplicable to him. As a faithful servant of God, he can only entrust himself to God. The blood of the covenant did not come cheaply (Matt. 26:26-29).

To the end, his real work is hidden. Some misunderstand his words and think he is calling on Elijah. This makes one person give him a drink (perhaps the drink mentioned in John 19:29-30, this time, with no 'gall' and perhaps the common drink of the soldiers), and makes others sit back to see if Elijah will appear.

But Jesus, having discharged everything required of him (c.f. John 19:28-30) as King and Saviour, cried out loudly, clearly, not fading away gradually, and yielded up his spirit (Luke 23:46 with Ps. 31:5). He had not been defeated by his enemies but had given himself up freely. Now, he awaited his being 'ransomed', together with us who trust in him (Matt. 20:28).

The loud cry may have been 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit' (Luke 23:46), or 'It is finished!' (John 19:30). It may reflect the cries referred to in Psalm 22:2, 5, and 24.

This was not a defeat but a victory because he had given himself up to save us from our sins (Matt. 1:21), as a ransom (Matt. 20:28) and for our redemption. He had called sinners to himself (Matt. 9:13) and poured out his blood for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28).

WHEN JESUS DIED / FRIENDS BURY HIM con't

The land was now cleansed. The new temple lay waiting to be raised up. The old temple, given to anticipate this day, was desecrated by God himself, ripping the temple's curtain from its top to bottom. The earth shook, which Jews would understand as God himself drawing near (Judg. 5:4). Tombs were opened, and, after the resurrection, were seen walking around Jerusalem. The general resurrection may still lie ahead, but God gave a witness to the finality of what had now been accomplished.

The climax of this scene is the brutal and unconcerned Roman soldiers (c.f. vv. 36 and 54) confessing that this man is the Son of God. They could not know all that this meant, but they revered Jesus and confessed the truth of who he was. Gentiles, not Jews, were first to acknowledge the crucified Lord, a great encouragement to Gentiles to whom this gospel would be proclaimed (Matt. 28:19).

Their wonder signalled the coming of Gentiles to fill the place left by sceptical Israel (Matt. 8:11-12; 21:43).

Joseph, a member of the Jewish Council, a disciple of Jesus, one who awaited the coming of God's kingdom, buried him (he is mentioned in all four Gospels. He was killed with criminals but buried with the rich (so Isa. 53:9). Among the caring women watching all these things were two Marys who would also witness his resurrection. Jesus was loved, but as yet, without hope.

On the other hand, the care of the chief priests and Pharisees (rivals in other times, but here, united) is to prevent a covert action. They have no love for Jesus yet fear the faith of the disciples far more than was warranted!

The scene is set for a resurrection: zero anticipation among the disciples, dread among Israel's leaders and a tomb now sealed and guarded by Rome.

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MATTHEW 28:1–10, JOHN 20:1–18 & MATTHEW 28:11–15

Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12

JESUS IS ALIVE!

Story Notes

File no. 163

Matt. 28:1-10

Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of James (says Mark) have watched Christ being buried and come to the tomb now, after the Sabbath, to anoint the body of Jesus. An angel of the Lord has preceded them, immobilizing the guards by his appearance and by an earthquake, and has rolled back the stone to reveal an empty tomb. The soldiers can do nothing. Angels, who secured the safe passage of Jesus through his infancy, now prepare the way for the witnesses of the new creation.

The women have fear too, but it is mixed with joy. The angels comfort them with: 'Don't be afraid,' and, 'He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.' The angel directs these witnesses to the evidence they will need to share with the apostles—the tomb is empty! They must do this immediately, perhaps, because the guard will soon report this event to their superiors and the angel wants others to see this empty grave before the evidence is tampered with. The disciples are to head for Galilee where Jesus will meet them.

Christ meets these women as they go, and they worship him. He repeats the command to be without fear. He confirms the message of the angel and refers to his disciples as 'brothers'. The new people of God will know Jesus as brother because they share one Father (John 20:17). Christ's presence and word is sufficient to bring them to a clear faith, taking away all reason to be afraid.

Matt. 28:11-15

The women are now true witnesses of Christ's resurrection. In contrast, the guards report what has happened to the chief priests but their testimony is quashed. False witnesses have been sought by the Sanhedrin to condemn Jesus and now they offer bribes to secure further false testimony. Those who believe in the resurrected Jesus do so because of evidence. On the other hand, the soldiers are bribed to say that they knew who took the body of Jesus away, while they were sleeping. This relies on people being gullible. What did they see in their sleep? For years, this story was used to counter proclamation of the rising of Jesus.

John 20:1-18

The story begins and ends with Mary Magdalene, first confused and then, when Jesus appears to her, believing. Between these stories, Peter and John come to check the empty tomb, and John, in some measure, believes that Jesus is now alive.

John records some events in Jerusalem, and then (chapter 21) in Galilee. How this record fits with the details in Luke (regarding Jerusalem events) and Matthew and Mark (the Galilean events) is not always clear but may be reconciled into a possible order of events. This is not the purpose of the writers themselves however. They want to report what they know, and the stories have more credibility for not being contrived to fit with other stories.

Mary Magdalene, with other women, is concerned that Jesus has not been properly buried because of the earlier haste and is at the tomb before daybreak to amend this fault (Luke 23:54—24:1). She finds the tomb already open and runs to tell the disciples.

Peter and John find the tomb, and burial clothes, empty, the head-cloth neatly wrapped. Lazarus had to be unbound (11:44), but not Jesus. He already has a glorified body, unrestrained by physical considerations. John believes Jesus is alive. Thieves or others would not leave the cloths in this way.

He believes on the grounds of the evidence rather than on the grounds that the Scripture predicted this—that had not yet become clear to him. We are not told that Peter believed. Luke tells us he went home 'marvelling' (Luke 24:12). The fact that John and Peter both go home suggests confusion about the meaning of all this.

JESUS IS ALIVE con't

Mary returns to the tomb, unaware, it seems, of John's belief. She mourns a death *and* a missing body. Looking into the tomb, she sees two angels. Understandably, these would attract more attention than the empty grave clothes. Jesus' gentle question to Mary as to why she weeps suggests she should not be doing so.

How Mary can notice a supposed gardener when she has just spoken to angels is not clear, but she speaks to Jesus with nothing in mind other than her intention to properly attend to the body of Jesus. Has this gardener removed the body? And can he direct her to it? Jesus repeats the question of the angels, and adds, 'Whom are you seeking?' He does not say 'What' but 'Whom'. Clearly, she should be expecting someone alive.

'Mary!' awakens Mary to the Jesus she had known. Jesus speaks to his own and they hear him (10:3-4). However, she responds to the Jesus she had known—'Rabboni!' and begins to treat him in this way. (Her clinging to him may be the taking hold of his feet as in Matthew 28:9.) Perhaps Jesus tells her that she does not need to cling to him because he will be with them a while longer—he has not yet ascended to the Father. In fact, there is work to be done. The disciples need to be alerted to his presence among them.

The message Mary must give to the disciples tells us that everything has now changed. The disciples are now 'brothers' of Jesus. He is ascending as he promised, but now, 'to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'. His life had been focused on returning to the Father, because it would be from there that he would send the Spirit and convey to them the life he had won for them (16:7). Life is about pleasing the Father and going to the Father, and now, Jesus has secured this for all who believe in him (14:1-3). But he cannot remain among his disciples. The resurrection is with a view to his ascension.

He has entered into the death that was rightfully ours, to save us from it, and to welcome us as brothers (Heb. 2:11-12 quoting Ps. 22:22).

We have these deeds proclaimed to us so that we may remember them, just as Israel was commanded to remember the exodus (Ps. 105:1-5). We have all the more reason to remember his resurrection as the mighty deed of God because the power that raised him is the power at work in us (Eph. 1:18-23). We are raised up with him (Eph. 2:6) to live to God (Rom. 6:9-11). The physicality of the resurrection is the way we have been justified (Rom. 4:30), and is necessary to atonement (1 Cor. 15:17) and to redemption of the body (1 Cor. 15:20-23)

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LUKE 24:13–43 JOHN 20:19–29

ROAD TO EMMAUS / THE DISCIPLE WHO WOULD NOT BELIEVE

Story Notes

File no. 164

Luke 13-35

Two unidentified disciples (not of the 'eleven'—see v. 33) are sought-out by Jesus. Already, he has taught that his sufferings and resurrection are necessary (9:22; 18:31-33; 24:7), but it is now, in the light of his actual dying and rising, that he is able to show these disciples how the Old Testament Scripture prophecies made this necessary.

How he is not recognised is a mystery, but it is important that the Scriptures be understood before Jesus reveals himself. The disciples know Jesus is a prophet, acknowledged by God in the miracles he performed, and acknowledged by many in Israel too, but cut off by Israel's leaders. These disciples, at least, and perhaps, many more, expected he would redeem Israel, but these hopes lie in ruins now that, as they suppose, Jesus is dead. An empty tomb has confused them more than raised their hopes.

Jesus chides them and directs them to the Scriptures that tell of his sufferings and glory. 'Moses' means all the first five books of the Bible. Jesus may have shown them how Abraham longed to see Christ's day (John 8:56), or how the lambs of sacrifice could never take away sin (Acts 13:39). He may have opened up the meaning of his being the Servant of the Lord (22:37 with Isa. 53:12) and how David was a prophet who foresaw the resurrection (Acts 2:30–31 with Ps. 16) and the reign of Messiah (Ps. 2 and 110).

These disciples, clearly, want more of what they have heard, and ask Jesus to stay the night. Their request is met with a revelation of his identity, but also, of how they may know him in this new way. He takes bread, blesses and breaks it and gives some to them. He had done this in feeding the 5000, but, more especially, at his last Passover (9:16; 22:19) where he added, 'This is my body which is given for you'. He is made known to them 'in the breaking of bread'. Then he is gone. His physical presence is not going to be the way they will continue to know him. They must know, not only that he is alive, but also, that he has been given up for them.

What they remember is the 'burning' of their hearts as the Scriptures were opened up. They make a late evening journey back to locate the eleven apostles (and others) in Jerusalem, and hear, before they can report their own story, that the Lord has appeared to Peter. They add their testimony that the revelation of Christ came to them in the breaking of bread, and while he instructed them on the road.

Luke 36-43

Jesus now appears to his apostles and the assembled disciples. They have heard the testimony of the women, of Peter, and now, the disciples from Emmaus but still feel they are dealing with a ghost. Now Jesus presents the physical evidence of his death in the wounds, and of his resurrection by inviting them to see and touch him. They still cannot understand, so he gives them further evidence by eating in front of them.

John 20 19–29

The story of the resurrection moves forward powerfully and Jesus is wholly responsible for the revelation of himself. He has already appeared to Mary Magdalene, and Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), but now meets all the apostles, entering through a locked door. This resembles what happened when he left his grave clothes behind; his body is real, real enough to still have the scars of his wounds, but not subject to physical limits.

Jesus announces peace, twice. He is not just calming anxious minds but announcing that God reigns (Isa. 52:7) and bestowing the peace he has won on his cross (cf. 19:19-22). The disciples are brought to joy, as Jesus had predicted (16:21-24).

The gift of peace is directly related to the apostles being sent. If Christ is sent by the Father to be the crucified Lamb, announcing peace, then, in his name, and by his deed, we are to announce peace.

ROAD TO EMMAUS / THE DISCIPLE WHO WOULD NOT BELIEVE con't

Jesus breathes (not necessarily 'on them') and commands the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit. He is recalling both creation and redemption episodes in Israel's history. God brought mankind into existence through breathing (Gen. 2:7); and now, nothing less than a new creation is happening. Later, God announced that he would bring Israel from devastation to vibrancy by breathing new life into them (Ezek. 37:10). The apostles are the beginning of this work.

The command of Jesus to receive the Spirit is an anticipation of Pentecost (not just a partial giving of the Spirit or a different account of Pentecost). In fact, Jesus must ascend to the Father to send the Spirit (16:7-15).

The apostles' message will be 'forgiveness of sins', an appropriate message from the Lamb who had come to take away the sins of the world. The unusual way of conveying this—'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven'—highlights the personal way the disciples are involved in this message. They do not forgive of themselves. The tense of the verb makes it clear that whoever we forgive 'has been forgiven'.

Thomas does not just doubt; he disbelieves—on his own testimony. Basically, this makes him a rebel. However, he is included in the greeting: 'Peace be with you' and exhorted to believe. He is spoken to as one already reconciled. So, he believes, indicating that faith is not a virtue to which one can lay claim but that it comes by Christ himself presenting himself to his own. Peter later tells us that this is how faith comes (1 Pet. 1:21; also Rom. 10:17).

Jesus says that those who do not see but believe are blessed and received by God. In saying this, he has encompassed us all who have heard through the testimony of the apostles. But what do we believe? The disciple who is last to believe confesses most fully. Don Carson says, 'The most unyielding sceptic has bequeathed to us the most profound confession'. He confesses what this Gospel has been teaching us from the beginning, that Jesus is our Lord and our God. The worship Thomas offers is received. He now knows Jesus is alive, that he is from the Father (c.f. 14:5), that he is the Son of God and that he has revealed God, that he has life in himself, and so, he honours the Son as he would honour God (5:23).

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JOHN 21:1–19

PETER GOES FISHING AGAIN

Story Notes

File no. 165

The disciples return to what has been their home, in Galilee, perhaps with many other pilgrims, but then, also, because Jesus told them through Mary Magdalene that he would meet them there (Matt. 28:7). It is here that Jesus makes himself known to them again (vv. 1, 14).

Going fishing, initiated by Peter, is a sensible enough thing to do for people accustomed to earning their living in this way, and in line with the practice of Rabbis who were expected to have a trade. They have obeyed the Lord in going to Galilee so there is nothing else for them to do at the moment.

On this occasion, after a fruitless night on the lake (as in an earlier occasion—Luke 5:1-11), the call of Jesus from the shore may have been taken as a friendly piece of amateur advice. His question is phrased to expect a negative answer: 'Haven't you caught anything?' In a quite literal way, they are being shown that apart from him, they can do nothing (15:5). Not just now, but in the catching of men and women, they will be wholly dependent on Jesus to direct their efforts.

The catch of fish awakens John to the identity of Jesus, and then, as at the resurrection appearance, John knows, and Peter jumps! On his previous encounter of this kind, Peter asked the Lord to leave him because he was a sinful man (Luke 5:8), but not this time. He is clean through the word spoken to him (15:3).

The large haul, left to the others to manage, deserved a counting, and a remembering, decades later. It doubtless looked after a few meals while they waited for their next move. On later reflection, it may also suggest to the disciples that the task to which they are again being summoned will be a success, and that, this time, there will be no breaking of nets. Perhaps Jesus says that none of the men and women they catch will break away from the gospel they preach.

When all the disciples have landed, they see that Jesus has the beginnings of a meal ready and he calls for some of their catch to add to it. Peter, ever eager, returns to the boat to do whatever is needed to get the whole catch on shore. All the fish are large.

The Luke account (24:41-43) has Jesus asking for some fish to eat to show he is real, but here, Jesus serves his disciples, as at the foot washing. Is this a sign of things to come, at the Lamb's marriage feast (Luke 12:37; Rev. 7:17)? We may be sure that Jesus is still among as one who serves.

The disciples have not recognised Jesus by sight (200 metres may make this difficult anyway, especially at dawn) or by voice. They have been told Jesus will meet them in Galilee, but then, they were not expecting this at the end of a disappointing night on the lake. Even on the beach and eating together, they are so unaccustomed to his risen presence that even while they are on shore and eating with him, and know it is their Lord, they want to ask him just to be sure!

They are sitting around a charcoal fire (18:18), which may remind Peter of another early morning when he warmed himself by such a fire, and found the limits of his love. This is the matter that will now be settled by the Lord who knows his own, and knows all things.

'Simon the son of John' is the name Jesus used for Peter when he first met him (1:42). Not until now does he reuse this name, so linking this event with his original commissioning as 'Cephas', a name which translates as Peter and means 'rock'.

Jesus wants time alone with Peter, and asks if he loves him 'more than these'. He had claimed he would remain faithful even if all the other disciples failed (Matt. 26:33). This claim now lies in ruins. He was one with all the apostles in having no love of his own. Peter has denied the Lord three times, so again, in reference back to that incident, Jesus asks Peter his question three times.

PETER GOES FISHING AGAIN con't

The variety of terms used for 'love', 'feed' and 'tend' are difficult to make anything out of, but they do suggest the personal nature of this intimate conversation. Jesus cannot simply want to make Peter squirm (though Peter is grieved at the third question). God's purpose is not to remind us of sin but to bring us into his presence with no consciousness of sins (Heb. 10:1-3). Rather, Jesus reveals what he has done in Peter, and when Peter says, 'Lord, you know all things', he is sure that his love is the work of Christ. All his new deeds are now done 'in God' (3:21; also Isa. 26:12; Phil. 1:6; 2:12f; 1 Thess. 5:24). It is his self-assertion that needed to die. If Peter now knows that he loves Christ, his salvation is sure and his joy must be full (15:11).

The love that Peter now knows he has for Christ will be revealed in his love for the church he is to shepherd. He will feed the lambs, tend the sheep, feed the sheep. He will lay down his life for Christ and for the church. He knows, before he takes up his leadership, that he will seal his service with death. He is not in danger of seeking great things for himself (Jer. 45:5) and the church can be assured that it is lead by someone who loves them as friends (15:13). Peter reveals something of this love in his last known letter (2 Pet. 1:12-14).

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LUKE 24:44–53; ACTS 1:1–14

Matthew 28:18–20; 1 Corinthians 15:5–7

FORTY WONDERFUL DAYS (ASCENSION)

Story Notes

File no. 166

Jesus reminds the apostles of his teaching, that the whole Old Testament has been the story of his coming, and that what they say has needed to be fulfilled—his sufferings, death and resurrection. They need to know that these things have been made 'necessary' because God promised they would happen, but they also need Jesus alive, present and opening up their minds.

To these apostles, Jesus now adds that they must take the message of forgiveness to all nations, starting right where they are. They are the witnesses, but they will be these witnesses, not just because they have seen the risen Jesus, but by the empowering of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus has promised to send to them. God himself will always be the revealer of Himself.

Other appearances of Jesus occur, but we are taken straight to the last of these, when Jesus meets them at Bethany, blesses them, and, in doing so, departs to be with his Father. From here, he will send the Spirit and reveal himself as Lord over all things, guiding the work of witness to the world.

The disciples now have no doubts about Jesus; they worship him. And they have no doubts about their mission; they return to Jerusalem and spend their time in thanks to God for the revelation that is now complete, and ready to be announced to the world. They wait for the coming of the Spirit, the story that is taken up in Luke's second volume—the book of Acts.

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