



BE MY



DISCIPLE

FOLLOWING JESUS IN TODAY'S WORLD



RAYMOND BROWN

BE MY DISCIPLE

Jesus says 'Trust me and obey me. Learn from me.
Follow me in a world that does not care about me.'
That is what it means to be a disciple.

By

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This gives the meanings of difficult words.
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1. TO GROW AND TO GO

When Jesus began his public work, he did something first. He chose a group of special workers. Their name was disciples. These men were all different from each other. This was true about their characters. And it was true about their jobs. But Jesus gathered them together. He did this for two reasons. First, he wanted them to be partners in his work. Then he wanted them for a new community. And they would be its first members. That community is the Church. [Note: This word refers to all true *believers. It does not mean the building where they meet together.]

Jesus chose **12** men. This was an important number for the *Hebrew people. There had been significant times connected with the number. And it had been like this from the earliest days of their history. It showed their hopes for the nation. To them, the number meant unity. It meant something complete. It showed that they were together.

Abraham was special to the *Jewish people. He was the beginning of their life together as a nation. Abraham had a grandson. Jacob was his name. Jacob had 12 sons. And they became leaders of 12 tribes. (Read Genesis 49.)

But the number was not just important to *Jews. It was important in the life of the first Church too. Judas was a *disciple of Jesus. But he was not loyal, and he killed himself. Then there were only 11 disciples. But they soon chose someone else. (Read Acts 1:15-26.) They had a great task to do. The Lord Jesus himself gave it to them. Now, once again, there were 12 men to do that work. 'Twelve' continued to be special to believers. It reminded them about their unity as a group in Christ. (Read Revelation 21:12, 14, 16, 21).

The word 'disciple' means 'one who learns'. In Old Testament times, some of the great *prophets had disciples. The prophets would gather a group of followers around them. Often, the times were hard. But this group of men were eager to accept the prophets' messages. Then they would teach the next group of young people. We know that Elisha had a group like this. He lived in the ninth century BC (Before Christ). The men were called the 'sons' or 'company of the prophets'. (Read 2 Kings chapters 1-9). In the next century, Isaiah had *disciples too. He said to his disciples 'You must guard and look after the messages that God has given to me.' (Read Isaiah 8:16).

In New Testament times, John the Baptist had *disciples too. (Read Luke 7:18; John 1:35 and 3:25). Some of these men left John and started to follow Jesus. (Read John 1:36-37). So it was natural for Jesus to choose his own group of helpers. He wanted them to share in his work. [Note: John the Baptist or Baptiser was his title. People gave him this name because he *baptised people.]

At first, the name 'disciple' only referred to these 12 men. But after Jesus went back to heaven, things changed. In the book of Acts, Luke often used the word. But he was not just talking about the first 12 *disciples. He used it to describe all the people who were serving Jesus in the first century.

Jesus taught his 12 *disciples and trained them. And each of the four Gospels provides much information about this. [Note: The four Gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The word Gospel means 'Good News'.] *Believers today are his *disciples. So, these passages are important to us too. But all the New Testament teaching about the subject is important.

This is because of two serious dangers. And they are still in the life of the Church today. [Note: The Church refers to all true Christians everywhere.] There is the danger of being satisfied. *Believers may not want to learn more about God and his Word, the Bible. A person may feel that it is enough just to be a believer. The other danger is not to share their faith with people who are not Christians. Disciples today should make a difference in society. But they will not do so unless they avoid these 2 dangers.

There are subjects that are similar to these two dangers. And they are in many stories about *disciples. These stories are in all of the Gospels. [They are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They are the first four books of the New Testament.] The writers show the subjects in various ways. And it would not be possible to study them all. So, we will study John's Gospel only. And we will look at three disciples in that book. They are Andrew, Philip and Nathanael.

John's gospel was probably the last one. The other three, (Matthew, Mark Luke), completed their gospels first. John had much relevant information. But he chose to leave out certain things. John wanted people 'to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God'. Then they would commit themselves to Jesus Christ. And John wanted them to understand the reasons why they were doing this. He said that his aim was 'so that you can believe...' Then 'you can have life in his name.' (Read John 20:30-31.)

All the stories about these 3 *disciples are only in John's gospel. It is the same about the teaching that Jesus gave them. There is one exception. It is Andrew's answer to Christ's invitation. So, there must be a special reason for John's selection. We meet the three men in John's first chapter. So, he probably wanted to use them all through his book. He wanted to show important parts of Christ's teaching. They are about how to be Christ's disciple. These passages do not just describe 3 New Testament partners of Jesus. They clearly show vital things about how to be his disciple in every age.

From these stories, we see something that is vital. They show the only way to avoid the two serious dangers. It is not easy to behave as a true *believer should. Many people might think that high standards are stupid. They might even laugh at those people who want to live close to God. So, believers might not choose to follow Jesus Christ like this. That is the first danger. Then there is the other danger. Millions of people do not know Christ. The danger is that believers might not care about this.

So, we will study these three *disciples. (They are Andrew, Philip and Nathanael). John presents their stories in a great way. We are Christian *disciples ourselves. And we can learn much from them too. Two things should be continuous for all believers. They should continue to:

- grow in the Christian life.
- share the gospel.

These two subjects depend on each other. And we shall often read about them in this book.

We will start with Andrew. Two things are obvious. He had things to learn. And he had things to share.

Word List

[Meanings of difficult words]

In the text there is a * before such words

baptise	A Greek word. It is a ceremony. (Baptism is the name for the ceremony.) It means to put a person in water or under water for a brief time. Read Mark 1:4-11 and Romans 6:3-8. These verses explain how it became a Christian ceremony.
believer	A person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is someone who belongs to Christ and who follows him every day. This is another name for a true Christian.
disciple	A person who follows a leader. It could refer to a student of a teacher. It especially refers to the 12 men whom Jesus chose. It is also a person who follows Jesus today.
Hebrew	A nation, a people and a language. Jew is another name for a Hebrew person.
Jew	A person who belongs to the Jewish nation. God chose the nation to be his special people. (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). Our Old Testament gives their history. Hebrew(s) is another name for them. Their language is Hebrew. The Lord Jesus was a Jew.
Jewish	About, or relating to, Jews.
prophet	A person whom God chose. Then God gave special messages to that person. The messages could be for an individual, or for a group of people or for a nation. The prophet would hear God's words and tell them to the people. In Old Testament times, a prophet often wrote down these messages. And the Jews still call a group of books 'The Prophets'. These books are also part of our Bible.

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2. THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS MUST COME FIRST

The first *disciples of Jesus worked together. They were a group. But Jesus also dealt with them in a personal way.

- He knew the failures of each one.
- He cared about the problems of each one.
- He encouraged the skills of each one.
- He recognised the qualities of each one.

Of course, Jesus had to train them as a group. They had to learn to live and to work together. But there were times when his attention was on their personal needs. And that should encourage every *believer. We should do many things together, as a group. (Read Acts 2:42-47.) But each of us is important to Jesus. He knows all about us. And we often see this fact in these stories.

So, let us begin with Andrew. We can learn from Christ's meetings with him. We notice three things about him in John's *gospel. Andrew was a disciple who:

- listened and obeyed
- was responsible
- had life's essential resources.

A disciple who listened and obeyed

Jesus had a cousin (a relative). His name was John the Baptist. [People gave this title to him.] We first read about Andrew when he was with John. John was a very special man. He began his service in the desert of Judea. And he was appealing to the people of his nation. He wanted them to *repent. He was rather like the last of the Old Testament *prophets.

Sometimes, God told those great men to do strange things. This was to show the people that the prophets' message was urgent. **Isaiah** was like this. He walked through the streets of Jerusalem city. He wore hardly any clothes and he wore no shoes. He looked like a refugee. And this action was a warning. God's punishment was approaching. (Read Isaiah 20:1-4.) This action was better than a thousand words.

Later, there was **Jeremiah**. He smashed a clay pot. And he did this in a public place. Pieces of the pot went everywhere. The people saw his strange behaviour. They heard his words. And they knew that Jeremiah was showing them something. It was about the southern part of the Jewish nation. Their enemies, the Babylonians, would soon enter their land. And the Jews would scatter in all directions. They would be *exiles. (Read Jeremiah 19:1-13.)

During that time of *exile, **Ezekiel** used similar methods. He, too, had truths to tell the people that they would not like. (Read Ezekiel 4:1-5, 17; 12:1-20.)

Like these Old Testament *prophets, John the Baptist used a sign. And this helped people to remember his message.

The sign that John used was *baptism. It was picture language. These people had *repented. Now, baptism showed that their sins were gone. In those days, baptism only had one use. It was a ceremony for Gentiles [non-Jews]. If they wanted to become Jews, they must have *baptism. So, John's message was clear to Jews. They were as far away from God as the most evil Gentile [non-Jew] was. As Jews, they had many privileges. But none of these things had helped them. (Read Luke 3:7-9).

Thousands of people listened to John. And one of them was a young man. His job was to catch fish. His name was Andrew. He listened to the message and he obeyed it. He was most eager to learn more. So, he stopped fishing for some time. And he became one of John's *disciples. Andrew heard many great truths that he already knew. He had learned them in *synagogue school when he was a boy. But they attracted him in a new way.

Then there was a very special day. Old Testament teaching was happening. It was sudden, and it was dramatic. Andrew could never forget that day. And he could not forget the one that came after it. (Read John 1:29-34). He was next to John the Baptist. And John urged the people to look at someone who was in the crowd. He recognised his cousin (relative) who was coming towards him. Then John said three things to the people. And Andrew would always remember them. They seemed to bring together all that John had been saying. He said that Jesus was God's Lamb. John said that Jesus would give God's Spirit. And he said that Jesus was God's Son.

These three great truths are central to John's message. Andrew shared them with thousands of other people during his life. And they are vital truths for us too. They are what the New Testament teaches about being a disciple. We must learn them. And we must know them in our own experience. If we do not, we cannot be disciples of Jesus. So Jesus is the Lamb. Jesus gives the Spirit. Jesus reveals (shows) the Father.

Jesus is the Lamb

[Notes: A lamb is a young sheep. John the Baptist or Baptiser was his title. People gave him this name because he *baptised people.]

'Look', John the Baptist said, pointing to Jesus. 'Here is the Lamb of God. He takes away the sin of the world'. Every Jew would clearly understand his words. There was a very special lamb in their history.

You can read about it in Exodus 12. The Jews were slaves in the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh, the king, refused to let them go.

On a certain night, the first son of every family in Egypt would die. But there was a way to escape this punishment. Each Jewish family had to kill a lamb. Then they had to put some blood on the outside of the main door. In this way, the first son of each family would not die. Every year after that, the Jews had a special meal. It would remind them about this time. Its name is the Passover.

John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God. Immediately, people would think about this special time. The lamb died instead of the first son in each family. The lamb was a *sacrifice. Some people who were there would think about that other lamb too.

Some very famous words are in the Old Testament. And they describe the Servant of the Lord. (Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12.) We know that the description is about Jesus. 'He was like a lamb'. 'The Lord has laid on him the sin of us all'. He 'carried our sorrows'. He 'suffered for the wrong things that we did.' They 'crushed him because of our guilt.' They 'whipped him and God healed us.' These are wonderful words. Each time it says 'he' or 'him', put in the name of Jesus. The great truths could only be about him.

Andrew never forgot this truth.

He remembered it specially, later on. Some Greek people wanted to meet Jesus. And Andrew took them to Christ. Jesus' words at that time were important. He spoke to them and to the other people who were standing there. He told them what his death would mean. He said that he would 'draw all men' to himself. (Read John 12:20-23).

There is something else. John pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God. But he was going to take away 'the sins of the world'. So, the good news (gospel) was not just for Jews. John knew this because he had studied God's word. [This would be our Old Testament.] He probably knew it too because of his own connection with Jesus. Jesus would die to save the people of all nations.

Jesus gives the Spirit.

Jesus came from his home that was in northern Galilee. And he travelled to the River Jordan. He did this for a special reason. He wanted John to *baptise him in water. Jesus had no sins to confess. Some men and women wanted to live for God. And Jesus wanted to show them what was important for them. John said that he was the sinner. And he said that Jesus should baptise him. But the Lord Jesus insisted that John must baptise him. He was a model that other people should follow. (Read Matthew 3:15.)

This *baptism was important. But John the Baptist knew about another baptism. Every *believer would receive it from Jesus. John's baptism happened in the waters of a river. But Christ's baptism was total. It was a baptism into the life and the power of God's Holy Spirit. John explained the truth. And Andrew listened carefully to him. A person must first trust the 'Lamb of God' to take away their sin. Then, like Jesus, each one would receive the powerful life of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus is the only one who could give the Spirit. John made this very clear. (Read John 1:33).

A few years later, Andrew's brother, Peter, said the same thing. (Read Acts 2:33). All believers (true Christians) need these two truths. The Lamb of God takes away our sins. This was the promise that John the Baptist gave. Then, we all receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was Peter's message. (Read Acts 2:38).

In Old Testament times, God only gave the Holy Spirit to a few special people. Now, the Holy Spirit is for all who believe in Jesus. Peter said 'The promise is for you and for your children, and for all...' (Acts 2:39.). So the promise is for Jews and for Gentiles (non-Jews). It is for men and for women. It is for young and for old people. It is for masters and for servants.

But God had already given this promise in the Old Testament. (Read Joel 2:28-32.) Many centuries later, it actually happened. Andrew and the other *disciples were there. (Read Acts 2). And they all knew who gave the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift was from Christ himself, after he went back to heaven. And the Holy Spirit completely changed all their lives.

Jesus reveals (shows) the Father.

Andrew heard John call Jesus 'the Son of God'. (Read John 1:34). John's special job was to announce someone who was unique. This one was much greater than John the Baptist. He was the unique son of the Father. And he was standing there in the desert with them all. John himself was content to be just 'a voice'. (Read John 1:22-23). And he never claimed to be anything else.

What John the Baptist taught was honest. He did not pretend. But he said exactly what he thought and what he felt. And the religious leaders did not like it. They sent some priests and some *Temple workers to John.

They wanted to ask him some questions. They asked who John was claiming to be.

- Was he the Christ, the Messiah, for whom the Jews were waiting?
- Was he the *Prophet Elijah? (Several centuries earlier, he went up to heaven. Read 2 Kings 2:11. Popular opinions about Elijah grew as the centuries went by. People said that he had special qualities that were not human.)
- Was he the special *prophet whom God had promised to send? He would be like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18)

John the Baptist replied that he was none of these people. And he had never claimed anything for himself. He was just a voice. He was announcing that someone who was much greater than himself would come. And, John said, that the greatest of all men was there. He was standing somewhere in the crowd. But the religious leaders did not identify him. 'Among you stands one whom you do not know,' he said (John 1:26). And they would not accept him even if they did know him.

John told something else to the leaders and to other people who were standing near. He himself did not know that Jesus was God's unique Son. Then the Father revealed it to him. He said 'the one who sent me to *baptize with water told me.' (John 1:33.)

John the Baptist was Andrew's teacher. He knew that John was saying important things here. Nobody can really know who Jesus is, until God the Father shows him. And nobody can know the Father until Jesus shows him. John was certain as he spoke to the crowds. 'I tell you that this is the Son of God', he said.

The rest of John's *Gospel is full of 'evidence' It shows that Jesus is the Son of God. The evidence was in what Jesus **said**. Jesus spoke many wonderful things. His words persuaded people. His words convinced them about the truth. Jesus constantly spoke about God as 'my Father'. He was clear in what he told his *disciples. He said 'nobody comes to the Father except through me' (14:6).

But it was not only what Jesus said that convinced his disciples. The evidence was in what people could **see**. There were many signs. Jesus had come into the world to be its Saviour. (This means one who saves.) Many dramatic things happened. And they showed that Jesus was the Son of God. Nobody else could do all the things that he did. He healed sick people. He fed those who were hungry. He made blind people able to see. He made dead people come alive again.

These 'signs' were more than amazing *miracles. They showed clearly that Christ is God. That is why the Pharisees, [religious leaders] wanted to kill him. People saw all the great things that he did. He made Lazarus come alive again (John 11). And the people believed that Jesus was God. The Pharisees thought that it was dangerous to delay. The number of people who followed Jesus was increasing daily. The Pharisees must pursue him. They must arrest him. And they must kill him.

Andrew now understood these three great truths from John the Baptist. He had been a *disciple of John. But he knew that he must now become a disciple of Jesus. Jesus was the Lamb who would save them from their sin. Jesus would give the Spirit who would help them. And Jesus showed who the Father is. Andrew wanted to be with Christ forever. The next day, John saw Jesus as he walked by. And John pointed to him again. 'Look', he said, 'the Lamb of God' (1:35-36).

Andrew knew that the right time had come. He left John and followed Jesus. Now he was a *disciple of Christ. All who want to follow Jesus in their lives must first accept the same three truths. Andrew is a good model of a disciple. He listened and he obeyed. He accepted and used every new truth. He was eager to know more about Christ. But he also used the truths in his life every day.

We must consider if we are like this. We must respond to all that we know about Jesus. There are things that we **know** in our minds. And there is what we **are** *spiritually. But there should be no difference between them

A disciple who was responsible

Andrew listened and he obeyed. But he was responsible too. He spent one full day with Jesus. Then he went to find his own brother, Peter. He wanted to tell him about Jesus. Then he brought him to Christ. We read that it was 'the first thing' that Andrew did (1:41-42). We should ask ourselves a question. It is this. What is the 'first thing' in your life and in mine? For Andrew, it was the thought that his brother did not know those three truths. He wanted to tell him those truths. Then he desired to bring his brother to Christ.

All *believers should desire to bring people to Christ. Paul was like this. Read what he says in Romans 9:2. It was like a pain that was always there. William Temple was a famous church leader. He described the Church of Christ. [Note: the Church is the group of believers. It is not the building in which they meet.] There is no other organisation like it, he said. It 'exists for the benefit of those who are not yet its members'. Groups and clubs of all kinds exist to help their own members. But the Church is not like this. Every local Church and each *believer should have a 'first thing'. It is a desire to bring people to Christ.

Christian history has many stories about men and women who are like this. Their 'first thing' in life was to bring people to Jesus. Most of them were never famous. But they were content because God used them. They brought people to Jesus. Later, some of those people became famous.

John Warr was like this. He is not famous. But he brought William Carey to Christ. When they were both young, Warr worked next to Carey. He continued to speak about Christ. He made it the 'first thing' in his life to tell his friend about Jesus. Later, Carey became a famous *missionary. His greatest desire was to tell all the people in the world about Jesus. He started modern missionary work. Someone described John Warr. He was 'the Andrew who first led this Peter towards Christ'.

Then there was Maria Milles. She was only a servant. But she belonged to Christ. She had a 'first thing'. It was to show the love of Jesus to a small boy. His name was Anthony Ashley Cooper. His parents were rich and important. But he was very unhappy. Maria was the only one who showed him any love. Every night, she told him stories about Jesus. She taught him the message of Christ's love. That little boy became Lord Shaftesbury. He lived from 1671-1713. And he worked very hard to help and to protect the poor.

But he became a Christian because of Maria. And he made this clear all through his later life. To the end of his life, he wore a gold watch. Maria left it to him when she died. And he would say that it had belonged 'to the best friend that I ever had.' He often told his friends something about Maria Milles. She had urged him to do it. And she said that it was the greatest of life's priorities. He must 'seek the kingdom of God'. And he must not rest until he had found it. (Read Matthew 6:33.)

Think again about Andrew. One day, he heard his brother talking to a vast crowd. It was at Pentecost. [The Lord Jesus had gone back to heaven. And this was the time when he sent the Holy Spirit.] Peter spoke so well. He seemed to know so much. He spoke about so many verses in the Word of God. [This is our Old Testament.] All that he said was to give honour to Christ. He urged the people to come to Christ. And Andrew could never have spoken like that. But neither could Peter have done so, without Andrew's help. Telling Peter about Jesus was Andrew's 'first thing'.

A disciple who had life's essential resources

Many believers know about the 'first thing'. They know that they should tell people about Christ. But they find it hard to speak when the opportunity comes. They do not know how to begin. They might not do it well. Perhaps it will annoy or upset people. Feeding other people with 'the bread of life' seems to be a very hard task. But we must remember something. It is this. Big things often begin with something small.

The most famous Andrew story is about this very subject. You can read it in John 6:1-15. Very large crowds were following Jesus. He spoke to Philip, who was one of his disciples. Jesus asked him where they could buy bread to feed all the people. [We read that Jesus already knew what he would do]. Philip had an answer. It was about what they could **not** do. 'We would all have to work for a month to buy enough bread', he said. 'Even then, it would only be enough to give each person a small piece'.

Now Andrew spoke. He explained what might be possible. 'Here is a boy' he said. 'He has five loaves and two little fish. But that is not enough for so many people'. In some ways, he was the same as Philip. But he told Jesus about the loaves that they had. He was not thinking about the money that they did not have. Philip could only tell Jesus what was not enough. Andrew pointed to the boy's tiny lunch. The boy must have agreed. And, soon, the tiny lunch was in the Lord's hands.

In his *gospel, John reminds us when this event happened. It was near to the time of the Passover. So, it was a day when people expected help. Passover reminded them about God's rescue. (Exodus 12 explains about the Passover.) Jews remembered God's kindness and his love to their nation. Soon after that time, God fed them in the desert. (Read Exodus 16). At that time, there were thousands of them. God did not just feed them once. He fed them for 40 years. Now, in the hands of Jesus, it happened again. He broke the bread. The hungry people took it. And they all had plenty to eat.

This *miracle speaks to *believers in every century. It reminds them that Christ is always sufficient. There are no limits to what he can do. God has a special task for each believer. It might be to spend time bringing people to Christ. It might be practical service. It might be sympathy and help. Even if it is just a little, we must give it to Christ. He can take it and change it. Like the young boy's small meal, he can use it to help many people.

Think about that young boy. Most healthy boys love food. He could have said 'No' to Andrew. Perhaps he was hungry himself. It had been a long morning, as he followed with the crowds. He wanted to eat it. And if people broke it into tiny pieces, it would be useless. But it was not a time for questions. It was a time to give. And he gave his little bit of food to Jesus. Then he saw Jesus make much out of his little bit.

Over the centuries, thousands of people have been like that boy. And we thank God for them. They gave their money. Other people held on to their money. They offered their time. Other people wasted their time. They gave their lives. Other people just pleased themselves. They obeyed the word of Jesus. And they were his true disciples. They gave themselves completely to God. And all these people made a discovery. It was the same thing as the young boy discovered. Jesus made their little gift into much.

As he went home later, the boy saw people carrying baskets. They were full of food. Other hungry people in the villages could have some too. Jesus said 'Give to other people and you will receive.' 'The way that you give to other people is the way that God will give to you'. (Read Luke 6:38). Many times, Christ's people have seen what the boy saw that day. In the hands of Jesus, their little gift made much. And that shows a disciple who has essential resources.

This is what Jesus said to Andrew and Philip. They brought some Greek people to meet Jesus. He told them then the most important thing about service. It was *sacrifice. 'A grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die. Then it grows and makes many seeds. But if it never dies, it will always be just a single seed. The person that loves his own life will lose it. ...The person that loves me must follow me.' (Read John 12:20-26). It must be like this for all people who want to follow Jesus. They must give their whole lives to him and to other people.

Jesus did not ask his *disciples to do anything that he was not doing himself. Jesus came down to this world. That was a very great *sacrifice. His death on the cross was an even greater sacrifice. There was so much physical pain. But there was something worse. He had never done anything that was wrong. He had never sinned. But God made him become sin for us. [Read 2 Corinthians 5:21.] And he did this so that we can live forever.

Of course, Jesus' *sacrifice was very special. No sacrifice of ours can be anything like his. But his sacrifice can be a model for our life. Jesus said 'Whoever serves me must follow me'. And all Christ's disciples can be like Andrew. They can see how Christ makes much out of their little service.

There is a tradition about Andrew's death. He was a *missionary in southern Greece. Believers were having a very hard time. Tradition says that he died on a cross. We cannot be sure if that was so. But Andrew would accept what Jesus said. He too must be willing to be like the grain of wheat. It must fall into the ground and die.

There was an artist in Century 17. His name was Murillo. And he lived in Spain. He painted a picture of Andrew's death. He included a young boy in the picture. The boy was half turning away. He was full of pain and despair. There were tears in his eyes. It showed how grateful he felt about that day in the hills. He was remembering when Andrew took him to Jesus. Then Jesus had multiplied his little bit of food.

The same sort of thing has happened in each century. *Disciples have always found life's essential resources. And they have proved something. It is this. It is Christ himself who offers these resources.

Word List

[Meanings of difficult words]

In the text there is a * before such words

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| baptise | A Greek word. It is a ceremony.
It means to put a person in or under water for a brief time.
Read Mark 1:4-11 and Romans 6:3-8.
These verses explain how it became a Christian ceremony. |
| baptism | The name for the ceremony when someone baptises another person. |
| believer | A person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.
It is someone who belongs to Christ and who follows him every day.
This is another name for a true Christian. |
| disciple | A person who follows a leader. It could refer to a student of a teacher.
It especially refers to the 12 men whom Jesus chose. It is also a person who follows Jesus today. |

exile	Someone who must leave his or her own land, often for a long time. The time when this happens to a group of people. The word can be a noun or a verb. So, it can refer to the act of doing this to someone.
gospel	Good News. It refers to all that God has done. It is about all that God is doing. It is also about all that God will do because of Jesus. The first 4 books of the New Testament are called 'The Gospels'.
miracle	A wonderful thing that only God could do. It could not happen in a natural way.
missionary	Someone who tells other people about the true God and about the Lord Jesus Christ. Often, a missionary will go to a foreign land to do this.
prophet	A person whom God chose. Then God gave special messages to that person. The messages could be for an individual, or for a group of people or for a nation. The prophet would hear God's words and tell them to the people. In Old Testament times, a prophet often wrote down these messages. And the Jews still call a group of books 'The Prophets'. These books are also part of our Bible.
repent	To regret a thought, or a word or an action. This will bring a result. A person who repents will turn away from evil. And he or she will turn towards God. In the New Testament, the Greek word is 'metanoia'. This means a change of mind. And the result will be a change of life too.
sacrifice	A ceremony. In the Old Testament, it was God's way for people to say 'Sorry' or 'Thank you'. People brought an animal or a bird to God. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus is our sacrifice for sin. All Old Testament ceremonies were pointing to him. It can also mean something that is hard to do or to give. Read 1 Samuel 15:22 and Psalm 51:17.
Synagogue	The Jews' church. [See Temple]
Temple	The Jews' special large church. It was in Jerusalem city. And the enemy destroyed it in AD70. (This was 70 years after the birth of Jesus.) Smaller church buildings for Jews' are called synagogues. [Other groups build temples too; they *worship false gods in them.]

BE MY DISCIPLE

Jesus says 'Trust me and obey me. Learn from me.
Follow me in a world that does not care about me'.
That is what it means to be a disciple.

3. NEVER GIVE UP

We have thought about some of Andrew's experiences. Now we will see what we can learn from his friend, Philip. Several times in the *Gospels, two disciples are in the same story. And this happens in John, the book that we are studying. There were James and John, who were the sons of Zebedee. And there were Andrew and Philip. Jesus called them both to be his *disciples (1:40 and 43). Later, they both spoke when Jesus fed the crowd (6:5-9). Then, they both took some Greek people to meet Jesus. (12:20-22).

These two men came from the same city. John made sure that we know this fact. He mentioned it twice in his gospel, (1:44; 12:21). Bethsaida was an interesting place to live. It was at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. The ruler's name was Philip. He had built the city. Then he made it his capital. Some Jews lived in Bethsaida. But most of the people who lived in that district were not Jews. (The name for them was Gentiles). The Greek people affected the culture of the region a lot.

Andrew and Philip had Greek names. (This was rare among the *disciples). So, they would have had many neighbours who were not Jews. Maybe this was why they were both eager to tell other people about Jesus. Both men are good examples of this. And it is the main thing that we notice about Philip.

Note: In the book of John, many people were like this. They were different sorts of people. And they used several methods. So they showed different things about this type of work. They were:

• John the Baptist (1:29-37); • Andrew (1:40-41); • Philip (1:43-46); • Jesus himself (3:1-4:27); • A woman (4:28-42); • A blind man (9:1-34); • Lazarus (12:9-11, 17-19); • John himself (20:31).

The skills of all these people are important for us today. But we will study Philip. He became very eager to bring people to Christ. And he reminds us about four important things. In this work, we must • be grateful. • be specific. • know God's word, the Bible. • be strong inside when people do not accept us.

Be grateful

Jesus met John the Baptist in the desert of Judea. Then Jesus went back to Galilee. This was his home district. And he began to choose his *disciples. Jesus 'found' Philip. He was the man from Bethsaida. Jesus just said 'Follow me'. These two words, 'found' and 'follow' are vital. To 'find' emphasises God's part. God acts first. To 'follow' shows a person's part. It is the human response to God. Christ had 'found' Philip. And he chose to follow Christ. Then he went out to 'find' other people. Andrew found his brother Peter. (Read 1:41). Philip went out to find his friend, Nathanael. But it all began with being very grateful.

Philip went out to find Nathanael. He was grateful for two things.

Jesus found him first

He could only find other people because Jesus found him first. This is a simple way to declare the truth about being a Christian. It is not about what we do for God. It is about what God has done for us. Each Christian's story begins with God. Philip was grateful that Christ came to him first. Now, Philip could go to other people.

Jesus spoke simply

Jesus did not complicate things when he first met Philip. And Philip was grateful for this. Jesus did not talk about ceremonies. There were no hard instructions. Jesus just said 'Follow me'. That needed great trust. And it is the same for all who would follow him. They do not know where Jesus will lead them. But there is a choice to make. They must do what Jesus says. Or they could refuse to go with him. So, it demands an answer. But it is also a personal appeal. At that moment, Jesus called Philip to follow him. He was not talking to anyone else. Philip had faults and failures. There were sins and weaknesses. But Jesus still wanted **him**, and he said so.

The words of a song express this well: ('Heaven shall not wait', Iona Community, Glasgow 1987)

Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
Will you let my love be known,
Will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow.
In you and you in me.

Now, Philip's desire was to bring other people to Jesus. But he not only had the desire. He also had the power to do it. He went to 'find' Nathanael. But he knew that Christ had gone ahead. And it is the same for us. We are just following in the footsteps of Jesus. We know that he is already searching for them. Jesus has done so much for us. The *gospel comes directly to each person. And we feel very grateful. So, we are eager to go out and 'find' other people. Our great desire is to see Jesus do the same for other people too.

Some *disciples are the same as Philip. They do not try to bring people to Christ because they like it. These disciples may not enjoy it at all. At times, it could be very hard. And there might be no obvious reward for their work. But they remember something important. It is this. They do not deserve any of God's great kindness to them. And God wants them to show this great kindness to other people too.

We might emphasise being grateful too much. There is a danger in this. It might seem that emotions are the most important thing. When we are grateful it will help us to speak about Jesus. But we must also choose to go and speak to a person. Both are important. And the Philip story reminds us about this.

Be specific (definite)

Philip knew someone who might want to follow Jesus. He knew a particular person to 'find'. Philip was eager for action. But he was practical too. He was personal. And he was specific (definite). He did not just have a strong emotion. He did not dream about all the people in the world. He did not think that he would bring them all to Christ. His intentions were not for some time in the future. He did not have impossible ambitions. No. Philip thought about one man. He must find him first and tell him about Jesus. The man's name was Nathanael.

Many Christians have good intentions. They want everyone in the world to know Christ. But they are not specific (definite). They do not think about an actual person. Edward Kimball was not like this. He lived in America in the middle of century 19. He was an extremely shy man. But he thought about one young man who was eighteen years old. Kimball taught him in his Bible class. And his great desire was to bring this youth to Christ.

There were some special meetings. And Kimball wanted to invite the youth to attend. It was Saturday morning. Kimball went to the shop where the youth worked. Then he stopped. Perhaps he should not go to his place of work. But he felt a great desire to do so. He would do it as quickly as possible, and then go away. The youth was wrapping shoes at the back of the shop. 'I went up to him', said Kimball. 'I put my hand on his shoulder... I asked him to come to Christ who loved him. Christ wanted his love and should have it.... There, in the shop, the young man gave himself and his life to Christ.'

Kimball had other young men in his class. But, on that Saturday morning, he was specific (definite) about one of them. For that moment, only one of them mattered. It was the youth about whom God was reminding him. For nearly a year, that youth had sat in Kimball's class. He had also listened to the church's pastor (priest) each week. But that morning was 'the time of God's favour.' (Read 2 Corinthians 6:2). Kimball was not hoping to bring all of his class to Christ then. He obeyed God's Spirit to go and see one of them. And he urged that one youth to accept the Lord Jesus.

The name of that youth was Dwight L. Moody. He became famous all over the world. And he brought thousands of people to Christ. He could not remember what Kimball's exact words were to him on that day. But he always remembered one thing. It was this. Kimball had tears in his eyes.

It was very hard for shy Kimball to go to the shop that day. He did not know how God would use Moody in the future. Kimball had other youths in his class. But on that day, he was specific (definite) about one of them. Moody had been in the Bible class for a year. He had attended church services each week too. But he had not come to Christ. That Saturday morning was different. (Read 2 Corinthians 6:2).

Kimball wanted the same thing for all of the youths who were in his class. He wanted them to come to Christ. And he could have thought about that. But the Holy Spirit was urging him to go and see one of them. He obeyed, and there were great results.

Centuries earlier, Philip thought about Nathanael. And we, too, should think about specific (definite) people. We should pray for them by name. Then we should be ready to speak to them about Christ. Maybe we could invite them to come to a meeting. Perhaps we could lend them a book to read.

Something else is still vital. Philip was grateful. He was specific (definite). But he had to use his mind too. And he decided to 'find' one man. That man was Nathanael. And he was a very intelligent man. So, Philip must appeal to his clever mind. This meant that Philip himself must learn things too.

Have knowledge

Nathanael loved the Old Testament. Jesus said that he knew all about Nathanael. Jesus saw him while he was 'under the fig (fruit) tree' (1:48). Jews sometimes used these words about a teacher (rabbi). It would mean that he was studying the Law in his own home. [Note: The Law refers to the first five books of our Bible.] So, Philip started by speaking about the Old Testament.

Nathanael needed to know that Jesus was unique. All the promises that were in God's Word came true in Jesus. And he needed to know this. If he did not know it, he would have a good excuse. He would just say that Jesus was pretending. And there were plenty of men who pretended like that in those days. (Read Acts 5:36-37). Each one said that he was the *Messiah. Each one offered to save the Jews from the Romans. [They were the nation that ruled over the Jews.]

Christ 'found' Philip. Now Philip told his friend that he could 'find' Christ in the Old Testament. He said 'We have found the one that Moses wrote about in the Law. The *prophets also wrote about him'. (Read John 1:45). We want to bring people to Christ too. And the Bible is the most important book to use. It encourages us. It is our authority. And Jesus is the central person of that book.

When Philip was alive, God's Word was vital. And it is just as vital for us today. In the first century, there were many new religious ideas. *'Salvation' was a common word at that time. But, the meaning of the word was a different matter. People did not know who would save them. They did not know from what he would save them. And they did not know how he would save them.

In our own day, there are hundreds of new religions. In the 1990's, a university in Britain offered a Course about religions. It claimed that there were 500 new religions in Britain and in Western Europe. The familiar ones are • Jehovah's Witnesses • Christian Scientists, • Mormons • Theosophists. Some of the other religions are • the Baha'i Faith • the Unification Church (or the Moonies) • the Church of Scientology • the Children of God or Family of Love • New Age.

Other religions continue to appear. Many of them are just as peculiar. They lead people away from the truth. They even damage people. And some of them are against the use of reason. One of the many things that these people emphasise is that each person is god. (New Age does this.) Some of the religions seem to be looking for slaves. They do not just want *disciples. One thing is certain. Different religions are a part of our modern culture. And we cannot ignore them.

The religious conditions today are similar to those of the early Christian centuries. Religious groups tried to compete for the loyalty of ordinary people. There were religious attractions like • Gnosticism • Roman Mithraism. (This was a group that was only for men. The Roman army supported them.) • 'Mystery Religions'. They had secret religious ceremonies. • Worship of the Emperor (leader) of the Roman empire • Neoplatonism • Oriental (from east or south-east Asia) religious groups • the strange ideas of Manichaeism. (At one period, this group attracted the great Augustine.) And there were many more peculiar groups.

The *gospel came into that sort of world. Those who declared it really believed that it was true. They explained it clearly. And what they said attracted people. Something was most important in that kind of society. It was this. There must be ancient documents about it. The gospel was not just another new idea. And it was important to prove this fact. It had a firm base in the Old Testament. It had teaching that people could trust. People suspected anything that was 'new' in the centuries after Christ. So, Jews had to see that Christ was in their Scriptures. (This is our Old Testament.) All who were not Jews (Gentiles) must have an accurate Book to accept too.

Christ was the one 'whom Moses wrote about'. John the Baptist or John the Baptist identified him. [People gave him this name because he *baptised people.] Christ was the Lamb of God in Exodus 12. He was the special one. He heals and saves, as in Numbers 21:4-9. (Read John 3:14 too). He was the *prophet whom God promised to send. (Read Deuteronomy 18:18).

Then, Christ was the one 'about whom the *prophets also wrote'. He was the 'Suffering Servant' in Isaiah (52:12-53:12). He was the 'holy branch' in Jeremiah (23:5). He was the 'Son of Man' in Daniel (7:13-14). Zechariah spoke about him too. 'What are these marks in your hands?' He will say 'People beat me in the house of my friends' (13:7). He was a 'fountain that would wash away sins' (13:1).

We must be like Philip when we speak about Jesus. We must have the Bible as our source. People are not interested in our personal religious ideas. What we think is not important. They need to know what God has said. He has spoken very clearly in his word. And each *believer should know the main facts of the Bible's truths.

They are facts like: • God desires to satisfy human need. • Sin causes great damage in the life of every person. • The reason why we should turn away from sin. • God provides the answer to sin. He can rescue us from its punishment and its power. • The reason Jesus came into the world. • The reason why he died. • How we can receive him. • The results if we do not obey him • We can know that we belong to him forever.

So, Philip began with Nathanael's main interest. But this did not mean that his friend would welcome what he said. Philip's first sentence was brief. He mentioned their Scriptures. (This is our Old Testament). Then he went on to speak about Jesus. And Nathanael did not like that. He felt embarrassed. He thought that Philip must have a bad reason for speaking to him. It even annoyed him. And it is the same today. Those who speak about Christ must be ready for blame. People might ignore us. They might laugh at us. But we must be ready to continue.

Be resilient (strong inside)

Philip said that Jesus was from Nazareth. He was 'the son of Joseph'. Nathanael belonged to Cana. This village in Galilee was near to Nazareth. And his reply was quick. 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' He might have been joking. (Any local person might say that about another community that was near.) He thought that it was a worthless place. His village, Cana, was superior.

But it was probably more than just a social feeling. It was likely that Nathanael was thinking about the religious meaning. Philip said that Jesus was the *Messiah. And the Scriptures (our Old Testament) connected the *Messiah to a particular place. The *prophet Micah said that the *Messiah would come from Bethlehem. But Nazareth! The Old Testament never mentioned the place. Later, the religious leaders made a statement. They said 'A prophet does not come out of Galilee' (John 7:52). And most students of that time would agree with them. Somebody might be called a *prophet. But if that person came from Nazareth, nobody would believe him.

So, Nathanael did not agree with Philip. But this did not stop Philip. 'Come and see,' the new *disciple said. His brief reply to his friend's attitude is a lesson for us. People may not like it when we speak about Jesus. They might change the subject. They might even forbid us to speak about him again. At such a time, we need the right response. It might just be a friendly smile. Perhaps another chance will come. But we must not attack them with words. And we must never give up. Another time, their attitude might be different. So, we should wait. And we should pray for them. We must believe that the chance will come.

It was like this for my friend, Paul Ariga. Now, people in Japan know him. He speaks to large crowds there. And he brings people to Christ in other parts of the Far East. Three *disciples brought him to Christ when he was 16 years of age. They did not give up, when things were hard. And God used them in different ways, to bring the youth to Christ.

The first *disciple in this story was also a youth. He was an eager Christian. And Paul Ariga was a *Buddhist. It was the night before the New Year. This was the time to pray for freedom from sins. And Paul was feeling very guilty. So, he was going to the *Buddhist temple. [This was the place where they met to worship.] The priest would ring the bell 108 times. All Buddhists thought that they were guilty of 108 sins. And they hoped to pay for these sins in this way.

The Christian youth was determined. He was going to take his school friend to a meeting that same evening. He even used his new skill of jujitsu to make him go there. Paul struggled. He did not want to go. And he made this fact clear.

But his friend would not give up. The youth's greatest desire was that Paul should meet Christ. The message was good news. If Paul went to the *Buddhist temple, he would just hear the sad sound of a bell ringing. His friend wanted Paul to hear that Christ would forgive all his sins. And by being resilient (strong inside), God used him.

Then there was the second *disciple who was resilient (strong inside). The Christian meeting was in his home. His name was Hideo Nakamura. He was a tailor (he made clothes). During World War II, he suffered great losses. At that time, he lived in Tokyo. One day, the bombs fell. He was not at home. He was delivering some clothes that he had just made. When he returned, a bomb had destroyed his house. He was desperate. At last, he found his wife. She was lying under heavy pieces of stone and wood. But her back was holding up this heavy load. And their baby daughter lay underneath her.

He tried to rescue them both. He noticed blood coming through the skin of his wife's face. As he tried to free her, Mr Nakamura thought about Jesus. 'Great drops of blood' from his face fell to the ground. (Read Luke 22:44). Hideo Nakamura's wife died, but he saved his daughter. How easily that Christian tailor could have become bitter. But he refused to be like that. He moved to Shirakawa in northeastern Japan to start life again. There, he continued to have meetings in his new home. It was here that his friend took Paul Ariga. That night Mr Nakamura told his story. He spoke about a God of love and of goodness.

The third *disciple who was resilient (strong inside) was Karl Gustaffson. He came from Sweden. And he went to China to tell people about Jesus. (He was called a missionary.) The Communists came to power. And they forced him to leave. At that time, he was more than 60 years of age. It would be natural for him to return to Sweden. But he refused to stop his service for God.

Karl settled in Japan. This was just 3 years before that special night. The language was hard. He did not have time to learn it well. So, someone would interpret his talks. God gave him a great message from the Bible for that evening. It was the final talk. Paul Ariga was feeling very guilty. And God seemed to have a message just for him. It was 'Be happy, young man. I forgive your sins'. (Read Matthew 9:2b). That very evening, Paul Ariga trusted in Christ.

I have spoken at meetings in Japan. They are called the Japan Keswick Convention. And Paul has interpreted for me at some of them. I admire him very much. He is a mature Christian. He has great gifts of communication. And I have benefited from them. I have thanked God that those three modern *disciples were resilient (strong inside). When other people might easily have given up, they refused to do so.

Philip was like that. He did not argue with Nathanael. That day, he was in a mood to quarrel. But Philip refused to argue. 'Come and see', he said, and that was all. Nathanael did what his friend suggested. He walked toward Christ. The *disciple had done his job. He met Jesus for himself. Then all his resistance disappeared.

All *disciples of every age want to bring people to Christ. But they must be ready for resistance against them. Jesus himself said that it would not be easy to follow him. Later, Philip heard Jesus say just that. 'Whoever serves me must follow me', he said. 'Where I am my servant will also be'. (Read John 12:26.). The place where Jesus is may not be easy. People often refuse him. They laugh at his words. And it will be the same for his *disciples. They must be resilient (strong inside) when people do not accept them. Whatever happens, they must never give up.

Word List

[Meanings of difficult words]

In the text there is a * before such words

baptise	A Greek word. It is a ceremony. (Baptism is the name for the ceremony.) It means to put a person in water or under water for a brief time. Read Mark 1:4-11 and Romans 6:3-8. These verses explain how it became a Christian ceremony.
believer	A person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is someone who belongs to Christ and who follows him every day. This is another name for a true Christian.
Buddhist	A person whose religion is Buddhism. The Buddha started it. He lived in India in century 6 BC (Before Christ was born). He taught about the way to end suffering. And the way to do this was to overcome your desires.
disciple	A person who follows a leader. It could refer to a student of a teacher. It especially refers to the 12 men whom Jesus chose. It is also a person who follows Jesus today.
gospel	Good News. It refers to all that God has done. It is about all that God is doing. It is also about all that God will do because of Jesus. The first 4 books of the New Testament are called 'The Gospels'.
Messiah	Lord Jesus Christ. It is a Hebrew word 'meshiah'. The same word in Greek is 'Christos', Christ. God promised the Jews that the Messiah would save them. We read about him in the Old Testament. Then, Jesus came. But the Jews did not believe in him (John 1:11). And the nation is still waiting for the Messiah to come.
prophet	A person whom God chose. Then God gave special messages to that person. The messages could be for an individual, or for a group of people or for a nation. The prophet would hear God's words and tell them to the people. In Old Testament times, a prophet often wrote down these messages. And the Jews still call a group of books 'The Prophets'. These books are also part of our Bible.
salvation	What happens when someone rescues a person from sin or from danger. The Hebrew word is 'yasha'. The Old Testament uses it 353 times. People may be in trouble or in danger. And someone rescues them or saves them. This could be God or it could be a person. In the New Testament, the word relates to salvation from sin and from its results. Salvation is past, present and future (2 Corinthians 1:10).

BE MY DISCIPLE

Jesus says 'Trust me and obey me. Learn from me.
Follow me in a world that does not care about me'.
That is what it means to be a disciple.

4. ALMOST STOPPED FROM COMING TO JESUS

When Jesus Christ came alive again, he continued to meet with his *disciples. They were very special times. Once, he spoke about what it means to be a disciple. He said something important. He told them that it was not enough to **be** his disciples. They must go on to **make** disciples. (Read Matthew 28:19). This is what Philip was doing. He asked Nathanael to come and meet Jesus. He did not say, 'Go and see'. That would have showed lack of care. He said, 'Come and see'. That showed sympathy. It was like this with Andrew. He 'brought' his brother to Jesus (1:42).

Nathanael met Jesus. And John's *gospel is the only book that tells us about this event. The story has vital messages for us today. Nathanael's name only comes twice. First, there is the time when he met Jesus (1:44-51). Then, 21:2 just mentions his name. The other *gospels use another name for him. The name they use is Bartholomew. This name describes his family. So, it is not a personal name. It just means 'son of Tholmai'. That makes it likely that he would have another name as well.

Some of the other *disciples have more than one name. Jesus called Simon by the name 'Peter'. The word means 'rock'. Matthew also had the name of Levi. Luke twice called another disciple 'Judas the son of James'. (Read Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13). But Matthew (10:3) and Mark (3:18) called the same man 'Thaddeus'. It is easy to understand why anyone would prefer a different name from Judas.

So Nathanael was his personal name. And this was a special name. It meant 'God has given'. Every Jewish person who read this *gospel would realise something. It was this. To use this name meant something important. It was the start of Christ's public work. And the name declared something that was vital at this time. It was about a generous God. He is a God who gives.

Nathanael did not think that people were sincere. He was the first person that Philip took to Jesus. And it did not seem that he could be the right person. Nathanael came towards Jesus. And, straight away, he had proof that Christ was unique. Jesus knew all about him. Then God gave him a gift. He did not deserve it. But the gift was this. He could understand. And he spoke publicly. He said to Jesus 'You are the son of God' (1:49). Then Christ showed him even more great things (1:51).

We will think about the time when Nathanael first met Jesus. The next few chapters will deal with this. And the story has truths for us today. We can learn about what it means to be a *disciple too. Notice something first. At their first meeting, Jesus examined Nathanael's wrong attitude.

Philip tried to persuade Nathanael that Jesus was the *Messiah. The problem was that Jesus came from Nazareth. Nathanael already knew what he thought about that. And most people would have agreed with him. In his opinion, Jesus could not be the Messiah. There was nothing more to say about it.

We, too, want to introduce people to Jesus. But we must understand something. They may already be against him. They may know things about him. But they are things that do not attract them to him. People have their own reactions to his name. And it was the same for Nathanael. The name 'Jesus of Nazareth' made him angry. It did not make him want to know Jesus.

There are four possible reactions to Jesus today. People may think that he has no importance for their lives. They may feel that he has no meaning for their lives. Other people may feel that Jesus just causes arguments. And some people have a false idea of Jesus. He is not attractive to them. If we are going to bring people to Jesus, we must know about these reactions. We must know how to explain the truth to them.

Some people think that

Jesus is not important

Some people might think that Jesus has nothing to do with their lives. Some of them may think about the Christ of childhood ideas. They will remember stories from when they were young. Of course, there are great stories in the *gospels. And they help to teach truths to children. But they only show part of the story. And that may be all that children hear. If so, people will think that Jesus is not important for their lives. They will think that he just belongs to childhood. They will be stories to help children to go to sleep. But these truths should make adults think too. Adults should see that their careless attitude is dangerous.

Many children today have very little connection with a church. They do not belong to any Christian organisations. And this happens in countries that people think are Christian. A report found something about 86% of all the children who live in England. They had no important connection with any church at all. And that was in the late century 20. [Peter Brierley, *"Christian" England: What the English Church Census reveals*, MARC Europe 1991, 60]. Such children know little about Jesus.

One primary school teacher brought great joy to her youngest class. She told them the story about Jesus' birth at Bethlehem. No child in the class knew anything about it. A senior teacher in a huge school told me a similar story. It was about pupils who were old enough to leave school. She showed me essays about 'The Meaning of Christmas'. The names of God, Christ or Bethlehem appeared only in two or three of them. And even these had no real understanding that the Son of God had come. So, in Britain today, children do not know about Jesus. And they are not sure about the truth of the Christmas message.

A teacher asked her class what happened at Bethlehem. One child called out the name of Jesus. Another child shouted: 'She is swearing'. That is the only way that the majority hear his wonderful name. All that they know about the Christ of history might be in day school. That could be good. But it is not always so. In our society, there are many religions. So teachers might describe Christianity as just one of them. They might think that Christ is not very important. They might ignore him. Or they might change the truth about Christ. And they might not realise what they are doing.

This can happen with the story about Christmas. It does not often make these people think about God's great love. It seems to be just happy stories about a bright star and about cows. Shepherds cared for their sheep on the hills. A baby was born. And visitors came from the east, bringing him gifts. Children hear these stories. But they may never hear about their true meaning.

The children become youths, then adults. And Jesus will have no importance to them. He belongs to their childhood. They need someone who will tell them that • God came to us in Jesus. • He came to earth for a reason. • His name means something important. • He came to save us from our sin. They need people who are like Philip. They need to hear the words: 'We have found...Come and see'.

The facts about Christ's birth that are in the Bible are few. But people change the facts as they tell his story. They make it all seem so warm. Everything is full of calm and joy. There is a great welcome for the baby. But, a cow house is not clean. Herod's men were trying to find Jesus and to kill him. So, there was not much calm. He lay where the cows' food went. So, his first hours were certainly not in a beautiful place.

There was a *missionary who came from England. His name was Geoffrey Bull. Just after the Second World War, he had a very hard time. For more than three years, he was a prisoner of the People's Government of China. And they used their evil system of 'brainwashing' against him. [This means that they tried to change his mind by force.]

One time, they were taking him through the area of Sikang. The group stopped for the night. And a house owner from Tibet let them sleep in a room upstairs. The *missionary had to feed the horses that were underneath them. He went down a tree trunk to do this. And he described what it was like.

'Below, it was completely dark. My boots sank into the animals' mess on the floor. And the horrible smell made me feel sick. I felt my way amongst the donkeys and the horses. And I expected them to kick me at any moment. What a place, I thought..

Then I realised something. Because we were travelling, I had forgotten. It was the night before Christmas Day. I stood still. Jesus, my Saviour (the one who came to save me), was born in a place like this. He came all the way from heaven to a horrible place like this. And he came for me. People make the cross and the crib (a baby's bed) sound beautiful. They seem to try to hide the facts. At his birth, we left him to be with the horrible smell of animals. At his death, we left him to the shame of evil men. May God forgive us.' (Geoffrey Bull, *When Iron Gates Yield*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1955, 158-59).

Some people think that

Jesus has no meaning

Some people think about Jesus as they see him in films. Maybe he existed. But his world is completely unlike their own. His message has no meaning to them. He is the Jesus who appears in the cinema. He is the famous person from the ancient world. He heals people, while sweet music plays. But the reality was so different. His evil enemies were strong. And they opposed him constantly.

People might show Jesus in a television play. Some plays have shown Jesus in very false, even evil, ways. Other plays show him as someone who is great and good. But they think that he is a man of fiction. He is a hero who brings people back to life. But they will not hear the truth about Christ's own return to life. Neither will they hear about his power to change people's lives today.

These certain facts are just not there. Years ago, there was a television play by Dennis Potter. It was called 'The Son of Man'. And millions of people watched it. But they did not learn much about: • the Christ of history • the Saviour of sinners • the one who conquers death • the great Lord of power • the Judge of those who choose to reject him. [Note: 'Saviour' means 'One who saves'. It is another name for Jesus. Only Jesus can save people from their sin. And he could do this because he died on the cross.]

All through Potter's play, Christ was never sure that he was the Son of God. And the last line of the play confirmed this idea. On the Cross, he did not pray in peaceful trust. He did not say, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit' (Luke 23:46). And we do not hear his shout of victory. The one word that he used was 'Tetelestai', 'It is finished' (John 19:30).

But the play ended with a most terrible cry. 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.' Many lonely people who watched the play might have been feeling just like that. ('Perhaps,' they might have thought, 'even Jesus was not sure'.) And there was nobody to tell them about Easter. Jesus came alive again.

Then there was a musical. [This is a play or a film that uses songs and dance to tell a story.] It was called Jesus Christ Superstar. The sense of not being sure was deliberate. It came as a question from the crowd. 'Jesus Christ Superstar. Do *you* think you are what they say you are?' It seems that we should feel sorry for Judas. In the play, God used him for his cruel plan. And Judas could not do anything about it. Judas sings:

'I must always take the blame for the murder of you...
They have dragged me through the horrible thick mud...

I do not know why he makes me feel like I do
He is a man – he is just a man
He is not a king – he is just the same
As anyone that I know...
God I will never know why you chose me for your crime. '

[Remember that this is a translation. So the words are not exactly the same as the author wrote them.]

Some people think that

Jesus causes arguments

Some people have wrong attitudes because of religious arguments. People just do not understand. They say that they follow Jesus. But they are not sure about him at all. One bishop (church leader) had many strange ideas. He did not think that Christ's mother was a virgin. [This means a woman who has not had sex.] The bishop had his own ideas. This is what they were. Christ may be 'alive' in the hearts and minds of modern *believers. But his body did not return to life. And Christ is not coming back to this earth. This is what he thought.

Beliefs like this upset ordinary people. 'Jesus of Nazareth' just seems to cause arguments. There are discussions about him. People might read things about him in the newspaper. There might even be discussion about him on television. But nothing seems to be certain. And nothing seems to be definite. People do not know that they should listen to Jesus and obey him.

Some people think that

Jesus is not attractive

In the 1990's, some people only knew about Jesus through an evil film. Its name was 'The Last Temptation of Christ'. There was much about sex thoughts of Jesus. This was supposed to happen while he was on the cross. The writer made it seem like fact. Only at the end did he say that it was only in Jesus' thoughts. But even the idea of such thoughts at this most holy time is awful. It is against anything that we know about him from the *gospels.

Of course, this film offends true *believers. It is also against the facts of history. But, many people knew little about Jesus. And the film's effect on them was bad. To them, Jesus did not seem to be special. They thought that the morals of Jesus must be bad. Writers of plays and films used to respect Jesus. They did not always show him as the Son of God. But they tried hard to be true to the text of the Bible. Now, they do not care what the Bible says. They invent their own stories. They will not even present 'Jesus of Nazareth' as a good human.

The way that the film showed Jesus is a disgrace. The historical facts are wrong. It is morally harmful. And it damages people in a spiritual way. So far, there has not been a film like that about any other religious leader. That would have caused much protest all over the world. So this evil description is all that many people know about Christ. And it is very sad. They will not even have heard about him in Sunday School.

A modern Christian believer may say 'We have found...Jesus'. And it will surprise those who hear these words. They might wonder why anyone would want to know Jesus. He is not attractive at all to them. This is because they only know him from the evil film. Most people never read the Bible. Even many *believers do not read it every day. The Bible Society did some careful research. They said this. Almost one third of people who attended church regularly seldom or never read the Bible. [*Attitudes to Bible, God and Church*, British and Foreign Bible Society, 1983].

We live in a society where most people do not read the Bible. So those who want to 'make *disciples' must do something. They must use every way possible to give a *gospel to those who do not attend church. Then they can read about Jesus for themselves.

But Church leaders have a responsibility too. They must declare the Bible truths in an attractive way. The people must see how important it is to them in their daily lives. They should leave church eager to read the Bible. However, some church groups do not teach much in their meetings. And they are giving a message to people. They are saying that the Bible is not very important. Groups like this will not succeed.

Philip showed Nathanael the way to Christ. But he was the Christ of the Scriptures. [This is our Old Testament.] And modern *believers must do the same. We can give people a gospel to read. An argument will not help them. Thousands of people who do not go to church have come to Jesus. And they have done this just by reading the New Testament. It has been like this over the centuries of Christian history. People read the story for themselves. Then they see how attractive Jesus is. Jesus himself has met with them. This is because it is God's word. It is very special. And it shows how special Christ is.

Many people today do not even know where to find the story of Jesus. I was talking to a youth about Jesus one evening. At first, he was not friendly. Later, he asked if there was a book about Jesus. I thought that he meant a modern book. But he did not want that. Surely, someone must have written something in the first century. If they had not, then he was not interested.

I thought that he was not serious. But he was. He had no idea where to look for an account of Jesus' life. Even the word 'gospel' was new to him. He went away with a New Testament. But I have often wondered how many youths there are like him.

People today often know nothing about the things of God. There are modern Nathanaels. And they need to read Christ's story for themselves. This is the way to bring them to Jesus.

This is what happened to Nicanor Estremera. He tried to murder a police officer. And he had to go to Princesa Prison. This was in Puerto Rico. He had been taking many drugs. (They were heroin, cocaine and morphine.) So, when he had none, he was in great pain. He wanted something to stop his mind thinking about all this. And he called to the man who was in the next cell (prison room). 'Luis, do you have something to read?' he asked. Luis had a Bible. Someone gave it to him while he was in hospital. And Estremera insisted that he must have it.

For some reason, he started to read John's *gospel. And he could not stop reading the Bible. As the days went by, he reached 2 Corinthians 5:17. The words seemed to be just for him. 'If anyone belongs to Christ, he is a new person. The old things have gone. Everything is made new!'

Estremera began to cry hard. At first, he thought it was the effect of not having drugs. Then, he felt a sense of true joy. He had never felt like this before. He started to pray. 'Lord,' he said, 'I have been reading in this book that you helped other people. Will you come and help me too?'

Two months later, Nicanor declared in public that he now belonged to Christ. This was at a meeting in the state prison. He took every opportunity to speak to other prisoners. He told them that Christ would forgive them. He would give them inner calm. They could have a new power. Four years later, he left prison. And Christians met him outside. Since then, he has spent most of his time speaking about Christ. He tells how Jesus can change a life. Nicanor has done this for many years. He has travelled to over 20 countries for this purpose. It all happened because he found Jesus when he read God's Word, the Bible.

We have neighbours and people with whom we work. They might be students with whom we study. They might be our friends. We want them all to know the real Jesus. And we must encourage them to read a *gospel. This is where they can discover the true Jesus. This is where they will meet him. They are not likely to meet him in an argument. Of course, we must be ready to answer their questions. We must understand their doubts. And we must accept it when they say things against us.

God does not expect us to know all the answers. But, when they look at our lives, people should see that Christ has 'found' us. They should hear us say, 'Come and see'. Then, we should bring them to the place where they can meet Jesus. This could be a meeting in a church or a house. But they need three things that will prepare them. First, what they **see** in us. (This is the proof of a life that God has changed.) Second, what they **read** in the Bible. (This is the cost of a life that God can change.) Third, what they **hear** from the speaker. (This is the offer of God to change a life).

All three of these things were in Philip's invitation. 'Come and see', he said. Nathanael had a wrong attitude. So, that was all that Philip could say. But nothing more was necessary. Jesus did the rest.

Word List

[Meanings of difficult words]

In the text there is a * before such words.

- believer** A person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.
It is someone who belongs to Christ and who follows him every day.
This is another name for a true Christian.
- disciple** A person who follows a leader. It could refer to a student of a teacher. It especially refers to the 12 men whom Jesus chose. It is also a person who follows Jesus today.
- gospel** Good News. It refers to all that God has done. It is about all that God is doing. It is also about all that God will do because of Jesus.
The first 4 books of the New Testament are called 'The Gospels'.
- Messiah** Lord Jesus Christ. It is a Hebrew word 'meshiah'. The same word in Greek is 'Christos', Christ. God promised the Jews that the Messiah would save them. We read about him in the Old Testament. Then, Jesus came. But the Jews did not believe in him (John 1:11). And the nation is still waiting for the Messiah to come.
- missionary** Someone who tells other people about the true God and about the Lord Jesus Christ.
Often, a missionary will go to a foreign land to do this.

BE MY DISCIPLE

Jesus says 'Trust me and obey me. Learn from me.
Follow me in a world that does not care about me.'
That is what it means to be a disciple.

5. JESUS SEES WHAT IS BEST IN US

Jesus called each of the *disciples in a special manner. Each meeting with Jesus was different. And it is the same for everyone. There is only one way that leads to the Father God. It is through Christ. But people come to Jesus by many different methods.

Peter heard Christ speak to the people. He saw all that he did. And he felt very guilty. He said 'Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man (Luke 5:8). Matthew collected taxes. And he probably felt guilty too. But it was not like this with Nathanael.

Jesus saw Nathanael as he came. But Jesus did not talk publicly about any of his sin. Jesus admired him. He said that Nathanael was an honourable man. The meeting was unusual. And the details are important. They help us to understand certain things. We learn about how to be *disciples ourselves. Jesus examined Nathanael's wrong attitude. We have seen that already. But there were two other things. First, Jesus recognised his qualities. Then, Jesus won his loyalty!

Jesus recognised his qualities

Nathanael came towards Jesus. 'Here is a true *Israelite', Jesus said. 'There is nothing false in him' (1:47). Jesus saw his special qualities. Jesus saw what he could become in the future. And Jesus knows what is worst about us too. But he also sees what is best in us. This truth is vital. Christ can see us as we are. But he can see us how we can become. He can see both things at the same time. And he is the only person who can do this.

Jesus knew all about Nathanael. He knew his wrong attitude. He knew what Nathanael thought about Nazareth. And he knew what he could be thinking about Joseph. Nathanael came from Cana. So, he probably felt superior. Cana was near to Nazareth. So, he would know all the gossip about Jesus' birth. And Christ's enemies soon used cruel words against him. 'We are not illegitimate children' they said (8:41). And they might just as well have added the words, 'not like you'. [Note: 'Illegitimate' refers to someone whose parents were not married at the time.]

Nathanael did not seem to have thoughts like these. If he had, Christ would have known. He knew all about him. John's *gospel emphasises the special knowledge of Jesus. He 'knew all men'. Nobody could hide anything from him.

Jesus 'knew what was in man' (2:24-25). He knew: • the important questions that were in the mind of Nicodemus (3:1-4). • the bad moral life of the woman at the well. She tried to hide what she was like with religious talk. But he knew all about her. (4:16-20). • the thoughts of men who wanted to make him king (6:15). • that the blind man would see later in the day. He knew that people would see 'the work of God' in his life (9:3).

Jesus knew that: • the illness of his friend Lazarus would not 'end in death'. It would bring honour to God. (11:4). • that Judas had evil intentions (13:11). The other *disciples had no reason to suspect Judas. They each wondered if it might be them. 'It is not me, is it Lord?' • a loyal *disciple would deny that he knew Jesus (13:38).

Later, Nathanael would learn that Jesus 'knew all men'. But, when Philip said, 'Come and see', he did not know any of this. He did not know that Jesus could even know his thoughts. Jesus amazed him. Jesus introduced him to everyone else! 'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked. He wondered what Jesus meant by saying that he was a true *Israelite. He wondered how Jesus knew that 'there was nothing false in him' (1:47).

Jesus knew how much Nathanael loved the Old Testament. And it seems that Jesus chose his words with care. He was contrasting him with the first *Israelite. Jacob was the first man who had the name 'Israel'. [Note: You can read about him in Genesis 25-33.] Jacob cheated people. He was not sincere. Nathanael was not like this in any way. He was true, honest and sincere. He did not approve of Jesus. But he did not pretend about this.

So, he was much better than many of the Pharisees at the time. They were the religious leaders. And Jesus spoke about them. Read what he said in Matthew 23:25-28. They were doing good things. They wanted people to think that they were holy. But, they were not. Their secret lives were evil in many ways.

Jacob was more like the Pharisees. He, too, was a 'hypocrite'. This word belongs to the language of Greek plays. It is a word about actors. They would have covers (masks) for their faces. And they would pretend to be someone else. Jacob made his father think that he was Esau. (Read Genesis 27:1-40). Isaac told Esau that Jacob had deceived him. And Jesus used the same Greek word. (There is an ancient translation of the Old Testament. Its name is the Septuagint. It is in the Greek language.)] But Jesus said that Nathanael was **not** like that. So, Jesus was contrasting the two men.

Jacob was greedy. He deceived his father. He cheated his brother. So he had to leave home. On his first night, he had a dream. God was speaking to him. And, centuries later, Jesus spoke about that dream. (Read John 1:50-51). He reminded Nathanael about it. Jesus used exactly the same words that are in the story of Jacob. Jesus knew Nathanael's faults. But he knew his good qualities too. And he was not like Jacob at all. There were attractive things about him. And Jesus knew all these things as soon as he saw him.

We must remember this when we think about being Jesus' *disciples. Jesus saw that there were useful gifts. There were attractive things about Nathanael. And he sees things like this in us. Of course, sin is in all our lives. [Read Romans 3:23.] It affects every part of us. We can still do good, kind things. We can be sincere. We can behave well and have good moral principles. But we can never earn God's benefits by what we do. At some time, sin always spoils things. And Jesus knew that this was true about Nathanael too. But Jesus still wanted to see the best things in him. He did not just show the worst things in him.

Jesus sees the things that are best in us too. He saw Martin Luther in century 16. God saw that he was very sorry for his sins. God saw that his great desire was to be holy. God knew that he had a clever mind. And he used Luther to lead the start of great religious reform.

There was John Bunyan too. He lived in Century 17. He worked with metals. And he had no education at all. But God saw that he had natural gifts. John Bunyan did not know it. But he could express things by writing them down. He became a prisoner because he was serving God. And he developed this gift during that hard time. His books have helped millions of people during many centuries.

Then there was John Wesley. He lived in century 18. Jesus did not just see his failures. He was a priest in the Church of England. But he relied on his good deeds. And he sometimes thought that he was superior in a spiritual way. But he was a failure when he went to serve God in America. And when he returned to England, this was all that he could think about. But Jesus saw his better qualities. He saw all that John Wesley could become. He saw that he would declare the *gospel to thousands of people. In fact, he travelled more than 200,000 miles. He gave more than 40,000 talks. And this job lasted for more than 50 years.

In that same century 18, Jesus saw a very evil man. His name was John Newton. He was the captain of a slave ship. He had bad manners. He was unpleasant. He spoke against God and against holy things. His moral standards were terrible.

But Jesus saw what John Newton could become. And Jesus could see what he did become. God's grace (kindness) helped him to turn away from his sins. And Christ saw his amazing gifts as well as the evil that all could see. Christ saw that Newton would be 'a true *Israelite, in whom there was nothing false'. He became • the faithful speaker. • the church leader who cared, • the one who wrote helpful letters • the writer of many hymns (Christian songs). These songs encouraged people to trust in God's 'amazing grace' (kindness). And this is the title of John Newton's most famous song.

All *disciples need to remember something. It is this. Sometimes we think that Christ wants to take things away from us. But Christ did not come into the world to do that. The only things that he takes away are things that would destroy us. He is so generous. He comes to add many more things to our lives. Satan tries to deceive us. We will lose so much if we come to Jesus. But Satan is our enemy. He is the thief. Jesus spoke about him. He said that 'A thief comes to steal, to kill and to destroy. But I have come to give life. It is a life that is the best that it could be'. (Read John 10:10).

It is the same for all *disciples of Jesus. Whatever century they live in, Jesus knows all about them. He sees them as they are. But he also sees them as they could become. What he did for Nathanael, he also did for the other first disciples. He saw more than Peter's sins. He saw Peter's future success. 'From now on, you will catch men' he said. (Read Luke 5:10). Matthew collected taxes. People who were in this job usually cheated. But Jesus saw more than the job. He saw Matthew's ability to write. Jesus knew that he would write a great book one day. [It is the first book in our New Testament.]

Jesus does the same with us. He sees more than our faults and our failures. He sees the people that he can make us. So, true *disciples do not just leave the sin that is in their lives. (Matthew left his job.) We must answer the call of one who sees what is best in us. He can show the gifts that we did not know about. He sees that he can make us into useful people. And we must let him do this.

Jesus won his loyalty

'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked Jesus. The words that he used mean 'Where do you know me from?' In the same way, we might wonder about someone's identity. And we might ask 'Where have we met before?' It was as if Jesus was saying that he had already met Nathanael. Nathanael knew nothing about it. But Jesus was there when he prayed and when he thought about God's word.

The words 'under the fig (fruit) tree' do not mean much to us. But they had a lot of meaning to the Jews. These words described the place of private home life. They also described a person's private thoughts and actions. (Read Isaiah 36:16; Micah 4:4 and Zechariah 3:10).

Christ's words surprised Nathanael. Jesus saw his present inner life. But Jesus knew all about his past life too. And that was long before the time when Philip told Nathanael about 'Jesus of Nazareth'. A sensitive preacher (one who declares God's word), might guess certain things about him. Those words of Jesus changed his mind completely. 'I saw you under the fig (fruit) tree. That was before Philip told me about you' (1:48). Such a thing was not possible. There was only one solution. Jesus must be all that he claimed that he was.

These words made Nathanael commit himself totally. Only God can know us completely. (Read Psalm 139 and Hebrews 4:13). Jesus was not just guessing about him. Jesus was speaking in a plain way. He was telling him that he was God's Son.

Jesus knew the things that were in Nathanael's mind. He knew his present state. And Jesus knew what he was doing. But it was much more than this. Jesus could see his past and his future. Jesus saw what Nathanael might do. He saw what he could do. And he saw what he would do, if God changed him.

Jesus was showing Nathanael what he was like. But he was showing him what God is like too. Jesus himself was the unique image of God. He revealed (showed) God in a perfect way. And this truth made Nathanael trust Jesus in a personal way. And he was not afraid to speak about Jesus. He believed that Christ was the one who revealed God to him. He accepted that Christ was his God and his King. And he was not ashamed to declare it in public.

This is the subject of the next chapter.

Word List

[Meanings of difficult words]

In the text, there is a * before such words

- disciple** A person who follows a leader. It could refer to a student of a teacher. It especially refers to the 12 men whom Jesus chose. It is also a person who follows Jesus today.
- gospel** Good News. It refers to all that God has done. It is about all that God is doing. It is also about all that God will do because of Jesus. The first 4 books of the New Testament are called 'The Gospels'.
- Israelite** A name for God's people, the Jews. Jacob was the first man who had the name 'Israel'. Read about him in Genesis 25-33. God gave Jacob this new name. Today, Israel refers to the nation. Or it can refer to the land.

BE MY DISCIPLE

Jesus says 'Trust me and obey me. Learn from me.
Follow me in a world that does not care about me'.
That is what it means to be a disciple.

6. DISCIPLES MUST LISTEN

Nathanael was amazed. Jesus knew all about him. Jesus knew where he was sitting. (He was 'under the fig tree'). But there is another possibility. Perhaps Jesus even knew what he was reading. Perhaps it was the story of Jacob. Three things suggest this. (Read John 1:43-51.) This passage is about Nathanael's meeting with Jesus.

- Jesus spoke about Jacob's dream of a ladder. (Read John 1:51 and Genesis 28:12).
- Jesus called Nathanael an '*Israelite'. God gave Jacob the new name of 'Israel'. (Read Genesis 35:6-10).
- Jesus said that there was nothing false in Nathanael. Jacob did many false things. (Read Genesis 27-32).

There was a small group of people there. And Jesus spoke to them. 'I say to you **all**, you shall see heaven open'. The word 'you' is plural. So, Jesus was not just speaking to Nathanael. Heaven was not just open to Jacob long ago. And it was not just for Nathanael then. Jacob had a personal answer to what God showed him. He said: 'This is the gate of heaven'. And Nathanael was about to follow Jesus. Millions of people would follow Jesus in the future. And heaven is open to them too.

The Scripture, [our Old Testament], was written centuries earlier. And it showed Christ. Now, Christ was guiding Nathanael as he read it. Christ was leading him to himself. And he realised that Christ was very special. He was not just a good *preacher. He was not just a local man who could do unusual things. Christ was not trying to start a political revolution. No. What the ancient Scripture said about him was true. And what Andrew and Philip said now was true. Nathanael was sure about this. And he gave his own reply, as young Jacob replied centuries before. (83.8)

We, too, can 'come and see' (John 1:46). What Jesus did for Nathanael, he can do for all. (Read John 1:49-51.) All his *disciples in every age can have 'the gift of God'. Each *believer must accept Jesus in a personal way. Then, he or she will want to speak about him in public.

In a short time, Nathanael changed. The story shows five clear stages. They show the progress in his experience of God.

- Superior attitude. ('Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' 1:46)
- Confusion and curiosity. (But he was willing to 'come and see' 1:46b-47a)
- Sincere questions. ('How do you know me?' 1:48)
- Definite decision to follow Jesus. ('You are the Son of God. You are the King of *Israel' (1:49.)
- Public statement (1:49.)

This statement said three things about Jesus. He was Nathanael's Teacher. He was God's Son. He was *Israel's King (1:49). These truths show us about Nathanael. But they are for us too. They help us to understand what it means for us to be *disciples. In this chapter, we will study:

Jesus as Teacher

Nathanael called Jesus 'Rabbi'. John's *gospel uses this title many times. (Read 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8). Here, in 1:38, we learn that 'Rabbi' means 'Teacher'. So, Nathanael was telling Jesus that he wanted to become a learner. He wanted to be like Andrew and like Philip. And this must be the first action for all *disciples. They must want to hear what Jesus says. And they must want to obey what he says. This is necessary for every disciple.

The next person who used the title of 'Rabbi' was Nicodemus. He was another Jew who knew the Scripture (our Old Testament) well. Notice how he began his conversation with Christ. He declared that he knew something. And other leaders knew it too. They knew that Jesus was 'a teacher who has come from God' (3:2). So, Nicodemus recognised that Jesus was a great teacher. But he must learn other things too (3:10). He must hear the vital message about the 'new birth'.

Jesus reminded Nicodemus about the Old Testament too. He had spoken to Nathanael about Jacob's experience. Now, he reminded Nicodemus about the message of Moses (3:14). Nicodemus knew the story well. (Read Numbers 21:4-9). But it would have been just a dramatic story. It was something that happened to Moses and the people then. He would not know that it could happen to him now. But Jesus was very clear. He said 'As Moses...so the Son of Man' (3:14). The story was pointing to Christ himself. Read the great truths of the *gospel in 3:14-16.

So, Nicodemus might have read that story very carefully. But he would not have understood its true meaning. He needed Christ to be his teacher that night (3:1). He knew the Jewish Scriptures [our Old Testament] well. But he could not understand the truth of 'what Moses wrote about in the Law' (1:45). Like Nathanael, he needed someone to explain it all to him.

Jesus used the same phrase with both men. He began a new sentence with the words: 'I tell you the truth'. First, he said it to Nathanael in 1:51. Then he said it three times to Nicodemus. (Read 3:3, 5 and 11). The exact meaning is 'Amen, Amen I say to you'. At the time, it was quite common for rabbis to use this solemn word. They would say 'amen' to give special strength to what they said. But they would usually say it at the end of a sentence. And they would never repeat the word.

This 'double amen' is only in John's *gospel. In the other gospels, Jesus said 'Amen, I say to you.' He began an important statement with the word. But in John's gospel, he repeated the word 25 times. So, he was giving extra emphasis to what he said. He wanted to show its importance. It was something urgent. And it was suitable for all, in any age. It came from a unique teacher. People must hear what he said. They must realise that it was of great value. And they must obey him.

Teaching was very important in John's *gospel. John's first introduction of Jesus in his book was as 'the Word' (1:1). God the Father had something extremely important to say. And he said it to us in Jesus, who is the Word of God. It is

- A Word that lasts forever (1:1). Jesus had always been with God.
- A Word that created (1:3). He made the universe.
- A Word that reveals. He expressed the love and the life of the Father forever. He was a word 'full of grace (kindness) and truth (1:14, 17).
- A Word that had authority. John the Baptist realised this. 'The one whom God has sent speaks the words of God. This is because God gives the Spirit to him without limit' (3:34).

John is telling us something that is vital. So it is at the beginning of his book. It is this. God's word to us in Christ is unique.

John's *gospel shows that teaching is necessary. This is especially true in chapters 14-16. Jesus said to his *disciples, 'All this I have told you so that...' (Read 15:11; 16:1, 4, 6, 25 and 33.) Jesus emphasised the importance of his teaching.

We are like Nathanael and Nicodemus. And we are like all people who follow Jesus. We, too, need a Teacher. If we are going to be true *disciples, someone must inform our minds. And this is what happened to these two men when they first met Jesus. There are things that 'learners' must understand. And that will not just happen. We must decide to use our time for it. And this is not an easy thing to do. Our lives are often much too busy.

Christ wants to be our Teacher at three specific times. They are • when we are alone • when we are in a group • when we are in public. So, we must

Listen when we are alone

First, we must meet with our Teacher in private. Every Christian needs to have personal Bible reading and prayer. And he or she should have some time in every day to do this. We need the regular discipline of a daily 'Quiet Time'. We might call it by another name. But it is time with God when we are on our own. And nothing that is easy can take its place.

Jesus told his *disciples that they were to meet with God in that way. (Read Matthew 6:6.) But they must not make it into a public show. The Pharisees (religious leaders) at the time liked to do this. It made them look holy.

Jesus taught the importance of private time with God. And he also did it himself. He got up early in the morning to spend time with God. And this was even more important when Jesus was very busy. He needed to escape from the public place. And he needed to go into a secret place to meet with God. (Read Mark 1:35; Matthew 4:23 and Luke 5:16.) He wanted to give himself to his Father again, at the beginning of each new day.

Something is clear from the example of Jesus. It is this. There are three important parts to this pattern of practical, daily time with God. One part is discipline, which people do not like. Another part is a place to be quiet. And this is rare in our world today. And the third part that we need is submission. This means to accept the authority of God in our lives. And people challenge this. We will consider each one of them.

Discipline. People today do not like this word. They think that they should not plan things. Things should just happen. People should be free to do what they feel like doing. They should never feel that they *must* do anything. This attitude is part of today's culture. And Christians can easily become like this. But its effects are very bad for them. Jesus had discipline in his life. And his *disciples must be the same, if they want to follow him effectively.

If we are going to have a daily Quiet Time, it is necessary to plan for it. It is necessary to think carefully about the best time for us. Life is not the same for each one of us. For some people, the best time is before they do anything else in the morning. For other people, that is not the best time. We might have to start work very early. And we might decide that a later time is better for us.

Many people have to travel to work. So they pray and read their Bible during a train journey. And this could encourage other Christians. Some people choose to go on an earlier train. Then they go into a church on their way to the office or the shop. They spend 15 or 20 minutes there quietly with God. They read his Word. They listen to his voice. And they ask for his strength for the day ahead.

Some mothers stay at home. And the best time for them might be when the children go to school. Other people might need to decide on a different time of the day. But we must plan for it or it is not likely to happen. We must keep our appointment with God. And that needs discipline.

A place to be Quiet. We live in a very noisy world. Many of our neighbours cannot bear to be still or to have silence. So it is not easy to be quiet. People travel with loud music playing in their ears. In many homes, television or radio is on most of the day. Constant noise seems to be essential. But Christian *believers know that they must be like Jesus. They must have a chance to go away from all that. And they need to do this for at least a few minutes in each day. Then the Lord can speak to them quietly, through his relevant Word.

Submission. [This word means to accept authority.] 'Authority' is not an acceptable word in the modern world. People have their own ideas and ways that they think. And they do not like standards or values that are different. It is like what the Bible describes. 'Everyone did what he himself thought was right'. (Read Judges 17:6; 21:25.)

Something offends many people. It is the idea that God, or anybody else, can tell us how to behave. These people are against the thought that we should give our lives to God. They cannot accept that we should obey him. They think that moral standards are all right. But they must not interfere with what we want to do. They could be there to show the normal standards for general behaviour. But nobody should force you to do anything. They say that moral conduct should fit with their own situation. There are no set moral principles, they say. And this includes God, religion, tradition or society.

People think that 'Authority' limits their freedom. Men and women must be free. But to think in this way would amaze Jewish *believers. It would have been like this for Philip and Nathanael. Their word for Law was 'Torah'. It meant 'a path on which to walk', a 'particular direction'. It meant a safe route to keep them free from harm. They truly believed something. It was this. God clearly described the way that we should live. And he did this in his Law. He knew that there were terrible dangers for people who disobeyed those laws.

Some people might think that the Ten Laws (Commandments) limit their freedom. [Read Exodus 20:1-17.] But they show a safe way of life for society. It is a way which we can trust. This was true for the time of Moses. And it is true for our society today. No community can be happy if people must work without any periods of rest. People might not respect old people. They might ignore them or neglect them. If that happens, the people in that society cannot be happy.

Imagine a certain community. There is no respect for life, for truth or for the law of property. Nobody could feel 'safe' in a community like that. Imagine a marriage. One partner who commits a sex sin could never make their family happier. There are people who want what other people have. And they are not nice people to know. Yet the Lord God deals with all these subjects in the Ten Laws (Commandments). He knows that people are unhappy if they reject them.

I have enjoyed walking along a certain Path on the coast of England. It is in the area of Pembroke. My son and I often saw notices. 'It is dangerous to leave the path' was one notice. Another notice was 'Cliffs kill'. 'How stupid,' somebody might say. 'They are trying to limit my freedom.' But those notices are warnings. They do not limit my freedom. They make sure that I keep my freedom, and continue to live.

That is why God's word came so clearly through Moses. 'Follow them so that you may live.' (Read Deuteronomy 4:1 and 32:47.) God has provided his laws to protect me. They are like those notices that are along the Coast Path. If I ignore the warning, I might fall to my death. Every year, somebody chooses to ignore the notices. They want to enjoy their 'freedom'. But they fall off the path and die. Their 'freedom' is of no use to them then.

Christ gives us his teaching. And *disciples listen to what he says. They know that he wants us to enjoy life. He wants us to 'have far more life than we had before' (10:10). And he came into the world to make this possible for us. So, if he warns us against something, there is a good reason. It might appear very attractive to us. But we can be sure that it would be dangerous. It would destroy. He is 'the way and the truth and the life' (14:6). He himself, his life and his teaching show the best path for us to follow.

So, we have decided what is the right time for us to meet with God. We have a quiet place. But we need some kind of method as we read the Bible. It is good to have a plan. Scripture Union and other groups publish notes. They give a daily Bible passage to read. Then they help us to discover for ourselves the great truths of God's Word. But we should not just read their comments. We should also have a personal notebook. And we could perhaps write down each day *one thing* that the Lord is saying to us.

Some Christians have found this helpful. It is a spiritual diary. They record the things that the Lord has said to them. And they write down how they should use these things in their own lives. Some Christians also use the notebook to write down special things for prayer. They also write down specific answers to their prayers. Or God might show them something special in their spiritual lives. And they want to record it.

Christ wants to be our Teacher as we

Study in a Group

This is the second way that we can meet with our Teacher. We can learn much about the Christian life if we study the Bible regularly with other *believers. Jesus chose 12 men to be with him in his work. And he knew that they would be able to encourage each other. He knew how important this would be in the years ahead. The *disciples were not just learners. They were partners. In this *gospel of John, some of the disciples seemed to be special friends. Andrew and Philip were like this. Such men would be partners as they learned together and as they served together.

They wanted to discover things about Christ together. We can meet with Christ in a group too. And it would be the same for us. Many people do this today. It might be in a church or a home. Or it might be at school or college. When we study a passage from the Bible together, we discover new things. By ourselves, we could just notice the same things each time. When we study them together, familiar verses can give us new thoughts. And we can learn from each other.

The Lord Jesus certainly did not do things on his own. Even the Son of God wanted a team around him. He appreciated three things about his group of *disciples. They were his supporters physically. They loved him and they prayed with him. They gave him practical help too. The *Saviour refused to manage alone. So it would be serious for us to try to manage alone.

Jesus knew what would happen when he went back to heaven. He had promised that the Holy Spirit would come. And the Holy Spirit would teach the *disciples. He would remind them about things that Jesus had said. Because of their busy lives, they could easily forget. But the Holy Spirit would reveal new things too. Or, he would state familiar truths in new ways. This happened to men like Paul, Peter, John, James and Jude. They would eagerly receive the truth. And the early Christian communities would value these truths very much. They had so much to learn from what the Spirit was saying through other *believers.

We have so much more than they had. We have the whole Bible. We have both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is God's unique Word. So we are not looking for totally new and different things about him. We might receive some 'message' or 'vision' [mental picture]. This could be while we are alone or while we are in a group. It might be about God's purpose for us. Or it might be about what God wants for us. We should all check it with what the Bible teaches.

The Bible is God's special way to show his truth to us. And everything else must be much less important. The Bible is God's Word. It is unique. It is special. It has authority. It does not change. And we must fully accept its authority only.

But that does not mean that we must understand its truth on our own. We might not have appreciated or used much of the Bible's message. And there could be a reason for this. We have not studied it as carefully as we might have done with other *believers. They are *disciples like us. They, too, want to listen to Christ. They want to learn from him. And they want to obey him in today's world.

Learn in public

We can listen to our Teacher in public. There are people who explain God's Word in public. And God has used people like this to communicate his truth since Bible times. Jesus had a custom (Luke 4:16). Every *Sabbath day he would go to the local *synagogue. And he would listen to the public reading and the explanation of the Old Testament. When he met with his *disciples, he taught them the truths of God's Word (Luke 24:45). And he used every possible chance to speak to larger groups of people. John's *gospel, like the other gospels, records times like this. Jesus taught in the Jerusalem *Temple, in local *synagogues and in other public places. (Read 6:59; 7:14, 28; 8:2, 20.)

And Jesus continues to communicate his truth. He does this through people who declare his Word. Luke made it clear that the first *believers regularly listened to God's Word in public. In the Book of Acts, this happened constantly. The *preacher explained what God was saying in his Word. And he showed how it should relate to each person's life. (Read Acts 1:15-22; 2:14-41; 3:11-26; 6:15 - 7:53; 13:14-43; 17:16-34; 20:17-38.)

The explanation of their Bible (the Old Testament) was very important to these people. And it must be so for us too, if we want to become mature Christians. Many times, God has spoken to millions of people in this way. If it is possible, every Christian needs to be in a church where this happens. They should hear the truths of the Bible taught clearly.

All through history, men and women have heard the clear word of Jesus. It has come to them through the faithful teaching of a Christian *preacher. Such people have a great responsibility. They must be loyal to the Bible text. They must be eager to relate it to life in today's world. And they must long to present the message in the right way. It should interest those who listen. And it should attract them.

The Bible is such a wonderful book. It has a message that excites people. So the *preacher must try hard not to bore them. To do it well, this kind of teaching demands hard work. The preacher's preparation must always be careful. There must be discipline. And he or she must be faithful. But those who listen have a vital part too. They should pray regularly for their priest or Christian leader as he prepares. But they should pray for themselves too. They should ask the Lord to help them to do three things. To: • listen carefully to the Word. • obey what God says to them through the Word. • share the Word with other people

True *disciples must remember two important things. They should do this as they listen to Christ their Teacher through the *preacher. They must be eager to remember his truth until they need it. And they must be eager to share his truth.

First, what the *preacher says from God's Word might not be relevant immediately. But this is not a good test. And we should never judge what he or she says because of this. In any group, people will have many different needs. Sometimes, what the preacher says will be exactly what we need at that particular time. It will seem as if the preacher is speaking to us alone.

But this cannot always be what happens. On some occasions, the Lord might be showing us a truth that we should remember carefully. We might need that truth for some future experience. It could be preparing us for that time. Or it could be showing us what we need for that time. God's truth should make us into mature Christians.

The Bible is completely reliable. And it should be like a solid foundation. We could use another word picture. God's Word is like seed. And we must never throw it away. We should never say two things. 'It is not relevant.' Or, 'It does not apply to me now'. The time might come when it is exactly what we need. And a mature *believer knows that. Like the seed, the truth will have time to 'grow' and 'produce fruit'. Then that believer can remember it at just the right time.

Second, true *disciples must be eager to share God's truth. What God says to us through a *preacher is not just for ourselves. The Lord might be telling us that particular truth on that day for a reason. It might be so that we can tell someone else about it. If we listen carefully, regular Bible teaching will help. It will help us more than anything else will. It will help us to think in a Christian way about the big subjects that are in life.

But regular Bible teaching will not just help us to 'grow' as believers. It will give us the resources that we need. And we will be able to help other people with their problems and their difficulties. So, whenever we listen to a Christian *preacher, let us remember something. The message is not just for 'now'. The message is not only for 'us'. We must remember it. And we must share it.

WORD LIST

[Meanings of difficult words]

In the text there is a * before such words

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| believer | A person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.
It is someone who belongs to Christ and who follows him every day.
This is another name for a true Christian. |
| disciple | A person who follows a leader. It could refer to a student of a teacher.
It especially refers to the 12 men whom Jesus chose. It is also a person who follows Jesus today. |
| gospel | Good News. It refers to all that God has done. It is about all that God is doing. It is also about all that God will do because of Jesus.
The first 4 books of the New Testament are called 'The Gospels'. |

Israel	Today, this word refers to the Jewish nation. Or it can refer to the land of Israel. [See Israelite]
Israelite	A name for God's people, the Jews. Jacob was the first man who had the name 'Israel'. God gave him this new name. Read about him in Genesis 25-33. Today, Israel refers to the nation. Or it can refer to the land.
preacher	A Christian preacher declares God's word in public. He or she teaches the truths of the Bible.
Sabbath	The Jews' special day. This is a Saturday. It was day 7 of the week for the Jews. It was the last day of God's creation, when God rested (Genesis 2:1-3). And God made that day special. The Hebrew word is 'Shabat'. It means 'rest'. (Read Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:15; Matthew 12:8, 12; Mark 2:27, 28).
Saviour	This is another name for Jesus. The word means 'One who saves'. Jesus is the only one who can save people from their sin. And he could do this because he died on the cross.
Synagogue	The building where Jewish people meet to worship God. And they receive teaching from the Scripture (our Old Testament). There was only one Temple. This was in Jerusalem. [See Temple]
Temple	The Jews' special large church building. It was in Jerusalem city. And the enemy destroyed it in AD70. (This was 70 years after the birth of Jesus.) Smaller church buildings for Jews are called synagogues. [Other groups build temples too. They worship false gods in them.]

BE MY DISCIPLE

Jesus says, 'Trust me and obey me. Learn from me.
Follow me in a world that does not care about me'.
That is what it means to be a disciple.

7. WE STATE OUR LOYALTY PUBLICLY

Nathanael responded to Christ. First, he accepted that he needed Jesus to be his Teacher. And we must do that too. We must realise that Jesus speaks to us in different ways. He speaks to us in private, in our own daily Quiet Time. He speaks to us when we study the Bible in a group. And he speaks to us when someone declares the Word of God in public. After that, Nathanael proclaimed his loyalty to Jesus who is God's Son and the king of Israel. [Today this refers to the Jewish nation. It can also refer to the land of Israel.]

God's Son

'Rabbi (Teacher),' Nathanael said, 'you are the Son of God' (1:49). He said it in public. And he said it clearly. This new *disciple accepted that Christ was God's Son. He was unique. Nathanael's response to Jesus made something clear. Jesus Christ is our essential Teacher. And he is the one who reveals the truth. But he is much more than that. He is unique. Nobody could ever be like him. He is the Son of God. People must obey the Teacher. But they must worship the Son.

John recorded these words of Nathanael at the beginning of his *gospel. He did this to announce one of his great main subjects. It is love for God's Son and the worship of him. Later in his book, we find that John wrote his gospel for that purpose. He wanted other people to understand, as well as Nathanael. It was so 'that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God' (20:31).

John's *gospel began with a public statement that Christ is God. It came from a man who had doubts, Nathanael. He said, 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' And the book ends with someone who accepted that Jesus Christ is God's Son. His name was Thomas. He had doubts too. And this is a surprise, because he was one of the 12 *disciples. He said, 'My Lord and my God' (20:28).

God's Son is unique. John repeats this subject many times in his book. It is part of the great first section (1:14, 18). And it prepares the readers for later teaching. From the beginning of John's *Gospel, John the Baptist was clear about Jesus. He is God's Son. And he is unique (1:34). In John's Gospel, the Father • gives His Son (3:16) • sends him (3:17) • loves him (3:35; 5:20) • uses him (5:19) and • honours him (13:32). In this *gospel, Jesus declared himself to be God's Son. (Read 10:29-30 and 36.) Other people also agreed with that truth (11:27). And John hoped that we, too, will agree (20:31). [Note: John the Baptist or Baptiser was his title. People gave him this name because he *baptised people.]

Nathanael and Thomas made their statements because they loved Jesus. And they worshipped him. This shows the most important Christian truth. The New Testament

describes what it means to be a Christian. And nobody can be a real Christian unless they accept that Jesus Christ is God. Yet this is what most religions refuse to accept. To them, Jesus was an attractive teacher. He was a great example. And he was an exciting leader. There are a great number of new religions. And many of them want to have Jesus somewhere in their system. But they will not accept that he is God.

Jehovah's Witnesses argue with confidence about their ideas. But they refuse to accept that Jesus is God's only Son. They believe that he is just 'a' son of God. This is in the same way that other people might be sons of God. Each year there seem to be more religious groups. There is the Church of Scientology. Its aim is to help the individual. People have problems. They feel that their daily lives limit them. And the Church wants to take them 'out of' these things. It wants them 'to gain greater levels of spiritual freedom'. But they teach that people can achieve all this without Christ, the Son of God.

Many of the new religions talk about the same thing. It is about the 'god' who is within each of us. But the Bible does not teach this. In the beginning, God made us in his image (like him). We are able to respond to him. But, by nature, we are like 'lost' people. Before we can know God personally, God must 'find' us. However, one religious group, Eckankar, is against this. They teach about each person's experience with the ECK. This is their word for Spirit. And it refers to the part of god that is in each of us.

The 'New Age' teaching is popular. It has a mixture of religious ideas and philosophy. This group also believes that each person is god. Some of them think that all other faiths are good. And they combine the teachings of several religious groups. Other people refuse any traditional religious ideas and philosophies.

'New Age' teachers say that people can change themselves. Men and women must become the god that they are. They can do this in various ways. They might use yoga. [This is a practice of the *Hindu religion.] Or they might constantly repeat a word or words [chant]. They might also use hypnosis. This is a state when a person loses the power to do what they want. Somebody else can tell them what to think and do. Some 'New Age' people might include some ideas and values that come from the Christian message. But they do not believe that Jesus is *the* Son of God.

In John's *Gospel, we learn what Nathanael said. He said that Jesus Christ was God. We are in an age when there are many religions. But this should show us that what Christians believe is special. The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus Christ is unique. And this will offend people who choose to follow other religions. But John's *gospel is probably more definite than any other New Testament book. We cannot mistake its clear message. 'Nobody can come to the Father' except through Jesus. And he is God's only Son (14:6).

There are people all around us who have a different religion. We might have neighbours who are *Muslims, *Buddhists or *Hindus. So, modern Christians must decide what to do about them. They must decide if their ways to God are real. Perhaps their way is just different from our way. Modern Christians must decide if their teaching is wrong.

It was the same for the first Christian people. There were many different ways of *salvation then too. But they were very clear and definite in their answers. The people at that time did not like it. But the Christians said what they believed. And they were certain

about it. 'There is no *salvation in anybody else. Jesus is the only one who can save people.' (Read Acts 4:12)

That definite teaching has not changed. And this helps us to be certain. But it does not mean that we can be proud in our attitude to other people. We cannot just reject the people who believe in other religions. Their religions mean much to them. Many thousands of people do not agree with us. They would not accept that Jesus is God's unique Son. And this happens even in a Western culture. So, we need to know how to mix with people like this. There are six basic principles. We need to learn, to listen, to serve, to communicate, to pray and to love.

We must learn. This is our Christian responsibility. We cannot share with people of other faiths if we do not know about our own faith. They have strong beliefs. And they have the right to choose what to believe. We must always be grateful for our religious freedom. This means that they can have their own beliefs. And it means that they can have the same freedom to share them that we have.

But there is a problem. Many Christians do not really know what they believe. And the message is for every *believer. You must 'know that what you have heard is true,' (Luke 1:4). John's *gospel has so much to say about 'the truth' that is in Jesus Christ. But we must *know* it well, if we want to share it effectively.

We must listen. Our neighbours who are not Christians believe in certain things. And we must take the time to listen to them. They have beliefs that are dear to them. And we must hear what they tell us. This is something that we must do. If not, we have no right to declare our belief in Jesus Christ. Perhaps we do not know anyone who believes in a different religion. But we should still take the time and the trouble to read about their faith. Then, if we speak to people about our own beliefs, we will know about theirs. We must not ignore this important subject.

In today's society, many people have a certain attitude. It is this. 'All religions are equal'. This could be an excuse to avoid something. They would not need to declare the New Testament message. But we ought to know some basic facts about other faiths. And we ought to know what God's Word says about some of those ideas.

We must serve. We want to give honour to Jesus Christ, because we are his *disciples. This should make us feel great sympathy for other people. It should make us want to serve them. And we would not want to help only those who support our Christian teaching. There may be people in our local community who need help. Perhaps they have another faith or perhaps they have no faith. But there will be times when we can do things for them.

There are chances for us to meet people who are not Christians. We can help them at: • language experience groups • friendship centres • play groups for small children • coffee mornings • meal clubs. Or there are things that we could do for them in their own homes. We could • take meals to sick or elderly neighbours, whatever their religion is • write letters • do their shopping • dig gardens for elderly people • show kindness. And we should do all these things in the name of Jesus Christ.

We can share our faith. We can do this with people who have other religions. Or we can do it with people who have no religion. We have the message about Jesus Christ, who is the only *Saviour. We might have neighbours who believe in other religions. And they might be glad to know more about Jesus Christ. But it must be the right opportunity. We must be sensitive to them. And we must speak in a way that will attract them.

It is like this in the *gospel of John. Religious Jews heard Jesus Christ's truth. But the good news was for the Samaritans too. (Read 4:7-26.) These people lived in Samaria. It was the country beside the Jews. But the Jews hated them. And Jesus showed them that this was wrong. He told his *disciples something important. Many Samaritans were waiting to believe. They were like a field of grain that was ready for the harvest. The disciples were urging Jesus to eat. But this 'harvest' was much too important. (Read 4:35-36.)

The Samaritan people had heard about Jesus from a woman. Jesus had helped her to see the truth. And the rest of the people were eager to hear for themselves. (Read 4:39-43.) Later they said, 'This man really is the *Saviour of the world' (4:42). Jesus was not just the Saviour of Jews. He was the Saviour for the Samaritans too.

The *gospel of John also tells us about some people who lived in Greece. They came to the special Jewish holy day (the Passover). And they wanted to meet Jesus (12:20). There are some wonderful words in John 3:16. 'God loved *the world* so much that he gave his only Son. So, *whoever* believes in him will not die. He or she will have life that goes on forever.'

In John 10, we read about Jesus as the Good Shepherd. [A shepherd is someone who looks after sheep.] Jesus said, 'I give my life for these sheep,' The Jews were these sheep. Then he said 'I have other sheep too They are not in this flock [group] of sheep. I must lead them too. They will listen to my voice. In the future, there will be one flock and one shepherd' (10:16). And Jesus seemed to be referring to people who are not Jews.

The account of Christ's death declares that he was dying for everybody. This is clear, even in the last moments of his earthly life. Across the top of the cross, there was a notice. It declared that Jesus was king. (Read 19:19-22.) They wrote it in three languages. There was the language of the Jews. This was Hebrew or Aramaic. It was the language of religion. There was Latin that was the language of politics. And there was Greek. This was the language of philosophy.

It seems that John was using a final chance to repeat something. It is this. The *Saviour died for all men and women in the world. And his *disciples have a privilege. They can share this good news with other people. In his Easter message, Christ uses some great words. 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you' (20:21).

We must pray. Perhaps we have neighbours who are not Christians. There are people of other religions too. They might be within our culture. Or they might be in other parts of the world. We might have Jewish friends or *Muslim neighbours. We might meet *Hindus or *Buddhists in the shops. Or we might work with people who are *Rastafarians. And it is important for us to put their names in our prayer diaries.

It might not be easy to talk to them about Jesus. But we can always talk to Jesus about them. When we do so, he might give us a chance to help them in some way. And, at the right time, we might be able to speak to them. He is the one who matters most in our lives And we might be able to tell them about him.

We must love. We know and meet people who are not Christians every day. And we must love them, whether they belong to another religion or not. Jesus loved people whatever their response was to his message. He cared very much for the rich young ruler. Jesus felt great pity for him. (Read Mark 10:21.) The young man was not just rich. He was morally good too. But Jesus knew that the young man would turn away from him. His money was his god. But Jesus did not stop loving him because of this. And we must love in the same way that Jesus loved. We must not love people just so that we can get quick results.

Nathanael declared that Jesus was the unique Son of God. This was when he first met with Christ. But it must not be just words. It demands our true love and admiration for him. It is not just what we believe about him. We must truly worship him, as well as talk about him. [83.3]

Israel's King

[Today, this word refers to the Jewish nation.

Or it can refer to the land of Israel.]

When he first met Jesus, Nathanael declared two things about him. He said that Jesus Christ was his Teacher. And he said that Jesus was God's Son. But Nathanael stated something else too. 'You are the King of Israel' he said (1:49). There is not much more about this subject until the last chapters of John's *gospel. Then we read about an important day. It happened in the city of Jerusalem. Today we call it Palm Sunday. This is because the people threw down branches of palm trees onto the road. And the crowds declared the same thing about Jesus. They called him 'the king of Israel' (12:13, 15).

In Old Testament times, there was a *prophecy that this would happen. (Read Zechariah 9:9-10.) At that time, the Jews had just returned to their own land. They had been in exile for many years. [This means that they had to leave their own land.] And they were eager for security. They wanted things to stay the same. The *prophecy said that the King would be gentle. (He would be riding on a young donkey, not on a horse.) He would be morally good. He would be a king who had overcome the enemy. But he would love peace. He would be the *Saviour of everyone in the world. ('He will rule from sea to sea'.) [77.2]

But John wrote more about the subject of Jesus as King. He did this when he wrote about Jesus' death on the Cross. In this *gospel, we read about Pilate, the Roman governor. [Romans were the people who came from Rome. They ruled the Jews.] Pilate was a coward. He could not make decisions. And, in the end, he condemned Jesus. He chose the words to go on a board. The soldiers put the board above Jesus' head on the cross. Pilate meant the words to be a joke. But he still refused to change them. The title that he chose was 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews' (19:19).

At first, Nathanael had thought that Jesus could not be important. This was because Jesus came from Nazareth. Now, Jesus was dying on a cross. A board reminded

everyone that Jesus came from Nazareth. And other people laughed at Jesus. But they were much worse than Nathanael. They spoke against him with louder voices too. They rejected him totally. Jesus had promised Nathanael that he would see 'greater things' (1:50). These people, at the time of Jesus' death on the cross, had seen the 'greater things'. But they still did not believe. They insulted Jesus, who was the king. They even hated him.

There are three things that only John writes about. They are in his *gospel.

The king's clever question. Pilate questioned Jesus. 'Are you the King of the Jews?' he asked. And Jesus replied with a question. He dared to ask his judge one of life's most serious questions. As the years have passed, it still challenges people today. 'Is that your own idea?' Jesus asked Pilate. 'Or did other people talk to you about me?' (18:34.)

That question from the King also comes to us. And it comes to everyone who wants to be a *disciple. 'Is that your own idea?' Jesus asks us. Or do you have a faith that is not really your own faith? Is it a faith that you have borrowed from other people? Is it a faith that is not personal? Your parents or other people in your church might have taught you about Jesus. And this is good. But Jesus still asks us if our response to the *Gospel is vital and personal. Jesus rules the kingdom of faith.

The king's unique authority. 'My kingdom does not belong to this world...My kingdom comes from another place' (18:36-37). Jesus made something clear to Pilate. Jesus had been travelling around the country. But he was not speaking against the Romans. [They were the people who ruled the Jews at that time.] Pilate was the Roman governor of the land of Judea. And Jesus Christ was saying that Pilate should not be afraid of him.

Jesus Christ did not want to start a revolution. He was starting something that was spiritual. He was going to do something that no human ruler could ever do. He was God's only Son. He had never sinned. But he was going to carry the sins of the whole world in his body (1:29).

Jesus Christ's kingdom is not like the kingdoms that are on earth. These kingdoms depend on political groups. They need to have good finances. And they must have military protection. But Jesus rules the kingdom of heaven. It has members who belong to heaven. God has registered their names there. (Read Hebrews 12:23.) Their values and their ambitions relate to heaven too.

So, Jesus Christ's kingdom 'does not belong to this world'. But his kingdom certainly influences this world. Its message transforms lives. It decides values. It raises standards. And it condemns things that are wrong.

There were some very hard times in the late Century 17. A group of people refused to follow the traditions of the main church. They were called Nonconformists. There was great *persecution. And many of them went to prison because of their faith. They found it hard to understand this time of trouble. And heaven became an immediate experience for them. It was not an event for some time in the future. Christ their king was very real to them. They made a heaven of peace in that hell on earth.

A man called George Hughes went to an island as a prisoner. It was called St Nicholas Island. It was near the port of Plymouth, in England. He wrote to his son, who was

somewhere in the same prison. 'I am well and, best of all, I am in heaven. I am happy with the will of God, which will bring us to glory (heaven).'

One of their leaders was John Howe. He said, 'It will never be well until our souls are a heaven to us. Behave as a citizen of a better country.' And Matthew Henry loved to quote his father Philip. He spoke about 'All who want to go to heaven when they die.' He said that they 'must begin their heaven while they live.' That is just the kind of thing that Jesus was saying. He told Pilate that his kingdom 'did not belong to this world'. Jesus' kingdom was not about escape from the world. It was combining real spiritual things now with constant hope for the future.

The king's purpose. Jesus spoke to Pilate. 'You are right when you say that I am a king. I was born for this reason: to tell people about the truth. That is why I came into the world' (18:37). Jesus, the king, had described his kingdom in a negative way. He said that it 'did not belong to this world'. Now he explained it in a positive way. It is the kingdom of truth.

Jesus spoke to his human judge. 'Everyone on the side of truth listens to me,' he said. In that moment, Pilate had to make a decision. He had to decide if he agreed with Jesus or if he was against Jesus. He could commit himself to Jesus. But he avoided it by a silly remark. 'What is truth?' he joked. His chance had gone. And it was not likely to return.

Nathanael's Teacher wanted him to obey. God's Son demanded that he worship him. Israel's king deserved his service. When he first met Jesus, Nathanael's words were important. He was saying that Christ could have the whole of his life. And Christ could use his life in whatever way that he felt was right. This meant that he was committing himself totally to Christ. Because he was his king, Christ had the right to rule him.

In the last part of Century 19, a famous *preacher came to England from America. His name was D. L. Moody. There was a young man who showed people where to sit at the meetings. His name was F. W. Boreham. He became a famous writer. And, when he was older, he described those meetings. There was one thing that he remembered most. It was the way that Moody ended the meetings. He would invite people to declare in public that they wanted to follow Christ. 'Who will trust the *Saviour here and now?' he would ask. 'If you will, stand up and say so! Jump to your feet and call out, "I will!" '

This was a bold thing to ask. And it needed courage to do it. But people responded every night. 'The response was sometimes like sudden thunder,' Boreham said. 'It caused great excitement.'

And it was this habit of Mr Moody's that was the reason for a popular hymn (song). Some of the words were:

And now, O Lord, help all who are with us today,
To join our song
And from the heart to gladly with us say:
I WILL to Christ belong.
I will! I will! I will! I will!
I will, with God's help, I will O Lord, be yours.'

[Note: This is a translation. So the words are not exactly the same as the author wrote them.]

Nathanael made his own public response to Jesus. And that was the day when he said 'I will' for himself. He confirmed three things. He was willing to learn. He was eager to worship. And he was ready to serve. Jesus Christ was his Teacher, his God and his King. Christ had this *disciple's total loyalty.

But the Lord Jesus Christ did even more for Nathanael. Jesus made him think about other things. There were important things that were not just about Nathanael. 'You shall see greater things,' said Jesus. When he wrote this *gospel, John said, 'Jesus then added, "I tell you the truth. You will see heaven open. And you will see the angels of God. They will be going up and coming down on the Son of Man"' What Jesus 'added' was most important. And we must look at his words more closely in the next chapter.

WORD LIST
[Meanings of difficult words]
In the text there is a * before such words

- baptise** A Greek word. It is a ceremony. (Baptism is the name for the ceremony.) It means to put a person in water or under water for a brief time. Read Mark 1:4-11 and Romans 6:3-8. These verses explain how it became a Christian ceremony.
- Buddhist** A person whose religion is Buddhism. The Buddha started it. He lived in India in century 6 BC (Before Christ was born). He taught about the way to end suffering. And the way to do this was to overcome your desires.
- disciple** A person who follows a leader. It could refer to the student of a teacher. It especially refers to the 12 men whom Jesus chose. It is also a person who follows Jesus today.
- gospel** Good News. It refers to all that God has done. It is about all that God is doing. It is also about all that God will do because of Jesus. The first four books of the New Testament are called 'The Gospels'.
- Hindu** A person whose religion is Hinduism. The religion started in India. Hindus have many gods. They believe that people have another life on earth after death.
- Islam** The religion of *Muslims (or Moslems). Islam teaches that there is only one god, Allah. And Mohammed is his *prophet. The Koran is their holy book.
- Messiah** Lord Jesus Christ. It is a Hebrew word 'meshiah'. The same word in Greek is 'Christos', Christ. God promised the Jews that the Messiah would save them. We read about him in the Old Testament. Then, Jesus came. But the Jews did not believe in him (John 1:11). And the nation is still waiting for the Messiah to come.

- Muslim** Moslem is another way to spell this word. It refers to a person who believes in *Islam.
- persecution** Cruel and unfair behaviour against other people.
People can behave like this if they believe different things. People can hurt God's children because they believe in the Lord Jesus. And they want to follow him.
- prophecy** A special message from God. It would often tell about the future. It is also one of the special gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians chapters 12–14).
- prophet** A person whom God chose. Then God gave special messages to that person. The messages could be for an individual, or for a group of people or for a nation. The prophet would hear God's words and tell them to the people. In Old Testament times, a prophet often wrote down these messages. And the Jews still call a group of books 'The Prophets'. These books are also part of our Bible.
- Rastafarian** A member of a religious group that started in Jamaica. They said that Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia was the *Messiah. And black people are the ones whom God has chosen.
- salvation** This is what happens when someone rescues a person. It could be from sin or from danger. The Hebrew word is 'yasha'. The Old Testament uses it 353 times. People may be in trouble or in danger. And someone rescues them or saves them. This could be God or it could be a person. In the New Testament, the word relates to salvation from sin and from its results. Salvation is past, present and future (2 Corinthians 1:10).
- Saviour** This is another name for Jesus. The word means 'One who saves'. Jesus is the only one who can save people from their sin. And he could do this because he died on the cross.

BE MY DISCIPLE

Jesus says 'Trust me and obey me. Learn from me.
Follow me in a world that does not care about me.'
That is what it means to be a disciple.

8. HEAVEN IS OPEN

Jesus knew that Nathanael meant what he said about him. [Read John 1:49.] But Jesus knew something else. It was this. Nathanael did not really understand the meaning of his words. The Lord Jesus looked at him. Then he spoke to him. 'I saw you under the fig (fruit) tree. And you believe because I told you that. But you shall see greater things than that' (1:50).

Nathanael had declared that Jesus Christ was unique. And he did this in public. It was because Jesus had revealed something to him about himself. Now, the Lord Jesus told his new *disciple something else. It was something that was 'greater'. It was not only what Jesus knew about Nathanael. It was what Nathanael could know about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus then looked at the other people who were standing there. And he spoke to them *all*. 'I tell you the truth. You shall (all) see heaven open. You shall (all) see the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man' [1:50].

This word picture of a heaven that is open was unusual. Jesus was declaring four important things. And these things were not only for Nathanael. (His name meant 'God has given'.) These things were for every Christian *disciple. Jesus was stating what 'God has given' to every man and woman. He has given four of life's 'greater things'. And these things are in the message about heaven that is open. The four things are • Heaven is secure. • God reveals truth. • God welcomes sinners. • Honour and praise comes to Jesus.

Heaven is secure

'You shall see heaven open...'. Jesus was doing two things. He was pointing away from this world to the next world. And he was pointing away from the present life to the life that was to come. Jesus often taught about this truth. And John deliberately put it at the beginning of this *gospel. The Gospel is not only about our life now. It is also about the future that God has prepared for us. John emphasised two parts of that truth in his book. Heaven is a present possession. And it is a certain future. Heaven can begin *now*. And it will be better *then*.

First, heaven can begin *now*.

The *Gospel is God's offer of 'life that is for ever'. And John's gospel emphasises two things about this 'life that is for ever'. It is not just 'life that comes after death'. It is a quality of life. And it begins here and now, in this life. Notice how Jesus explained this message of 'life that is for ever'. First, it is a present possession. It is:

A Life that completely changes. This 'life that is for ever' does not start when we die. Christ died for us. And it begins at the moment when we put our trust in him. Jesus made that very clear. He said 'I am telling you the truth. Everyone who hears my words should believe the Father (God). He sent me. The person who believes has life that is for ever. God will not condemn that person. They were dead, but now they have become alive.' (5:24). So, life completely changes. This does not happen at death. It happens at the moment when that person truly believes.

A Life that never ends. It will last forever. Jesus wanted to share 'things from heaven' with Nicodemus (3:12). And this was probably one of them. Jesus wanted to assure him. So he spoke about those who believe in him. Their lives would never end. They would have life forever (3:16).

Jesus reminded Nicodemus about God's people, the Jews. It happened when they were in the desert. God gave them special food every day. The people called it manna. [Read Exodus 16.] But they still died in the desert. Christ is 'the bread that gives life' (6:35). And those who receive him will never die forever. They may have experience of physical death. (This will happen unless Christ comes again before that.) But they will never have experience of death that is forever. They will never be apart from God. (Read 6:48-51)

A Life that knows that God has forgiven. People who trust Christ know that they have sinned. But he is their Saviour (one who saves) from sin and from its results. God says that they are guilty. But he pardons them because of his love, his pity and his kindness (3:17).

Then there is a contrast. Christ offers 'life that is for ever'. But many people refuse this offer. Their sin is the most serious of all sins. And God, who is their judge, must condemn them. It is much more serious than to steal or to murder. It is more serious than sexual sins or any other sins. To continue to reject Christ deliberately is the most terrible sin. 'Whoever rejects the Son will not see life. This is because God's anger remains on him' (3:36).

A life without doubts. Nobody needs to doubt. Each one who believes possesses this life. Jesus said it clearly. 'Whoever believes in the Son *has* life. It is life that is for ever' (3:36). Christ's teaching about this truth is clear in this *gospel.

A life that satisfies. On one occasion, the people asked Jesus to do another *miracle. They thought that it might persuade them that Jesus really was the *Messiah. Jesus had just fed a huge crowd of people. He had used one young boy's small meal. But the people wanted to have more evidence that he was unique. Jesus knew that this would not happen. They would not believe, even if he did many *miracles.

People were telling some stories about the *Messiah. When he came, he would produce bread from heaven. It would be like the time of Moses, when God's people were in the desert. [You can read about this in Exodus 16.] The crowds knew about these stories. But Jesus said that the special food (manna) in the desert was like a picture. It was showing the 'food that was for ever'. They would receive it from him. 'I am the bread that gives life. The person who comes to me will never be hungry. The person who believes in me will never be thirsty' (6:35).

A life that is secure. Jesus spoke about certain people. They have God's gift of 'life that is for ever'. He said that they are safe forever and they are secure forever. It is impossible for them to be lost. 'God is the one who sent me. He gave each one of them to me. He does not want me to lose one of them. And I will raise up all of them at the last day.' (Read John 6:39 and 44.)

Jesus said these amazing things. He showed that they were true. This life is what the *believer has in this present life. The believer can enjoy this special life now. He or she can be secure in this present world. This is what it means to have 'life that is forever'.

Second, heaven will be better *then*. At the time, Jesus' death was going to happen soon. And Jesus was talking to his *disciples about his death. His death would result in danger for them. But he also told them about a special place. He was going to prepare it for them (and us) in heaven. (Read John 14:1-2.)

Jesus was telling his followers something that is important. The moment would come for his arrest. He would die on a cross. Everything would seem very miserable. And they might feel great despair. At that time, they must '*keep on believing* in God'. (That is the force of the verb in this verse.) They must keep on believing that God is *sovereign. God was working out his great plan of *salvation. And he was doing this even through the awful events of the day that Jesus died. (That day is usually called Good Friday.)

There are two great truths. All that we see and all that we hear might seem to be against them. There is the truth that Jesus is God. And the truth about his work to save us from our sins. But Jesus said '*Keep on believing* in me.'

The physical part of his death would shock his followers. It would upset them very much. And the spiritual part would confuse them. It would be hard for them to understand. But he wanted his followers to *keep on believing*. His death would fulfil God's purposes to save them. And he would be going ahead of them. He would be going into that safe place where time has ended. He would be preparing it for his followers. It is for all who trust him to be their *Saviour and their Lord. [Read John 14:1-3.]

In all the centuries, Christian *believers have rejoiced about this great truth. Heaven is open for them. It is open because of what Jesus did for them on the Cross. Two special days followed his death. There was Easter Day, when Jesus became alive again. And there was Ascension Day, when he went back to heaven. These days mean something special. They mean that Jesus has opened heaven for us. And that heaven is forever. It will be such a great time. It will happen when we die physically. Then we will go to be with our Lord forever.

Any Christian may have times when heaven does not seem to be real. So we must remember something important. It was the time when Jesus spoke about heaven. It was not during times of public success. It was when bad times were near. Jesus said confidently that heaven was certain. He was going to die soon. But Jesus urged his followers to *keep on believing* in him.

The chapter divisions in the Bible sometimes hide the situation at the time. It is like this with the first verses of John 14. The words are familiar. And they give us confidence. But we need to think about what was happening at the time. Jesus talked about our home

that is in heaven. It was when he was going to die on the cross soon. But he could look beyond the experience of death. He would become alive again. And he would enter heaven for us.

Everything about his death meant so much sadness. Jesus had just said something awful. One of his followers would not be loyal. He would actually help Jesus' enemies. Of course, this would '*upset*' Jesus 'in his spirit' (13:21). Jesus used the same word earlier. He was talking about his death on the cross for us all. He said 'Now this *upsets* my heart (12:27).

John also used the word in this *gospel at another time. He was describing the emotional reaction of Jesus. Jesus was with two people whose brother had died. 'He felt very sad in his heart. It *upset* him very much' (11:33). Then, Jesus said the same word to his *disciples. It was about their death as well as his death. 'Do not let this *upset* your hearts...keep on believing in me' (14:1).

Think about the world as it was in Century 1. People took this *gospel of John to all the different churches. Its readers knew that they too might have a terrible death. Jesus had warned his followers about this. People would persecute [behave badly towards] Jesus. And the same thing would happen to his followers. They must not think that they would escape. (Read John 15:18-20; 16:2-4, 33.)

The last part of John's *gospel gives an example of this. Jesus told Peter what would happen to him in the future. When he was old, he would die because he was a Christian. People would carry him where he did not want to go. They would take him to the place where they would kill him. (Read 21:18-19.) But Peter could be certain of something. It was this. There would be a safe place in heaven for him. The Lord of Life would be waiting there to welcome him home. And it would be the same for every *disciple.

Usually, people do not even want to mention the subject of death. If anyone speaks about it, others will not like it. They will say that it depresses them. But it should not be like this for Christians. They should truly believe the message of Jesus. Then they will not be afraid of death. They will remember how Jesus talked about death. It is not like the last stop in a journey. It is a change. Death is not an end that we should fear. It is a wonderful new beginning.

There was a famous preacher. [This means that he declared God's word in public.] His name was F. B. Meyer. A few days before his death, he sent a card in the post. It was to another famous speaker called Lindsay Glegg. His hand was shaking as he wrote. 'I have raced you to heaven. I am just going. I will see you there. Love, F. B. Meyer.'

God gives this confidence. Jesus promised things about the life that is to come. And what he said was for those who '*keep on believing*'. Jesus said 'I am ...the truth' (14:6). He told Nathanael that he would see heaven open. So there must be such a place. Jesus was describing something more than the clouds. He was telling his new *disciple about a life beyond this one. And it would be a better life too.

But there is more. The message about a heaven that is open shows something else too.

God reveals truth

The Jewish rabbis [teachers] said that heaven was 'open'. They sometimes used the words to explain an idea. It was like a picture. God opened the heavens so that he could share truth with them. They worshipped a 'God in heaven who reveals mysteries.' (Read Daniel 2:28.) The rabbis believed that God was pleased to explain his message. But he would only do this for certain people. People who wanted to hear and to understand his message would do so.

Jesus may have been saying something more. Nathanael had just understood a great truth. It was that Jesus knew all about him. But he would gradually understand something that was greater. There would be more great truths from the Bible. And God would help him to apply these things to his life. This would continue to happen for all *disciples in every century. God's truth had come to Philip through Moses and the *prophets. And these truths would be very clear to Nathanael too.

This has happened to Christ's *disciples in every century. As they have read the Bible, God seems to have opened heaven for them. God has shown them clearly some great truth. And that truth has changed their lives. It was like that for Luther in century 16. He described how God 'opened heaven' for him. It was his experience of how God revealed truth to him. It was at a time when he was feeling great despair. He read from Paul's letter to the Romans. [This is in our New Testament. It is the second main section of the Bible.]

At first, Luther recognised the truth about himself. And this made him sad. But then he understood the truth about God's gift. He could be right with God. And that truth healed him. He felt as if he had entered 'paradise [heaven] itself'. Heaven was open.

I was a monk. [He belonged to a religious community.] I lived a very good life. But I still felt that God would think that I was a sinner. I had a very bad conscience. I might feel that I had done all that I could. But I could not believe that God would stop being angry with me. I did not love the holy God who punished sinners. In fact, I hated him. I was angry with God. ...

I thought carefully about this matter by day and by night. And, at last, by the *mercy of God, I gave my full attention to all the words of the Bible passage. 'The person who is right with God by faith will live forever' (1:17b). I began to understand. 'The Gospel (Good News) is the power that God uses to save every person who believes' (1:17). The God of *mercy makes us right with himself. It is not something that we must do. He does it, when we trust in him.

Here I felt that I was completely born again. I had entered paradise (heaven) itself through gates that were open.'

Luther then understood more about other passages in the Bible. They did not just describe God's nature and his qualities. In the same places, the Bible clearly showed God's work in us. For example, there was 'the power of God, with which he makes us strong.' And there was 'the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise.' [Read 1 Corinthians 1:18, 24, 30; 2:13; Romans 1:16; Ephesians 1:17; Colossians 1:9, 28.]

You can read more about what Luther wrote. (Luther, Preface to Latin Writings, 1545, in John Dillenberger ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from his writings*, Anchor Books, New York 1961, 11.)

John's *gospel emphasises the importance of truth. Christ is the truth for the world (1:14; 14:6). He brought the truth to the world (1:17; 18:37). And he speaks the truth in the world (1:51; 3:3; 5:19). He describes the Spirit of truth (15:26). And he sends the Spirit of truth (15:26). The truth will make people free (8:32). And the truth makes people ready to serve God (17:17).

This word is necessary for our times. People challenge authority. They laugh at faith. They make their standards lower. They ignore moral principles. And they despise strong beliefs. They quickly reject Christian truth. To them it is something that existed long ago. It is not relevant to them in any way.

This does not happen only in the Christian tradition. And it is not just in Britain. The Chief Rabbi (Jewish teacher) tells us the same thing about America. Officials studied the beliefs of American Jews. There was a statement. It said, 'To be a good Jew one must believe in God.' And two-thirds of those Jews *disagreed* with it. For such people, to be a Jew had no connection with their Scriptures. [This is our Old Testament. It is the first part of the Bible.]

Many people say that they are Christians. But they are the same as the people in the study. They do not think that the New Testament has any meaning for them. [This is the second main part of the Bible]. The label 'Christian' has nothing similar to its origins. This label just lets people know that they belong to a main religion.

This makes it even more important for true Christians today. We need to share Christian truth. And we must do this with loyalty and with love. Our neighbours do not understand what Christians really believe. Television discussions and newspaper reports do not help. They might suggest that Christians do not believe in anything very much.

These are times when very many people do not know about spiritual things. We want heaven to be 'open' for the people we meet every day. So Christians must 'open' themselves with true sympathy. Believers must realise that these people will be without Christ forever. We must 'open' our lips without fear. Then people who do not believe will at least know certain things. They will know what God thinks about people who do not care. They will know what it means to be a Christian. It is a *miracle. And they will know why Christ died to make that *miracle possible.

God welcomes sinners

So, there was another part of vital truth about 'greater things'. And Jesus shared it with Nathanael on that day. It was the special message that was for all *disciples. And it still is for all disciples. They must first accept it for themselves. Then they must share it eagerly with other people. The message is this. God will forgive sinful men and women forever.

Centuries before this time, Jacob had a *vision. You can read about this in Genesis 28:10-17. We are sure that God meant to comfort Jacob. What Jacob had done was very bad. It was a serious sin. But this had not separated him from God's sympathy and pity. The dream showed a ladder that went up to God. The way was open into the

presence of God. And he was a God of *mercy. We might wonder why the angels were so important in the dream. The word 'angel' just means 'messenger', one who takes a message.

An angel was coming down the ladder. He brought a message to Jacob from God. God was showing Jacob that he was generous. God would forgive him. And God hoped that an angel would go up the ladder with a message one day. It would be a prayer from Jacob. He would tell God that he was truly sorry. Because of his sin, Jacob had offended God. He had made his father very sad. And he had made his brother into an enemy. But the way was still open into the presence of God. And he was a God of love.

So this was what Jesus was telling Nathanael. He knew about Jacob's *vision. But he would see something much greater than that. The angels were affecting the life of one man, Jacob. But Christ would make access to God possible for everyone. Anyone in the world who truly believes can come to God. This is a much 'greater thing'. There can be communication between heaven and earth.

God sent Jesus to give an important message. Jacob, who was a sinner, deceived people. But he saw 'the ladder that rested on the ground.' And he saw 'its top that reached up into heaven.' As the centuries went by, millions of other people would realise the same truth. They, too, can go to heaven. And it will be because of Christ's death on the cross for them.

God will welcome sinners. And he will forgive them. The ladder that was in Jacob's *vision becomes a much greater reality. Jesus our *Saviour, became like that ladder. The angels of God would 'go up and come down on the Son of Man'. (Read John 1:51.) By him only, men and women can come to God. Jacob plotted and deceived. He was a cruel thief. He was certainly not honest. And he ran away. But God forgave Jacob. So, if God could forgive him, then he will forgive anyone.

There is a great old hymn (Christian song). It is called 'Beneath the Cross of Jesus.' Elizabeth Clephane wrote it. One verse is about Jacob's dream. And it ends with these words.

'So seems my Saviour's cross to me
A ladder up to heaven.'

In his *gospel, John described Jesus. He called him 'the Lamb of God'. And John says that Jesus 'takes away the sin of the world' (1:29). God will forgive the sins of anybody in 'the world'. Christ's death on the cross was necessary for everyone. So nobody needs to feel that he or she is too bad. And nobody dares to feel that he or she is too good. Everyone needs to know that God forgives him or her. When Jesus Christ died, he would 'bring all people to' himself (12:32). And that includes everyone.

We can read about this in several parts of John's *gospel. There was the woman who had bad morals. She came from the land of Samaria. Jews did not want to have any communication with the people from there. They were called Samaritans. Even her own people kept away from this woman. They all knew about her sin. But Jesus forgave her. (Read 4:16-17, 29.)

Later in the *gospel, Jesus forgave a Jewish sinner. She chose not to obey the Law of Moses. That Law said that she should die. [Read Leviticus 20:1.] But God's *grace said that she could live. The people who were around her blamed her in a cruel way. They were ready to kill her for her sexual sin. But Jesus forgave her. And he told her to leave her 'life of sin' (8:11). The Light of the World had shone into the dark places of her sinful life. And she determined not to 'walk in darkness', but to have 'the light of life' (8:12).

People who had obviously bad morals needed Christ to forgive them. But it was not just people like them. His best *disciples needed Christ to forgive them too. There was pride (13:8). Peter thought that he was better than others were. He spoke words that did not mean anything (13:37). He acted quickly in anger (18:10). They were awful cowards (18:15-18, 25-27). And Thomas had doubts (20:24-27). The other *disciples had doubts too. Then they believed that Jesus was alive. But Thomas still separated himself from them.

But Jesus Christ forgave the *disciples for all this and for much more. They too knew that heaven was open for them. And, after that experience, Christ sent them out with a message. He would forgive others too. And he gave the disciples his authority to declare this truth. He had become alive again. And he had given them a promise that would not change (20:23).

Men and women have thanked God for an open heaven. And it has been like this in every century. There was a man called George Fox. He lived from 1624 to 1691. When he was a young man, he was very aware of his sin. So he went to many ministers [priests]. But he said that 'they were all miserable comforters' [people who comfort]. But a day came when he, too, had a *vision of an open heaven.

At another time, I saw the great love of God. And I was full of admiration. God's love had no limit and it had no end. And then I saw what entered into God's kingdom. Jesus did it. He opened the door with heaven's key. My faith seemed to come alive. I understood that Christ, the life, had done it all. And my trust was in him.

Fox realised something important. It was this. Jesus in heaven is 'the one who opens the door'. To 'see' him causes us to look away from anything that is on earth. Nothing that is on earth could be the way for us to get *salvation. So, the 'greater things' include the open heaven of our salvation. We should look up to that heaven. Then we are looking away from ourselves.

Like Fox, we must realise certain things. We cannot get *salvation by our own efforts in this world. We cannot get it by trying hard to live a good moral life. And we cannot get it by our religious achievements. But these things cannot change people. And if we want Jesus to change us, we must accept this. Jacob cheated. And he was not honest. Nathanael was proud. And he thought that nobody was honest or unselfish. But these men could not change themselves by their own efforts. And it is the same for us. We probably want to be in heaven forever. So we must trust Christ now. We must put our hope in Christ only.

People in our world have made a great mistake. They are looking somewhere else for *salvation. But this is not what we need. We seem to have all the resources that we need to improve ourselves. But this idea is false. We cannot continue to believe it.

Experts say that there has been only one peaceful day since the end of the Second World War. So, through all the years, there has been much violence. And terrible behaviour has destroyed the peace. This has been happening in some part of the world. And there has been only one day when it has not been like this.

Every year there are some famous Talks. They are called the Reith Lectures. In 1990, Jonathan Sacks, [a Jew], was the speaker. He spoke about people who think that they can make themselves perfect. And he said that this was 'the greatest illusion of modern times.' ['Illusion' means that it seems to be true. But it is false.] But we thought that we were better than anyone else was. People thought that they did not need God. They can manage so very well on their own.

Sacks noticed something. It was about the time just after the Second World War (from 1945). People really believed certain things. 'Science would solve the mysteries of nature. So technology would profit. People would not believe in magic and luck. Instead, they would use their reason. People would be fair to other people. They might not agree with their views. But they would still accept them. Everybody would be involved in the modern society. And they would all be equal. Officials would not make people do what they thought was best for them. People would be free to make their own choices. '

But, said Jonathan Sacks, 'ideas changed. It happened at some period in the 1960s. People began to express great doubts. Technology had given us the power to destroy life on earth. Financial systems had grown. But they were destroying nature. The leaders of the modern state had power. They could rule in a cruel and an unfair way. The state could organise worse violence than ever before. Feelings of hatred and anger between the races had not disappeared. They caused the deaths of many in the ovens of Auschwitz. [This was one of the terrible prison camps of World War 2.]

The result of revolution was never a perfect world. People could buy and sell products freely. But this just made rich people richer. And it made poor people poorer. In a city that did not have any religion, many people had no homes. And there was violence. People wanted to do things in their own way. And this made it hard to have any relationships.'

There was a man called Robert Bellah. He described things well. He said that 'progress is the modern world's great idea. But it seems that it may be progress that leads into the abyss. And that does not convince us that it is such a good thing.' [Note: An 'abyss' is a very deep hole.]

Jesus showed a different way. His way led away from the 'abyss' (very deep hole). It led to the things that are 'above'. Philip discovered truth that came from above (1:45). Nathanael found *grace that came from above. Nicodemus heard about life that came from above (3:3). The crowds heard about three things that came from above. There was food (5:32-35). There was light (8:12). There was hope (11:25-26). Also, Peter needed to be clean from the effects of sin (13:6-10). And Thomas needed faith (20:26-28). These things came from above too.

In this *gospel, John constantly reminded his readers about something. He was speaking to those who really wanted to be different. They must begin by knowing that they could not change themselves. The answers that people gave would mean disappointment. An open heaven was, and still is, the only hope.

There was a famous poet. His name was Francis Thompson. He lived from 1859 -1907. And he reminded us about something important. It is this. Christ is near if only we will look. But, we often do not see him.

Thompson's life had many failures. People expected him to become a priest. And he started his studies. But the church leaders said that this plan did not come from God. So he started to study medicine. But he failed to qualify as a doctor. In 1885, he left his home. He lived in London for three years. And he had no home. He had no money and no possessions, so his needs were great. He also depended on opium (a drug). But he longed to be different.

Later, he described how close this open heaven was. [Remember that this is a translation. So the words are not exactly the same as the author wrote them.]

But (when so sad you cannot be sadder)
Cry, - and upon your great loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Between Heaven and London's Charing Cross.

[Note: Charing Cross is the name of a train station in London, England.]

Jesus receives honour and praise

There is another truth. The open heaven reveals the unique Son of Man. He has gone back up to heaven. And he is receiving the honour and praise that he deserves. It shows a great victory.

We learn certain things by the words 'greater things' (1:50). And these things are at the beginning of this *gospel. Jesus would complete his work on earth. He would bring us *salvation by his death on the cross. He would become alive again. And he would return to heaven. There, he would receive honour and praise. 'You shall see heaven open... and... the Son of Man' (1:51). The truth about *salvation belongs most of all to the 'greater things'. And Nathanael would live to see it happen in Jesus. He had declared that Jesus was God (1:49). And he realised that truth is surely a 'gift of God'.

By these words, Jesus was telling his *disciple something important. He is the 'Son of God', who conquers. Some of the great Psalms (2:7-9) describe him like this. [Note: the Psalms are in the Old Testament, the first part of the Bible.] But he is also the sympathetic 'Son of Man'.

Daniel was a *prophet. God spoke through him when God's people, the Jews, were in a foreign land. It was a very hard time for them. And Daniel described someone who was very powerful. He would defeat all enemies. And he would rule forever. His kingdom would continue forever. (Read Daniel 7:13-14.) But Daniel also described a Man in heaven. He is 'able to sympathise with our weaknesses'. (Read Hebrews 4:15.)

While Jesus did his work on earth, many people would treat him badly. They would • criticise him • insult him • bother him • fail to understand him • make fun of him • reject him • abandon him. But, at the very beginning, Jesus made something clear. He spoke to Nathanael and the others who were standing there. He told them that things would be different one day. And they would all see that day.

Jesus would become the great and the wonderful Lord. All people would give honour to him and praise him. Heaven would be open. And, when men and women in all the world looked up, they would accept him. They would know that he is God. They would receive his truth. And they would be able to use his power.

Then, it seemed that Jesus wanted to show something especially to Nathanael. The 'greater things' were near to him. After Jesus said these words (1:51) we read about Nathanael's home town, Cana (2:1). Cana was a small town in the district of Galilee.

John repeated this information in his *gospel (21:2). And he made sure that we know something more about Cana. It was the place where Christ did his first two 'signs'. [Note: In John's *gospel, a 'sign' is something that we can see. But it is evidence of something that we cannot see.] One sign was when Jesus transformed (changed) the water into wine. And the other sign was when Jesus restored a dead youth. Jesus made him become alive again.

These signs were both *miracles. And they are the main subjects here: Jesus transforms (changes) and Jesus restores. That is how Christ did two things. He 'showed his power and his greatness.' And he gave confidence to those who had begun to follow him (2:11).

Cana was a small community. These people were Nathanael's neighbours. They knew what he believed. Christ was the Son of God. And Christ was the King of the Jews (1:49). It seemed as if Jesus wanted to do two things in the homes of Cana. He wanted to reveal his power and his greatness. And he was encouraging this new *disciple's faith. Heaven was opening already. Jesus was giving the answer to a need. And Jesus was changing lives.

The first 'sign' is in 2:1-11. Jesus changed water into wine. He gave the answer to an obvious need. There was no wine. And there was no way that they could get any more. They were desperate. And Mary came to Jesus, to tell him about the need. Jesus responded in love. But he made something clear to Mary. Whatever he did, a 'greater thing' would soon happen. He said 'My time has not yet come.' But Mary urged the servants to 'do whatever he tells you to do'.

His word would cause the *miracle to happen. 'Fill the pots with water...Now take out some water. And take it to the master of the feast.' That Word was unique and powerful. It had done *miracles at the creation of the universe (1:3). And God was using that same Word again on earth. He was saying something very clearly. The circumstances of life might be • dull • difficult • not what you would expect • embarrassing • causing you to feel upset and angry. But whatever the circumstances were, Christ could deal with them. He could completely change them. He was powerful and he was great.

The second 'sign' is in 4:46-54. It also began with the community at Cana. When John was recording this *gospel, he wanted to put both *miracles together. And it seems that even the place where they happened was important. 'Again he visited Cana in Galilee. It was the place where he had changed the water into wine.'

One of the king's important officials hurried to the town. He came from a place called Capernaum. And he wanted to see Jesus. His son was almost dead. Again, there was no more human help. But the king's official might have used his reason. Jesus was a

man who could change water into wine. So, surely, he could change illness into health. But Jesus did that while he was at the wedding. So Jesus was 20 miles away.

So, the king's official appealed to Jesus. 'Come, before my child dies.' And Christ was eager to respond. There was great human need. And the official had expressed faith. Also, Jesus wanted to show something else that was definite. It was this. It was not essential for Jesus to be there, to do a *miracle. 'The man believed what Jesus told him and went home...And when he returned home, his son was well again. Jesus had said, 'Your son will live.' And the word did the work.

Both *miracles created faith. The first 'sign' at the wedding caused his *disciples to 'put their faith in him'. Then, the king's official returned home. And he discovered that the fever left his son at the very moment when Jesus spoke. So, 'he and all the people in his home believed' (4:53). The second 'sign' caused people with needs to trust in Jesus. They were like Nathanael. They had met the Son of Man.

The circumstances were different. There were happy guests at Cana's marriage feast. And there was a family in Capernaum whose members were suffering very much. They were anxiously caring for a boy who was dying. But, in Christ, God had entered into both homes. Both families had seen heaven open. And life for them would never be the same again. But there was something much more important. It was this. People gave praise and honour to Jesus.

Word List
[Meanings of difficult words]
In the text, there is a * before such words

believer	A person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is someone who belongs to Christ and who follows him every day. This is another name for a true Christian.
disciple	A person who follows a leader. It could refer to a student of a teacher. It especially refers to the 12 men whom Jesus chose. It is also a person who follows Jesus today.
gospel	Good News. It refers to all that God has done. It is about all that God is doing. It is also about all that God will do because of Jesus. The first 4 books of the New Testament are called 'The Gospels'.
grace	Kindness. Grace is when: God gives us what we do not deserve (2 Corinthians 8:9). He saves us (Ephesians 2:1-10; Romans 3; 21-26). He helps us (2 Corinthians 12:8, 9).
mercy	Kindness to someone who does not deserve it. It is a very strong word. There are several meanings in it. There is love and pity. 'To have mercy' also means to forgive sins.
Messiah	Lord Jesus Christ. It is a Hebrew word 'meshiah'. The same word in Greek is 'Christos', Christ. God promised the Jews that the Messiah would save them. We read about him in the Old Testament. Then, Jesus came. But the Jews did not believe in him (John 1:11). And the nation is still waiting for the Messiah to come.

miracle	A wonderful thing that only God could do. It could not happen in a natural way.
prophet	A person whom God chose. Then God gave special messages to that person. The messages could be for an individual, or for a group of people or for a nation. The prophet would hear God's words and tell them to the people. In Old Testament times, a prophet often wrote down these messages. And the Jews still call a group of books 'The Prophets'. These books are also part of our Bible.
salvation	What happens when someone rescues a person from sin or from danger. People may be in trouble or in danger. And someone rescues them or saves them. This could be God or it could be a person. The Hebrew word is 'yasha'. The Old Testament uses it 353 times. In the New Testament, the word relates to salvation from sin and from its results. Salvation is past, present and future (2 Corinthians 1:10).
Saviour	This is another name for Jesus. The word means 'One who saves'. Jesus is the only one who can save people from their sin. And he could do this because he died on the cross.
sovereign	This can relate to a ruler who has all authority and power. But, in the Bible, it usually refers to the fact that God is sovereign. This is God's absolute right to rule everything in the way that he chooses. People cannot force God's choice. And people cannot make a limit to God's choice. God chooses to act in his own way. (Read Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 45:9-19; Romans 9:19-21 and Ephesians 1:11.) Important point: God always does things that fit with who he is. He will never act in any other way. So we can trust him completely.
vision	It is like a dream. But the person is often awake. The person sees things happen, but nobody else can see them. God sometimes gives messages in this way.

BE MY DISCIPLE

Jesus says 'Trust me and obey me. Learn from me.
Follow me in a world that does not care about me.'
That is what it means to be a disciple.

9. ENOUGH BREAD AND EXTRA BREAD

Nathanael had declared that Jesus was the Son of God (1:49). After this, Jesus did 2 *miracles. They were like signs. And he did them in Cana, that was Nathanael's home town. He was encouraging Nathanael's faith in the place where he lived. His friends and neighbours would see the *miracles. And they would know that heaven had opened for him. He was a sincere follower of Jesus. Andrew and Philip both came from Bethsaida (1:44). And Jesus did the same for them, when he reached their region.

John records the story of a special sign. It was when Jesus fed more than 5,000 people (6:1-15). This *miracle happened on 'the far shore of the sea of Galilee'. Luke (9:10-17) tells us the name of the place. It was Bethsaida. And this was the home town of Andrew and of Philip. Only John records that both of these men spoke to Jesus at the time. So, it seems to be important to study this familiar story. There is a purpose for doing this. Six things are like clear pictures of Jesus.

Every *disciple of Jesus must become more aware of how great Jesus Christ is. And nobody can hope to be successful without this. At the end of that special day, Andrew and Philip both saw Jesus in a new way. And they would never forget it. This is important for us too.

We live and work in a society that rejects God. We want to live for Jesus Christ and work for him. But we can only do this if he is more and more real to us. We need to understand him more and more. If we do not, our faith will be weak. And we will not be able to tell people about Christ properly.

Jesus invited Andrew and Peter to be his *disciples. Then Jesus fed thousands of people at Bethsaida. And both disciples discovered six new things about Christ. • He had *compassion • He was *sovereign • He depended on his Father • He was sufficient • He was sympathetic • He submitted himself to God. [Note: These 6 things are still true about Christ today.]

The Christ who had compassion

[Note: This word comes from a Latin word.

It is 'compati'. This means 'to suffer with'.

Christ had pity and sympathy for people who were suffering.]

Jesus was aware of people's needs. And he was ready to help. He saw their physical needs. He understood about their need for things. He knew that their minds needed teaching. And they had spiritual needs too.

First, the Lord was sensitive to the people's **physical needs**. Crowds of people were going to Bethsaida that day. And John tells us the reason why they were following Jesus. They 'saw the *miracles that he did to heal the sick' (6:2).

The people were aware of his great *compassion for all who were sick. It was a large crowd. And the journey must have been a struggle for many of them.

- There would be those who could not walk. They could be in the crowd only because their friends carried them.
- There must have been deaf men and women. People were excited. And they talked about Jesus Christ's *miracles. But the deaf people could not hear what they said.
- There would be dumb people. They knew that Christ could heal them. And they wanted to meet him. But they could not ask how far they might have to go.
- Blind people were feeling their way along the dusty roads. This would not be easy. There were so many travellers. And they were all determined to get to Jesus too.
- Lepers may have been there. They had a serious skin disease. And they would have to keep at a safe distance from everybody else.

John said that the crowds followed Jesus because of his *miracles. John said that because he knew that there were sick people there. People were not just curious about what Jesus had done for other people. They were there because of what he might do for them. It was a long, extremely hot day. They would be very tired. But it would all be worthwhile if Christ could help them.

Matthew told about the same occasion in a different way. Jesus did something before he fed the hungry people. 'He had *compassion on them. And he healed those who were sick'. (Read Matthew 14:14.)

Jesus knows all about our **need for things** too. Jesus was concerned. He saw that the hunger of the vast crowd was increasing. So he asked Philip an important question. 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?' Even healthy people were hungry. There were several thousand people there. And it was impossible for humans to satisfy their need. Only the Christ who had *compassion could do that.

In our world today, there is the huge problem of hunger. And it should matter to every Christian. There are some very sad sights from many parts of the world. Often, we see this on the television. Jesus was very practical in his *compassion. And he would care very much about these people. Two things do not go together for a *believer. One is a love for Christ that remains strong. The other is a lack of care for the millions of hungry people. Jesus Christ loves them. And this should make us feel that we must act.

We can give. And we should do so regularly, if we can. We might be able to donate the money that we would spend for one main meal a week. We must know what is happening in the world. Then we can demand action from governments for specific areas of need.

We should pray. This is what the Lord wants us to do. And we can encourage others to pray too. Perhaps we ought to do something practical. In this way, it would help people to understand these needs. There are Christian organisations. We might offer them some part-time help.

There is Tear Fund, for example. This charity offers a wide variety of different opportunities to serve with it. And it can be in various parts of the world. Some people may be able to work for a few weeks in the holiday season. There are projects like this in

Africa, Asia, Central or South America. There are different jobs. People might build a hospital ward. They might paint a school. Or they might finish a well.

Other people might be able to offer help for a whole year. They would probably have practical skills. It could be in health care, agriculture or the care of forests. They might be engineers. They might be able to organise and to manage. Other trades would be useful too. Many people in the Lord's world are in need. And he might be asking you to share his concern for them.

Jesus was aware of the **needs of people's minds**. The story says that Jesus 'went up on the side of the hill. And he sat down with his *disciples' (6:2). The Jewish rabbi (teacher) always 'sat down' to teach his eager *disciples. This was what a true teacher did at that time. Jesus had chosen a team of learners. And, here, he was going to teach them. Mark says that Jesus 'began to teach them many things' (6:34). And this happened before the *miracle of the meal. Jesus knows that we need more than physical health and food. Our minds also need to have 'food'. We need God's truth. Only that will satisfy life's greatest needs.

This story shows that Jesus knows our **spiritual needs** too. He spoke to the huge crowds (Mark 6:34). And he spoke to the smaller group of *disciples (John 6:3). But he spoke personally to one *disciple too. Jesus had a chance. He could assess Philip's spiritual development. And he could make one disciple become more mature. Jesus wanted to do that because he loved Philip. He wanted him to be at his best in his spiritual life.

Jesus believed that certain things were important. They were • to teach each person.
• to involve himself with specific human needs. • to care for the needs of each person in a sensitive way.

Jesus asked Philip a question. 'Where can we buy bread for all these people to eat?' John tells us that Jesus asked the question 'to test' Philip (6:6). He wanted to know Philip's spiritual progress. Jesus wanted to know how Philip would deal with the need. Philip decided about how many people there were. Then he guessed how much it would cost to provide even a small amount of food. It would use up eight months' wages. And nobody would have that much money with him or her anyway.

So, Philip thought most about the necessary money that they did not have. At least Andrew drew attention to the little food that they did have. But he despaired too. 'That is not nearly enough for so many people.'

Jesus had a reason for asking about food. He wanted his *disciples to understand that they must depend completely on him. They must realise that they themselves could do nothing about it. Only then could they appreciate that Christ was sufficient for it.

In Century 17, there was a man called William Bridge. He belonged to an important Christian group of that time. They were called the Puritans. He wrote some wise words. 'A person might find what he needs in another person. While he does this, he will not come to God. He might have encouragement from somewhere else. But while he does this, his encouragement will not be from the Lord his God.'

Christ made the *disciples understand how great was the problem. Then he allowed them to witness the greatness of Christ. Philip and Andrew might have found the necessary human resources. If they had, the *miracle would not have happened. First, they must accept the facts. They needed a huge amount of food. And they only had a tiny amount that was available. Then they would realise how impossible it was for them. They must have the unique help of Jesus.

But Jesus asked the vital question for a reason. He wanted Philip to understand the real meaning of the problem. And this shows us all something that is vital. It is this. Christ has a great concern for each of us. He cares very much about the spiritual development of each one of us. We should realise our need of him more. Then we will long for him more. And we should reach out to him more. Then we will grow more in our spiritual lives.

So, the first sentences of John's dramatic story are important. They show that Jesus has great *compassion. And he really cares about every part of our lives. He cares about our physical needs, and our need for things. He cares about our mental needs and our spiritual needs.

The Christ who is *sovereign [He has all authority and all power]

Jesus was aware of people's needs. And he was ready to help them. But he controlled circumstances too. John shows this by what Jesus said to Philip about the people's hunger. He asked the question about the bread 'only to test him.' Jesus 'already knew what he planned to do.' Christ completely controlled the situation. And nothing that happened that day was a surprise to him. It was important for the *disciples to realise that.

John's *gospel declares Christ's person, his teaching and his work. John's book clearly shows two facts about the Lord Jesus. He was both man and God. Jesus was fully human. He had to depend completely on the Father. And this was true about everything that he said. And it was true about everything that he did.

But, at the same time, Jesus had qualities that only God could have. His characteristics showed that he was unique, that he was God. And, because he was the unique Son of God, he was aware of his fate. During the years of his work, he spoke about 'that hour' which was coming. It was the time when he would give his life. It would be as a *sacrifice to save us.

At Cana's wedding, he told his mother that his hour had not come yet (2:4). Later, he said the same thing to his brothers. They did not believe that he was God's Son. (Read 7:5-6, 8.) John tells us about two more occasions. When Jesus was in Jerusalem, he was teaching in the *Temple. The people who had authority wanted to arrest him. But they did not succeed. And this was 'because his time had not yet come' (7:30; 8:20).

As God's time for Jesus' fate came closer, he said 'The time has come...' (12:23, 27). At the end, he met with his *disciples. And he 'knew that the time had come. It was time 'for him to leave this world and to go to his Father' (13:1). Then, very near to the end, he prayed a very special prayer. He began by saying, 'Father, the time has come' (17:1).

John showed a *Saviour who had complete control. Nothing just happened to him. He permitted the various events to happen, as the hours went by. Before the start of the special meal, he knew what he was soon going to do. And, at the end, he still had full control.

The crowd, which saw this amazing feast, liked it very much. They began to whisper among themselves. Surely this was the *Messiah, whom God had promised to send. There was a popular story about the Messiah. When he came, he would feed those who were hungry. He would satisfy the needs of those who had nothing.

So the evidence made them act. Large numbers of people moved towards Jesus. He must be the leader whom God had appointed. He would free them from the Romans. [They ruled the Jews at that time.] And the crowd determined to recognise Jesus publicly. But, John wrote, long before they started to approach him, Jesus knew. He knew that they planned to force him to be their king. So he left and went into the hills alone. (Read 6:14.)

So, the Lord had complete control at the beginning of the *miracle. And he still had complete control at the end of the *miracle. Philip and his partners understood that as the weeks and months went by. Later, they thought about the fact that he was *sovereign. Nobody could ever be better than Jesus Christ was.

In all the centuries since then, *believers have been glad about this. They are certain that their lives are in his care. Their *Saviour already knows what he is going to do. When Christ controls their lives, they understand that. Things that happen to them are not just a series of 'accidents.'

We might not always be aware that Christ is working. Even then, he most certainly is working. The circumstances of life vary. But he is there, in some way. He is patiently working out his purposes of love.

Sometimes he tests us, as he tested Philip. Often he encourages us, as he encouraged Andrew. (Read 1:41-42.) He often corrects us, as he corrected Thomas (20:27). And he often forgives us, as he forgave Peter. (Read 21:15-19). In all these situations, he is working. And he is *sovereign. He determines to do the maximum for us. And he determines to bring out the best that is in us.

When people first read John's *gospel, the times were hard. People who had authority arrested *believers. They put them in prison. They tortured them (hurt them physically). They even killed them. (The word that we use is persecution.) But God reassured the *believers, and they were glad. Jesus Christ was in control.

'He already knew what he was going to do.'

These words were important to many Christians in the different centuries. They might feel confused. They might not understand. But they rejoiced that Jesus Christ ruled as king. And they could be confident, whatever might happen. 'He already knew what he was going to do.'

The Christ who depended on his Father

Even though Jesus was *sovereign, he relied on his Father. In a clever way, John shows both these parts of Jesus. He was in complete control. But he chose to commit himself

fully to the Father's will. He chose to depend entirely on the Father's resources. This was true for what he said. It was true for what he did. And it was true for what he had. It was important for their Lord. And it is still important for his *disciples.

In this *gospel, Jesus relied completely on the Father for what he **did**. 'The Son can do nothing by himself. He can only do what he sees that the Father is doing'. (Read 5:19-20, 30.) Everything must be part of the Father's plan for Jesus' life. And Jesus did not want to do anything else. He must do only the things that pleased God. And Jesus insisted about that. Every new ambition must pass that test. There was a specific question. It was this. 'Will my Father get pleasure from what I do in this particular situation?' If the answer was not a clear 'Yes', then Jesus would have rejected the idea. And so should we.

Jesus relied on the Father for what he **said**. 'I do nothing on my own, But I speak just what the Father has taught me' (8:28). 'The Father sent me. He commanded me what to say. And he commanded me how to say it' 12:49). That is impressive.

Jesus knew an important fact about communication. It is this. How we say things is important. It is just as important as what we say. We might intend to speak well. We might have the truth of the matter in our minds. But we could still fail because we spoil it. Our motives could be wrong. We might say it in an unfriendly way. We might not have an attitude of love. Or we might even spoil it because we use careless words. The ideas might be right, but the words are awkward.

Jesus depended on the Father for what he **had**. Jesus held the little boy's tiny meal in his hands. He was *sovereign. But he gave thanks for the little bit of food. His prayer showed that he was grateful to his Father for it. And he knew something. If it pleased God, he would increase the amount. And God certainly did do that.

The story made something very clear. It was this. Human provisions were not nearly enough. The Lord Jesus relied completely on the Father's resources. Look at what was available to these humans. There was a group of *disciples who felt despair. They completely agreed with Andrew and Philip. 'Eight months' wages would not buy enough.'... 'That is not enough for each one to have a bite.' (6:7)

A very young boy stood beside them (6:9). The word that John used to describe him is important. He used Greek, the main language of that time. People used the word *pais* to describe a youth. They used the word *paidion* for a boy. And they used *paidarion* for a small boy. And that very young boy (*paidarion*) had only enough food for himself.

John did all that he could to make it clear how small the amount was. 'Here are five *small* loaves and two *small* fish.' And the bread was 'barley bread'. Barley grain was cheaper. It was what poor people would use. People with only a little more money would use wheat grain. So this little boy certainly did not come from a rich home.

So the emphasis was deliberate here. Human resources were not nearly enough. But they were in the hands of a grateful Lord. And he always looked to his Father who was in heaven. His Father would provide enough bread for each new day. That was how Jesus taught his *disciples to pray. (Read Luke 11:3). And that is how he expected them to live. They must rely completely on a generous God.

The Christ who is sufficient

Jesus did much more than anyone could expect. He provided more than they could possibly eat. He gave generously. And John made this clear. Jesus gave them 'as much as they wanted'. 'They all had enough to eat.'

Jesus always gives us more than we need. He offers not just life, but the very best life. (Read John 10:10). He promises not just peace. His 'peace is so great that we cannot understand it.' (Read Philippians 4:7). We could never fully describe his love. 'His love is greater than any person can ever know.' (Read Ephesians 3:19.) His resources are great and have no limits. (Read Ephesians 3:16.) His power is superior. It is much greater than any other power. (Read 2 Corinthians 4:7.) His *grace is all that you need. (Read 2 Corinthians 12:9.)

In this *gospel Jesus is generous. He provided plenty of what people needed. Think about the wedding feast. The pots for water were full to the top (2:7, 8). The wine was splashing over, on to the floor. Jesus wanted to satisfy people's needs. And he would do it generously. He was going to feed hungry people in Bethsaida.. So there must be plenty for everyone who was there. And there must be enough for those who were not there.

The Christ who is sympathetic

Jesus cared about other people. He was pleased when the hungry people enjoyed their meal. But he was already thinking about some other people. They were not sitting on the grassy slope of the hill. There were hungry people in the villages that surrounded the hill. Jesus wanted to satisfy their needs too. 'Gather the pieces of fish and bread that remain. Do not waste anything.'

The *disciples borrowed 12 tall baskets from some nearby homes. And, for the rest of the day, the disciples and other people were busy. They distributed the food to those who had not been able to follow Jesus to Bethsaida. We live in a very different world today. But this action tells us some things.

It tells us that Jesus does not like waste. Those words, 'Do not waste anything' are important. Every Christian should write them on a small card and put them in the kitchen. Millions of people who are in the world starve to death every year. But some *believers take much more than they can eat. They buy that which they are not likely to use. And this should disgust us.

The world's hungry people must be content with tiny bits of food. And, often, these bits are not good enough to eat. At the same time, some of the world's rich people have problems. They are too fat because they eat too much. They drink too much alcohol. They smoke cigarettes. And all these things can cause many physical problems. The way that Christians live their lives needs regular checks. And the words of Jesus give that check. 'Do not waste anything'.

Jesus hates poverty. Many poor people were in the region of Galilee that day. And Jesus really cared about them. It makes him very sad when Christians today do not care. Many of them have no interest in the needs of poor people. And people who do not have homes or other necessary things do not matter to them. But Christ would have helped these people first. That is why he sent the pieces of bread into the villages.

Yet, in our world, 250,000 children will become permanently blind this year. And it will happen just because of the lack of two things. One lack is some vitamin A. And the other lack is a daily handful of green vegetables. People can become blind just because they are poor. The sympathetic Christ must be saying something to his followers about this.

Each year 230,000 children get the terrible disease of polio. And this is because they do not get a simple treatment. [It is just some drops that go on the tongue.] This treatment has almost removed the disease from Western society. Our Lord and *Saviour loved disabled people. So we know that he would be sympathetic. He would care about them today.

[Note: The information above came from a Report in 1989. So this number of children could be much more today.]

Every year, 14 million children die from two causes. And they are both unnecessary. The causes are common illnesses and a lack of good food. Some simple and cheap methods could save most of the children. Two and a half million children die from dehydration. [This is when they do not have enough water in their bodies.] A mixture of 8 parts of sugar and one part of salt in clean water could save their lives. While he was on earth, Jesus often lifted up very young children in his arms. So he must care very much about the tears of those mothers. They cry because there is no hope for their children.

In the next 24 hours, more than a thousand young women will die. Something will go wrong at the birth of a child. And this will continue while certain things happen: • Boys get the healthiest food, rather than girls. • Women eat last and eat least. • Women work hardest and longest. • Half of the babies in poorer countries are born where there is no medical help. There, the birth of a baby will remain dangerous. It is 150 times more dangerous than it is in the West.

Large numbers of people who are hungry and who suffer are Christians. Millions (195,000,000) of our brothers and sisters live in absolute poverty. So the message of the story of the 12 baskets is very relevant. Jesus did not neglect those who had such great needs. So, we should not neglect them either.

[Note: These are just a few very sad facts that were true in 1989. Again, things could be much worse today.]

The Christ who submitted himself to God

Jesus pleased God. John's account of the story adds a detail. It is not in the other 3 Gospels. It happened at the end of the *miracle of the meal. Some people who were in the crowd spoke. They said, 'Surely, this is the *Prophet who will come into the world.' [Deuteronomy 18:15-19 explains this.] For the Jews, this Prophet would be their *Messiah. And they moved closer to him. They wanted to make Jesus into their king. Here was a *Saviour who did *miracles. So they thought that Jesus would get rid of their enemy, the Romans, for them.

But Jesus knew that this was not his fate. He must first be king of people's thoughts and desires. Only then could he be king over their lives. So Jesus went away as quickly as he could. Some older documents make this clear. They say that he escaped or ran away into the mountains.

Perhaps this was the most dangerous moment in his life. At the beginning of his work, the devil tempted him. He offered to give Jesus all the kingdoms that are in the world.

But Jesus deliberately refused to be that kind of king. Now, people who admired him were making the same offer. But his enemy was still there. The devil was trying to turn him away from his main work. Jesus' main work was to die. This was the only way that he could save us from our sin.

While the devil was tempting him, Jesus climbed up into the mountains. And he did it on purpose. He left the place where men and women wanted to control him. They wanted to use Jesus for their purposes. They were certainly not thinking about God's purposes. The Lord Jesus' action was quick. He would not change it. And it was a deliberate act. He was choosing God's perfect will for his life. And he was saying a definite 'No' to everything that was less than that.

Not long before his journey to Bethsaida, Jesus was in Jerusalem. And he spoke to his enemies there. He told them about his life's greatest ambition. He said 'I do not try to please myself. I want to please him who sent me' (5:30). Later, some Pharisees [religious leaders] came to speak to him. They challenged his authority. And he said the same thing to them. 'I always do what pleases him' (8:29).

Jesus knew what would happen. People would put thorns together to make a crown. And they would make him wear it. [Thorns are sharp things like needles. They grow on some plants.] He must wear that one before he could wear the king's crown. He must suffer and die on the cross first. Only then could he sit on the throne.

Jesus spoke about a grain (seed) of wheat (12:24). The seed would fall to the ground and die. And that must happen before there could be a harvest. His Father had given Jesus a job that he must do. He must die. But his death gives us life. And it completely changes our lives.

How Jesus acted on that hill in Galilee impressed Andrew and Philip in a vital way. The two *disciples said significant things. But they would never forget the things that they saw. • Jesus had *compassion. So they did not need to doubt his love. • Christ was *sovereign. So they did not need to question his wisdom. • Jesus depended on his father. So it was very foolish for them to rely on themselves. • Jesus was sufficient. So they need not fear the future. • Jesus was sympathetic. So they must never ignore the needs of others. • Jesus submitted himself to God. So they too must offer to God all that they had. They must give to him all that they were.

WORD LIST
[Meanings of difficult words]
In the text there is a * before such words

- believer** A person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.
It is someone who belongs to Christ and who follows him every day.
This is another name for a true Christian.
- compassion** This word comes from a Latin word. It is 'compati'. It means 'to suffer with'. Christ had pity and sympathy for people who were suffering.

disciple	A person who follows a leader. It could refer to a student of a teacher. It especially refers to the 12 men whom Jesus chose. It is also a person who follows Jesus today.
gospel	Good News. It refers to all that God has done. It is about all that God is doing. It is also about all that God will do because of Jesus. The first 4 books of the New Testament are called 'The Gospels'.
grace	Kindness. Grace is when: God gives us what we do not deserve (2 Corinthians 8:9). He saves or rescues us (Ephesians 2:1-10; Romans 3; 21-26). He helps us (2 Corinthians 12:8, 9).
Messiah	Lord Jesus Christ. It is a Hebrew word 'meshiah'. The same word in Greek is 'Christos', Christ. God promised the Jews that the Messiah would save or rescue them. We read about him in the Old Testament. Then, Jesus came. But the Jews did not believe in him (John 1:11). And the Jewish nation is still waiting for the Messiah to come.
miracle	A wonderful thing that only God could do. It could not happen in a natural way.
prophet	A person whom God chose. Then God gave special messages to that person. The messages could be for an individual, or for a group of people or for a nation. The prophet would hear God's words and tell them to the people. In Old Testament times, a prophet often wrote down these messages. And the Jews still call a group of books 'The Prophets'. These books are also part of our Bible.
Saviour	This is another name for Jesus. The word means 'One who saves'. Jesus is the only one who can save people from their sin. And he could do this because he died on the cross.
sovereign	This can relate to a ruler who has all authority and power. But, in the Bible, it usually refers to the fact that God is sovereign. This is God's absolute right to rule everything in the way that he chooses. People cannot force God's choice. And people cannot make a limit to God's choice. God chooses to act in his own way. (Read Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 45:9-19; Romans 9:19-21 and Ephesians 1:11.) Important point: God always does things that fit with who he is. He will never act in any other way. So we can trust him completely.
Temple	The Jews' special large church. It was in Jerusalem city. And the enemy destroyed it in AD70. (This was 70 years after the birth of Jesus.) Smaller church buildings for Jews are called synagogues. [Other groups build temples too. They *worship false gods in them.]

BE MY DISCIPLE

Jesus says 'Trust me and obey me. Learn from me.
Follow me in a world that does not care about me.'
That is what it means to be a disciple.

10. DIE IN ORDER TO LIVE

Jesus had fed the great crowd of people. Then John described another occasion. Again, Andrew and Philip appeared together. And you can read the story in John's *gospel, (12:20-33). Jesus taught what it means to be his *disciple. The passage has some of the New Testament's most vital teaching about this subject.

This happened in the first Century. It was in Jerusalem city. But it is still relevant in our world today.

Jesus and his *disciples had gone to Jerusalem. They wanted to attend a special religious event. It was called the *Passover. (Read 12:1-19.) They went early, so that they could stop on the way. About two miles east of Jerusalem, there was a village. It was called Bethany. And Jesus wanted to stay there for a few days with some friends.

There was Lazarus. He had died, but Jesus made him come alive again. And there were his sisters, Martha and Mary. They prepared a meal, to welcome Jesus. And this was the time when Mary did something special. She had a pint of very expensive perfume. It was called nard. Mary poured the perfume on Jesus' feet. And she wiped them with her hair.

Jesus had done a *miracle that had changed their home. And Mary did it because she was so grateful to him.

People knew that someone had made Lazarus come back to life. And they soon heard that this man was in their district. The next day, as Jesus left the village, more and more people began to join him. They, too, were going to the celebration.

Jesus entered Jerusalem city. And then it began. The Jews praised him publicly. They greeted him as if he was their nation Israel's king. It was happening just as God had promised. It was what it said in Zechariah 9:9. As they praised him, they quoted some more words. They came from a familiar Psalm (118:25). They called out 'Hosanna'. That word means 'Save now'. So they were saying two things. Jesus was their king. And Jesus was their *Saviour.

The author had written the words of Psalm 118 in an earlier century. He described a man who was like a stone. And the builders rejected the stone. They threw it away. But the man would become like the chief corner stone. This meant that he would become the most famous stone. He would be like the most important stone in the building. And now the people were welcoming Jesus. He was the King whom God had promised to them. He was the ***Saviour** who was present with them. And he was like the Stone whom people would reject.

The people declared these things in the streets of Jerusalem. The words were very important (12:16). But even the *disciples did not realise this. The people did not realise it either. And this was not the only time that it happened. (Read 11:51.)

Visitors to Jerusalem soon heard about Lazarus. And it made them think. This man Jesus released a body from a grave in Bethany. So, he must be able to free their nation from their political enemy. He could make the dead come to life again. So nothing else should be able to hinder him. A few Roman soldiers would be easy for him to conquer.

Again, Jesus was in danger. People did not understand his mission. Even his friends did not understand. Before that, he specially asked people not to talk too much about his *miracles. And he did this on several occasions. (Read Mark 5:43 and 7:36). People would say that there should not be any delay. They had someone who would rescue them from their enemy now. And talk like that could cause political trouble.

People wanted political freedom. And some of them thought that Jesus would give it to them. But the Jewish officials thought that Jesus was dangerous. He would challenge their authority. He was becoming more and more popular. Different kinds of people were committing themselves to be his friends. (Read 12:17-19.) And the officials knew that this could not go on. 'Nothing is going right for us,' they said. 'The whole world is following him.'

By these words, they were actually announcing a great truth. But they did not realise it, of course. They used the words, 'the whole world'. And that was the subject that John was going to deal with.

Something special would happen. Some travellers who came from the land of Greece were in Jerusalem. They had come for the *Passover. Maybe they were Jews who spoke Greek. And they were visiting Jerusalem for this major event. Or, maybe they were Gentiles (non-Jews). Perhaps they wanted to know more about the Jewish faith. People like this were called 'God-fearers'.

These men spoke to Philip first. And this might have been because he came from Bethsaida. This was a place with a more Gentile (non-Jewish) culture. And they spoke Greek, (the language of the land of Greece). John specially mentioned Philip's early life in the town, as if that was relevant. (Read 12:21.) Perhaps these Greek men knew that Philip would understand them. Perhaps he would know the sort of things that they would want to discuss with his Lord. 'We would like to meet Jesus,' they said to Philip. And he went immediately to Andrew, who also came from Bethsaida. Together, they could bring these people, with their questions, to Jesus.

At first, this just seemed like an ordinary meeting. Some *Passover travellers wanted to meet a famous person. Everybody was talking about Jesus. He had done so many great things in the past months.

He • provided plenty of food for a vast crowd of hungry people (6:1-11). • walked on the surface of water. He did this in the middle of the Sea of Galilee (6:16-21). • talked publicly in Jerusalem's *Temple (7:14-52). • had lively discussions with the religious leaders (8:12-47). • made some of the leaders so angry that they hated him (8:59). • gave sight to a blind man. • made a dead man come back to life again (11:1-44). Of course, everybody would want to see him.

We do not know what the Greek visitors thought about their meeting with Jesus. But something is clear. It was an important time in his life for Jesus. In this *gospel, this was 'the beginning of the end'. There was a Christian writer. His name was Alexander Findlay. He said that Jesus' life was like a drama. To Jesus, their visit was 'like the curtain rising for the final act'.

So, Jesus met the Greek visitors. And he immediately said something that was important. 'The time has come for the Son of Man to receive great honour and praise.' To Jesus, their arrival was one of the 'greater things'. (Read 1:50; 5:20; 14:12.) He was going to die soon. Then men and women living in all parts of the world would believe in him. These Greek men were just the first. There would be millions of other people. They would realise that he had died on the cross for them. And they would trust in him.

It is important to notice something. At this time, Jesus began to talk about his death. Probably the Greek visitors were still there. Jesus said that his life was like a 'grain of wheat'. It must fall into the ground and die. If it did, it would produce 'many seeds'. And the Greek people who wanted to know more about Jesus were like these 'seeds'.

But Christ's teaching about his death also has truths about us. Jesus spoke specifically about our death. It was not a physical death. It was a 'death to self'. [This means that Jesus must always be first in our lives. It is not what we want that is important. It is what Jesus wants that matters.] Jesus taught that this is a vital part of being a real *disciple. A disciple 'must live like a person who will die very soon. Yes, if he is not ready to die for me, he cannot be my *disciple.' (Read Luke 14:25-27.) So, 'death to self' might also mean a physical death.

Jesus explained what he meant in John 12. He talked about what it meant to be a true *disciple. And he did this in a way that people could not ignore. He challenged their common religious, moral and social values. And he did this deliberately.

Jesus was like the *prophets in the Old Testament. He had a message for the people to understand. So he used powerful language and unusual word pictures. Jesus presented the truth. First, the truth about what he had promised to do. Second, the truth about what they should promise to do. Like the Old Testament *prophets, Jesus deliberately shocked them. People might not like what he said. But they would never be able to forget it. He said • to die is better than to live. • to hate is better than to love. • to lose is better than to keep. • to give is better than to get.

To die is better than to live

Jesus would die on the Cross soon. And he knew it. He did not have much time left. His death was a necessity. And it was a reality. So Jesus must describe it clearly. He gave them a simple word picture. He spoke about a farmer who buried a seed. That event was familiar. And it would help the listeners to remember the message. 'I tell you the truth. A grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die. Then it grows and makes many seeds. But if it never dies, then it will always be only a single seed.' (12:24)

One seed might be in a bag. If it stays there, it will continue to be a seed. But it cannot fulfil its best purpose. To become what it can be, it must die. Someone must bury the seed in the ground. It must be in the dark. Only then can it achieve its amazing growth. To the human eye, it would seem to be lost. It is in the cold earth. It has gone forever. But it will slowly begin to release its new life.

The time when Jesus said this made it more significant. Jesus knew that his death was certain. For most people, eager life was all around them. There had been grateful guests at the meal in Bethany village. The crowds had been all around Jesus as he walked to the city. Admirers lifted Jesus onto a donkey. Travellers who came from the land of Galilee praised him with enthusiasm. They shouted the word 'Hosanna'. The word means 'Save now'. It was a time to rejoice. Israel's king had come.

But things were not quite what they seemed to be. Something had happened the night before. In that Bethany village home, Mary did something special. She broke a jar of expensive perfume. The sisters had stored it for a long time. Jews would keep it to rub onto a body before the funeral. It was a family's way to express their love for someone. And it showed that they would miss that person very much. And Judas complained. She had done this to a guest's feet. What an extreme waste of money! He spoke about the needs of poor people. But few people were listening.

Everybody was looking at Jesus. He spoke quietly to help the woman. What he said was a complete surprise. So everybody would remember his words. 'Do not stop her. It was right for her to save this perfume for this day. She is preparing me for the day when they will bury me. Poor people will always be with you. But I will not be here with you for much longer.'

Lazarus was there too. He saw his sister kneel at Jesus' feet. He saw her use her hair as a towel. Everything seemed to be good for Lazarus. Jesus had brought him back to life again. Because of a *miracle, death was past for him. But that was not really so. Lazarus spoke about Christ's power and the fact that Christ was unique. Lazarus was influencing people in a spiritual way, like his Master. 'Because of Lazarus, many Jews were rejecting the chief priests. And they believed in Jesus instead.' So the priests were making plans to kill Lazarus too. Death might be very near for him.

By her welcome of love, a woman who believed prepared for Jesus' death. Now, her brother was relating to his death. 'So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus too.' The travellers had come for a happy celebration. But it had a message about death. It was *Passover time. So it was a season of grateful celebration. But death was the main part of that story too. They had to kill lambs. Death was certain.

When these threats of death were around him, Jesus spoke about his own death. Other people are born with the purpose to live. Jesus came especially to die. If he did not die, then other people would not live. His unique life could have remained 'a single seed'. Then there could have been no *salvation. He could have deliberately clung onto his life. Then the priests and other officials might not have been able to arrest him. He said that an army of angels could easily rescue him (Matthew 26:53.) But, if they had, Jesus would not have fulfilled the mission that God had given to him. And we would only have 'the single seed' of his great life.

By a special act of God, Jesus might have escaped that awful death. But only that one seed would have remained. It would have been the 'single seed' of a beautiful life. People could always admire it. But that would be all. It would have been the story of a unique example. But nobody would be able to match it. So we would just feel shame.

The 'single seed' would have left us with Jesus' unique teaching. But we would be without his power in us. We would just have standards that we could never achieve. Jesus' perfect life would reveal us as we are. We are sinners who have no hope. We could never change ourselves.

But the seed died, as Jesus said that it must. Mary's perfume revealed that Christ's death was certain. The desire to harm Lazarus was cruel and nasty. And this showed that Christ's death would be cruel. The *Passover lambs were symbols that Christ's death was not because he was guilty. And the Greek visitors gave hope for the effect of his death. The one seed that was dying was the first of 'many seeds'. Already, while Jesus talked about it, people were coming. Like the Greeks, people were coming from another nation and from a different culture.

This was like another word picture that Jesus had used earlier. These people were like the 'other sheep' that came from far away (10:15-16). And the Shepherd, the one who looks after sheep, was ready to die for them.

But, in this passage, the *Saviour's death was a pattern for the *disciple's life. There was a man called James Calvert. He lived in Century 19. And he went to the islands of Fiji, to tell the people about Jesus. The people who lived there were cannibals. This means that they ate other people. He came back to Britain to have a holiday, and to explain about his work. Someone asked him if he was afraid. These people might kill him. He replied, 'No. We died before we went.' That is the secret.

Those who follow Jesus should be the same. They know that they must give up the selfish life. Some things in life may not please him. And they must be ready to 'die' to them all. They must be ready to give them up.

But there is more. This experience does not happen only once. Those who follow Jesus must 'die' to certain things each day. They must 'die' to everything that is not according to Jesus' teaching. And they must 'die' to anything that is not like his example.

There are people around them who do not believe. And they determine to get all they can out of 'life' for themselves. They just cannot understand why Christians choose to give up these things. But three things tell *disciples something that is very important. There is the example of Jesus. There is the teaching in the Bible. And there are stories about people through the centuries who had faith. They knew what it meant 'to die'. It meant to 'die' to their selfish desires. And that kind of death is always better than 'to live'. [This would mean that they were choosing what they wanted.] People who chose 'to die' proved something that is vital. It is this. Those who truly 'die' are the only ones who really 'live'.

To hate is better than to love

Someone might say that all this is against our human nature. It is natural to love ourselves, to satisfy ourselves, even to praise ourselves. But Jesus does not agree with that. There is God's will. There is Christ's example. And there is the Spirit's message. Christ's *disciples must put these things before their selfish desires. This will mean that we deliberately put our personal wishes into second place. And when we do this, there will be good results. Our lives will be complete. We will be satisfied. Our lives will be more useful. And, of course, we will be secure forever.

Jesus said that this means 'to hate' ourselves. This was a dramatic way to say 'love less'. The language of the Jews is Hebrew. And they often described things in this way. To 'love less' shows determination for an essential choice. Jesus said it plainly on purpose. It was so that his *disciples would always remember his words. 'The man who loves his life will lose it. But the man who hates his life in this world will keep it forever.'

The alternatives are very clear. We can be greedy. We can hold onto our rights in this life. But this would cause us to lose what is best in it. We can please ourselves in this world. But this might mean that we lose the next world. What Jesus said then applies to us now. He wants us all to know that it is very important. If we really want to enjoy this life, we must enjoy him much more. The secret is to love him more than all others.

There was a spiritual writer called Walter Hilton. He lived in England in Century 14. He said something that is still important. It was something that we could do. Then we would know what we love. 'Just consider what you are *usually* thinking about.' As he did his daily work, Hilton was usually thinking about Jesus. Next, he was thinking about other *believers. And he rarely thought about himself.

That is what it means to hate ourselves. We must certainly love ourselves much less. Or we will not be the kind of *disciple that God can use. Think about life as if it was a play. Disciples must constantly move away from the centre of the platform. They must keep the most important place for Jesus. He should always be in the centre of the platform of life.

This will have a big effect on our daily lives. If Jesus always comes first, it will often be hard. It will often go against our natural desires. This is what Jesus meant when he spoke some very strange words. He said that we should 'cut off our right hand'. He said that we should 'throw away our right eye'. And he said to do this if anything was hindering us. Nothing should hinder our Christian development. (Read Matthew 5:27-30.) Jesus used this severe picture language on purpose. He knew how hard it could be to obey him.

There are spiritual dangers. There might be a moral risk. There might be a spiritual weakness. We all have parts of our personal life and our thoughts that are like this. And 'to hate ourselves' explains what we must do. We know that. Certain things or places could tempt us. And we could then do what is wrong. Or we could think what is wrong. So, we must keep right away from things that are wrong.

Here is an example. We might read something or look at things. And they are not good for our spiritual life. They might create or excite pictures in our minds. They might make spiritual resistance harder. There is a mental pornography (evil sexual pictures). And we must deal with this kind as severely as the kind that is printed.

To remove the eye or the hand emphasises that all this is hard. To be holy is never easy. You might refuse to read a certain book. You might not watch a film or TV programme. And people might think that you are living in the past. Your ideas about sex are not modern. You are not free. But to do these things would not help you. They would make you less than the person whom you long to be. Socially, it could seem as if you were missing an 'eye' or a 'hand'. But it would be well worth it. That kind of holy life would please God. It would help other people. And it would improve us.

To reject selfish desires is not something that is just in the *gospels. Other passages in the New Testament emphasise the same thing. Paul was teaching the Christians at Rome. And he told them about essential ways to live the Christian life. He emphasised something that was necessary. And the words that he used showed this. Paul said to 'kill the wrong things that you do with your body.' Then, with the power of the Holy Spirit, we can really 'live'. (Read Romans 8:13.) Paul explained that men and women have a sinful nature. And that produces sinful thoughts, which lead them to plan sinful deeds. (Read Romans 8:4, 5, 13.)

Paul wrote about *believers who have given themselves entirely to Christ. They have given the Holy Spirit control of their lives. And they have determined 'not to do what the sinful nature wants to do' (8:4). What their human nature wants does not control their minds. Their ambitions are much better than that. Their minds concentrate 'on what the Spirit desires' (8:5). And that means that they 'kill' evil thoughts and evil desires. They stop them long before they become acts that would damage. The Holy Spirit lives in them. And they achieve all this by his powerful work.

To lose is better than to keep

The Bible describes these two opposites. And what happened in the village of Bethany shows this. There was Mary. She loved Jesus. And she poured the expensive perfume over his feet. But Judas was thinking about the cost of the perfume. His attitude was selfish and greedy. His mind worked out that Mary had wasted a lot of money. And it was stupid. Mary's whole desire was to give. Judas was just thinking about what he could get. Mary loved Jesus. And she wondered what she could give to him. Judas did not care. He just wondered what others would give to him.

Matthew wrote about this event. And he chose to put the two stories next to each other. It seemed deliberate. He specially wanted us to contrast the characters of Mary and of Judas. Jesus, the Master, praised Mary. 'She did it to prepare me for when people would bury me... Next, Matthew accused Judas. 'Then ...Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests. He asked, "What will you pay me if I give him to you?"' (Read Matthew 26:6-16.) The woman had spilt the perfume. And, soon after this, Judas was rushing to collect his money. He would like to have had the cost of the perfume. But he could at least have the cost of Christ.

Mary gave away her treasure. But she lost nothing. In fact, she gained everything. Judas held firmly to his money. And he lost everything. The silver coins had been so important to him. But, suddenly, they had no value. Too late, Judas understood what really mattered in life. He was in a terrible state. And he threw his money down the *Temple steps. Not long before that, he had rushed up those same steps. And that was to collect his precious silver. Judas did not just lose his money. He lost his life and he lost his future.

In his gospel, John makes something very clear. It is this. Things never give us satisfaction that lasts. (Read 4:32-34; 6:27; 12:4-8.) We do not enjoy them for the whole of this life. And we certainly cannot enjoy them in a future life.

A famous actor died at the age of 87. Many people wrote about his life and about what he had achieved. One of the notices included his sad personal words. 'My trouble is that things were always very important to me. I owned 12 horses and 7 big cars. I have had many sexual partners in Paris, London and New York. [These are the capital cities of France, of England and of America.] And these things never made me happy.'

To give is better than to gain

Jesus spoke some important words. He said them to the Greek visitors, and to Andrew and to Philip. Of course, anyone who was standing nearby would hear his words too. 'Whoever serves me must follow me.' And that means to submit to him completely. 'Where I am, my servant will be also.' (John 12:26.) And Jesus 'will be' at the Cross.

At that exact moment, in the street of Jerusalem, Jesus felt something. He felt what it would be like in the garden of Gethsemane. He would have a very hard test. He seemed to want his *disciples to realise something. To 'hate' life at this time would not be easy. And it would not be easy at any other time.

As the time for his death approached, it disturbed even Jesus very much. The Son of God knew how hard it would be. Jesus must let the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die. And that would be a hard thing to do. 'Now I am very upset. And what shall I say? Should I say, "Father, save me from this time of suffering?" No. I came to this time so that I could suffer. Father, bring honour to your name!' (12:27.)

There was only one way that Jesus could bring people to himself. And this included his eager *disciples Andrew and Philip. It included those Greek visitors too. He must die on the Cross (12:32). Jesus knew that it would be very hard. But he had entered the world with that definite determination. He would always do what the Father wanted him to do. He would bring honour to the Father's name. (Read 6:38; 17:1; Hebrews 10:5-9.) Jesus intended to say those difficult words. That is the reason why the Father replied so quickly. 'Then a voice came from heaven. "I have brought honour to my name. And I will do it again."'

The people heard the voice. Some of them thought that the sound was thunder. There will always be people who are like this. At difficult times, they will not hear the voice of God. Other people were a little more aware of spiritual reality. They thought that an angel might have spoken to Jesus.

But it was the Father who was speaking to Jesus. And he had done this twice before. There was Jesus' *baptism. This was when he committed himself publicly to do what his Father wanted. And there was the time when three *disciples saw Jesus change. God showed his approval of Jesus to these men. Jesus was God's Son. And he would obey his Father. (Read Matthew 3:17 and 17:5.)

Jesus would die soon. And he gave himself to the Father again. When Christ spoke, he was in a public street. People were standing all around him. They were very different sorts of people. There were *disciples. They knew that it could be hard. But they still longed to follow him. There were some Greek people. They had heard about being followers of Jesus. And they really wanted to know what it meant. And some people just stood there and watched. They were only aware of ordinary things like sounds. They would rarely hear the appeal of a quiet voice inside them.

But Jesus committed himself again to obey his Father. And this brought honour to his Father. At the Cross, his Father would have honour again, And Jesus' *disciples would bring honour to the Father too. This would happen when they followed Christ, whatever their circumstances might be.

Jesus was going to give his life. And he knew what that meant. He would gain very much. And he could not achieve this in any other way. The seed must die if there was to be a harvest. Christ's death was unique, of course. God can forgive men and women, and change them. But it is only through Jesus that this can happen. Jesus' death also provides a pattern for us. It shows us what it means to be a true *disciple.

Peter described it correctly. He said that Jesus died instead of us. We deserve to die. But his death is also a perfect example of how to be holy. Peter said 'You must follow the example of Jesus.' He said these words to slaves. They did not matter to anyone socially. They were under the power of the great Roman Empire in Century 1. Some of them were suffering very much because of their faith. 'You must follow the example of Jesus,' Peter said to these slaves. 'Christ suffered for you. He gave you an example to follow.' (1 Peter 2:21.)

The word 'example' had a common meaning in Century 1. It described the large letters that a teacher wrote at the top of a slate. [This was a type of stone. It was easy to split it into thin, flat strips. And schools used it to write on.] Young students could copy the letters. In this way, they would learn to form perfect letters of the alphabet. Jesus submitted himself to God. And he is the perfect example of a life that is like this. Jesus gave all. And, by this, he gained everything for us. *Disciples follow him. They give themselves totally to him.

We submit ourselves to him. And we might think something. It is this. It will always be very difficult. But this is wrong. We cannot do this hard thing by ourselves. But it will never be a disadvantage to us. Jesus assured his men about this. If they gave up anything for him, they would receive much more. (Read Luke 18:18-30.) But when they let the seed die, they must trust him. There would be a harvest. But there must be an act of bold faith. The harvest is not visible when the seed dies.

There is a lovely story. A chief (arch) bishop told it in 1989. The story is about a Christian salesman. He had been away from home at a conference. The final meeting ended late. He and his friends hurried to the main train station. They wanted to get home quickly. A train would soon be leaving the station. And they must get onto that train. Or they would have to wait a long time for the next one. And this would mean that they would get home very late.

The group of salesmen rushed to get onto the train. And, by mistake, the Christian kicked over a small table. There was a box of fruit for sale on the table. Apples fell out of the box. And they rolled all over the floor. But the men did not stop. There were only a few seconds before the train would leave. And the other men got onto the train.

But the man who had caused the accident stopped. His work partners urged him to get onto the train. But he felt very unhappy. He could not decide what he should do. He had noticed a young boy, about ten years old. He was standing by the table, selling the apples. In those few seconds, one question took control of the salesman's mind. What would Jesus do now?

More than anything else, the salesman longed to be with his family. But, in that moment, to follow Christ became more important. He waved goodbye to his friends. They could not understand him. Then he walked quickly back to the main public area. People were rushing for their trains. As they tried to avoid the apples, many kicked them. The

Christian man could not understand why the boy did not try to pick them up. He was doing nothing. He had a look of confusion on his face. He just seemed to be helpless. But, as the man got closer, he realised why. The boy was blind.

Quickly the salesman began to collect the apples. He put them back on the table, ready for sale. But he could see that the fall had spoilt many of them. He put some money into the boy's hand. 'Please take these ten dollars because of the damage that we did. I hope that we have not spoilt your day.' Slowly, he began to walk away. Then he heard the boy's voice. It was louder than the noise in the station. 'Sir, are you Jesus?'

Now he knew why he had to stay. If he had pleased himself, he would have gone on the train. But he would have left the boy at the station. The boy would have been alone in the dark. He would have felt unhappy and confused.

The salesman had a challenge. He saw the train start to move away slowly. In a second, he must decide whether to 'lose' his life or to 'love' it. Just then, it meant to 'hate' what he really wanted to do. But it was a chance to follow Jesus. 'Where I am, my servant will also be.' For a moment, it was hard. But he received a great reward. He did not just help a blind boy. He heard the most wonderful praise in the world.

The Greek visitors wanted to meet Jesus. Eventually, they saw him *with* his *disciples. Today, they need to see him *in* his *disciples. That is the subject of the last chapter of this book.

Word List
[Meanings of difficult words]
There is a * before such words

- baptise** A Greek word. It is a ceremony.
It means to put a person in water or under water for a brief time.
Read Mark 1:4-11 and Romans 6:3-8.
These verses explain why it is a Christian ceremony.
- baptism** The name for the ceremony when someone *baptises another person.
- believer** A person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.
It is someone who belongs to Christ and who follows him every day.
This is another name for a true Christian.
- disciple** A person who follows a leader. It could refer to a student of a teacher. It especially refers to the 12 men whom Jesus chose. It is also a person who follows Jesus today.
- gospel** Good News. It refers to all that God has done. It is about all that God is doing. It is also about all that God will do because of Jesus.
The first four books of the New Testament are called 'The Gospels'.

miracle	A wonderful thing that only God could do. It could not happen in a natural way.
Passover	An important Jewish holy day. Read Exodus 12. This explains the meaning of the word. Every year, on this day, Jews eat a special meal. It reminds them about the time when they were slaves in Egypt. And God rescued them.
prophet	A person whom God chose. Then God gave special messages to that person. The messages could be for an individual, or for a group of people or for a nation. The prophet would hear God's words and tell them to the people. In Old Testament times, a prophet often wrote down these messages. And the Jews still call a group of books 'The Prophets'. These books are also part of our Bible.
salvation	What happens when someone rescues a person from sin or from danger. The Hebrew word is 'yasha'. The Old Testament uses it 353 times. People may be in trouble or in danger. And someone rescues them or saves them. This could be God or it could be a person. In the New Testament, the word relates to salvation from sin and from its results. Salvation is past, present and future (2 Corinthians 1:10).
Saviour	This is another name for Jesus. The word means 'One who saves'. Jesus is the only one who can save people from their sin. And he could do this because he died on the cross.
Temple	The Jews' special large church. It was in Jerusalem city. And the enemy destroyed it in AD70. (This was 70 years after the birth of Jesus.) Smaller church buildings for Jews are called synagogues. [Other groups build temples too. They worship false gods in them.]

BE MY DISCIPLE

Jesus says 'Trust me and obey me. Learn from me.
Follow me in a world that does not care about me'.
That is what it means to be a disciple.

11. SHOW US THE FATHER

Philip had a special request for Jesus. He said, 'Lord, show us the Father. That is all we need.' Christ's reply (14:8-13) is still important for us in the modern world. It provides us with teaching about what it means to be a *disciple. Jesus told his friend Philip some of his own priorities for life. And Jesus made it clear that his priorities should be our priorities too.

The Lord Jesus responded to the Greek visitors. (Read 12:20-33.) Then, something happened. And when we read John's *Gospel, we are very aware of it from chapter 13. It was this. Jesus now gave his message in a different place. And he was giving it to different people.

John 1-12. We have been in the presence of Jesus. He mainly dealt with two sorts of people. There were those who were unfriendly. Their actions showed that they were against Jesus. And there were those who just did not care. The first part of the *Gospel warned about this. Some people might reject the light and choose the darkness.

The people who were in the world 'did not recognise him'. And 'his own people did not accept him' (1:10-11.) Many people did not respond when he spoke to them. But he used every chance to express his message to them. He did this with enthusiasm and with skill. He used words and visible truths. He used things that they could hear. And he used things that they could see. But they were evidence of things that the people could not see. (They were called 'signs'.)

Jesus' great teaching was with words. His words made pictures in the people's minds. They interested the people very much. They were word pictures that they could never forget. There was • the new *Temple (2:19). • the new birth (3:3). • the spring of water in a person that gives life (4:14). • the bread that would mean that there would be no more hunger forever (6:35). • the fountain that would stop anyone from being thirsty again (7:37). • the light that is permanent. People need never walk in the darkness again (8:12). • the shepherd who gives his life for the sheep (10:11). [Note: A shepherd looks after sheep.]

But Jesus did more than use illustrations. There were great stories and famous sentences in the Old Testament. [This is the first part of our Bible.] The people would know them well. But he explained them in a new way. There was • Jacob's open heaven (1:51). • David's great enthusiasm (2:17). • the snake that Moses lifted up (3:14). • the Jews' manna (special food) in the desert (6:30-33). • Isaiah's spring that never failed (7:38-39; Isaiah 58:11). • Ezekiel's one shepherd (10:16; Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24).

People needed to hear the truth. But they needed to see it too. Jesus knew that words alone would not convince them. In Old Testament times, when God spoke, things

happened. His words did not just describe his power. They communicated it. He just said that something must happen. And it did happen. So, people must see the same 'power through the word' in Jesus, God's Son. Only then would people not hesitate. They would not be doubtful any more. They would commit themselves to Jesus Christ.

Therefore, all Christ's *miracles are in the first section of John's *Gospel. There is one exception. It is the amazing number of fish that the *disciples caught once. (Read 21:1-6.) John deliberately left this event until near the end of the book. John preferred to call these *miracles 'signs'. They showed that Christ is God in a way that people could see.

John described these 'signs' in detail. Christ chose to do something to help in human life situations. And he did something because he was kind.

There was • the happy wedding celebration in Cana. • the dead boy whom he brought back to life in Capernaum. • the hungry crowd that he fed at Bethsaida. • the storm that he stopped on Galilee lake. • a grateful blind beggar who could see, after he washed at Siloam's Pool. • the dead man whom Christ called out of his stone grave in Bethany.

It was certain that God in Christ had spoken. His word transformed people. His word transformed situations. Yet people still deliberately rejected Christ. Neither his words nor his 'signs' convinced them about anything. From the end of chapter 11, things changed. 'That day the Jewish leaders started their plans to kill Jesus' (11:53). And those who followed Jesus were in danger too (12:10-11). This could be very hard for them. And it caused many of them to remain secret *disciples. They were afraid, so they kept quiet. This showed something sad. They preferred human praise to God's approval (12:42-43).

John 13-21. Jesus' work that was more public was finished. Now, the important place was not the *Temple area. Jesus was with his *disciples in the Upper Room. [These words describe the room at the top of the house. Jesus and his disciples ate the special Passover feast there. Exodus 12 explains the meaning of the word Passover.] The disciples were committed to Jesus. But they felt confused. Their immediate need was not to have more 'signs'. Bad things might happen to them. And they needed Christ's words to help them. Then they could bear anything.

At first, Jesus' message in these chapters was by means of questions or comments. Five of the *disciples spoke them. John asked who would betray Jesus (13:24-25). Peter then enquired what Jesus was going to do next (13:36). Jesus planned to go somewhere. And Thomas wanted to know the way to that place (14:5). Philip longed for Jesus to show the Father to them (14:8). And Judas (not Iscariot) wondered something. It was why Jesus was going to show himself to the *disciples only (14:22).

We all learn by asking questions. Philip's request and Jesus' reply is important. It helps us to understand what it means to be a *disciple. Jesus said that his relationship with his Father was like an example. It showed them what their relationship with God should be like. They wanted to know what the Father was like. All they needed to do was to look at their Lord. If they really knew Jesus, they would know God too. He was God's Son. He was the perfect image of his Father.

Jesus told them something that was amazing. They had been watching Jesus. And their Father was in heaven. But they had also been looking into his face. Jesus spoke about his Father. 'Now you do know him and you have seen him' (14:7).

But Philip still did not understand. It was a dangerous and uncertain time. They might have to deal with disaster. So Philip thought that a special, extra experience of their Father God would help them all. 'Lord, show us the Father'. Life was going to be hard. Jesus could make sure that they actually saw God in a special way. This would really help them.

It could be like one of the famous people in the Old Testament. There was • Abraham (Genesis 17:1-22). • Moses (Exodus 33:18-23). • Joshua (5:13-15). • Isaiah (6:1-8). • Ezekiel (1:1-28). • Daniel (7:9-14). Life was going to be difficult for all of these men. But God showed himself to them. And this helped them. It prepared them for all that happened.

But Jesus made something clear to his *disciples. They did not need to see God in a more visible way. They had been looking at God because they had been looking at Jesus. And it had been like this for the past three years. 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,' Jesus said. Christ had often told his *disciples that he was united with the Father. He depended on the Father for everything, for his words and for his deeds. But Philip was like the other *disciples. He had not really understood that vital truth.

Perhaps he was just not aware of it. 'Do you still not *know* me, Philip? I have been with you for a long time' (14:9). Perhaps he had not committed himself to the truth. 'Do you not *believe* that I am in the Father? Do you not believe that the Father is in me?' (14:10.) Philip was like so many of us. He might have understood the truth in his mind. But he had not truly believed it.

Jesus used this time to share some great truths with his *disciples. He spoke about his priorities, and about their priorities. All through his time of service on earth, he and his Father enjoyed a very close union. Nothing separated them. The disciples were in a world of people who hated them. And if the disciples were going to succeed, something must happen. The relationship that Jesus had with God must become a pattern for the disciples. It must show that they had committed themselves completely to Jesus.

The relationship of Jesus with his Father had five qualities. Each one was significant for Philip and for his friends. In his great relationship with God, Jesus did five things. He showed His Father's nature. He communicated his Father's words. He did his Father's works. He needed his Father's help. He desired to *glorify his Father. And it is just the same for modern *disciples. This is how we express that we are committing ourselves to Christ.

Show the Father's nature

Jesus was in the world to show people what God is like. But Philip had not understood this fact properly. The Old Testament description of God was reliable. But it was not complete. It caused enthusiasm, but it was not finished.

Jesus was God's unique Son. Because he came into the world, men and women need never doubt God's nature. There is no sin in God. But he has *mercy on people who do sin. God is love. But he is also powerful. God is holy, but he is patient too. On this occasion, Philip clearly showed something. It is this. We can hear truth and yet we might not believe it. We can know truth, but we might not make it part of our own lives.

Those words that Jesus spoke to his *disciple should affect us too. 'Do you not know?' and 'Do you not believe?' We need to consider what we are doing to learn more about our faith. We can read God's Word every day. When it is possible, we should meet with other believers. This might be in the place where we work. It might be at home or in church. We should appreciate the value of good Christian books or videos. Then, we can share the message that God's Word is relevant today. Jesus might be saying to us 'Do you not *know* ...?'

Perhaps we have just let these truths come into our minds. But we have not accepted them for ourselves. They could be just great subjects about God. But they belong to distant worlds. They are truths that have not made any difference to us. We must not just think about the truths. We must do something about them. Jesus might be saying to us 'Do you not *believe*?' And that does not just mean that we accept truths with our brain. It demands that we commit all of ourselves.

Richard Baxter lived in century 17. He wrote a book called "The Saints' Everlasting Rest." 'Let all your knowledge become affection and action.' So, every truth that we know should affect us. And each truth should lead to action.

So, we need to make sure about something. We must connect the truths of the Bible with life in the world today. We accept the Bible teaching that God's nature is love. So we cannot just excuse any of our relationships that break down. And this is so even when it is not easy to love someone. (Read Matthew 5:43-48.) If we believe that God will care for us, then we must not worry. (Read Matthew 6:25-34.) If we recognise God's holy character, then we must be holy too. (Read 1 Peter 1:15-16.)

Philip and the other *disciples understood something later. It was this. Christ had shown the Father *to* them. But he wanted to reveal the Father *through* them. When Jesus went back to heaven, he wanted them to do certain things. They were to live like God's children in the world. They should be like a mirror that showed their Father's character. God's principles should be of great value to them. They should follow his standards. And they should desire what he wants.

'If anyone loves me he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him. And we will come to him. We will make our home with him.' (14:23.)

Jesus taught his *disciples to desire this ambition. But, in this *gospel, he also prayed that they would have it. 'I showed them what you are like. And I will show them again what you are like. Then the love that you have for me will be in them. And I will live in them' (17:26).

So, this teaching about how to be a *disciple emphasises something. People who commit themselves to Christ will share the Son's ambition. They will want their daily lives to show the Father's qualities. This will be their greatest desire. Of course, Christ was unique. He never sinned. He was perfect. So he could reveal the Father completely. We are not perfect. We are sinners. But we must never use this as an excuse to lower our standards.

Our Father who is in heaven shows *mercy. And Jesus said that we must show *mercy in the same way. (Luke 6:36.) So this must be possible. He would never command us to do something that is impossible. Therefore, modern *disciples must reveal the Father's qualities. And they must do this by what they are. The truth must be visible in their lives.

Communicate the Father's words

Jesus did more than reveal the Father by his way of life. He communicated God's words too. His message was truth. And he had received it directly from his Father. Jesus did not express completely new ideas of his own. He was not independent from his Father. That was not why he had come into the world. And he made this clear to Philip. 'The words that I say to you are not just my own.' In fact, Jesus repeated the same thing on other occasions too. (Read 7:16; 8:28; 12:49-50; 14:24.) Jesus knew that he showed the truth in his life. But he knew something else. It was this. Men and women would need to hear his words too.

Something that is simple is not always clear. It could need an explanation in words. An example of this was what Jesus declared to Philip. It was about the fact that he was God. He must communicate this in words. Or it would be hard to understand and to believe it. The *disciple would not be able to understand it fully unless he heard it in words. 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me. The words that I say to you are not just my own words.' He was God. And his words confirmed that fact. It was a reality.

Jesus needed to say it. Or no Jew would ever believe it. Jesus stated that he had a unique relationship with the Father. And this caused the people who were around him to reject him. It was a terrible sin for any Jew to claim that he was equal with God. Yet his *disciples dared to accept Jesus' words. The words were vital if they were to believe the message.

*Disciples who want to follow their Master must do the same. They must communicate what is in God's Word, the Bible. Jesus received the words of the message from the Father. And he taught them faithfully to his disciples. They too must proclaim that message accurately to the people around them. Learners were to persuade more learners to join them. And they could only do this by giving them the message. The fact that Christ is unique is not a secret. It is something to tell everybody. And, in every century, true disciples have been eager to do this. They want other people to become *disciples too.

It was a very happy day for Thomas Bilney. God's truth seemed to jump from the pages of the New Testament. [This is the second main part of our Bible.] He knew, without any doubts, that Christ had died for his sins. He lived in Cambridge, England, in century 16. He was a friar. [This means that he belonged to a Roman Catholic religious group.] He had bought a copy of the New Testament. It was Erasmus's translation into the Latin language. And he admitted something. 'I was more attracted by the Latin than by the word of God.'

'But at last I heard words about Jesus. It was the first time that I read the translation. And I remember the occasion well. (It was a most sweet sentence. It gave comfort to my soul.) I happened to read a wonderful sentence of St. Paul. "What I say is true, and you should fully accept it. Christ Jesus came into the world so that he could save sinners. And I am the worst of those sinners." (1 Timothy 1:15.)

I did not realise this at the time. But God used it to teach me and to work in me. I felt different immediately. I felt happiness and excitement. Before, I felt very guilty

about all my sins. I was almost despairing. Then I felt a wonderful comfort and peace. And I wanted to jump because I was so happy.'

He was very grateful for this new faith. He was full of happiness and excitement. But he also wanted to talk about what had happened. The grateful *disciple had to find someone with whom he could share his joy. And Bilney looked for a chance to speak to a certain person. His name was Hugh Latimer. He was the most famous public speaker at the time. But he was extremely against the message of the Reformation.

[Note: The Reformation was a very important time in history. Martin Luther started it in Germany, in century 16. It was a time of change for many religious beliefs and practices. People heard that they could know God personally. God would forgive them because of Christ's death on the Cross. They did not have to pay money to the priests to experience this.].

People who cared about him called him 'Little Bilney'. He quietly asked Latimer if he could 'confess his soul' to him. Of course, Latimer thought that he wanted to confess his sins. But, in reality, he wanted to speak about his Saviour, Christ. Because of Bilney's courage, Latimer believed too. Latimer declared the Gospel (Good News) confidently. And he convinced many people to trust in Christ. He continued to do this until he suffered the same awful death as Bilney. They would not change their beliefs. So officials burned them while they were alive.

They died for the faith by which they lived.

(You can read more about these men in '*Acts and Monuments*' by John Foxe.)

It was very hard for those men to share the truth. It meant that they died. And this still happens in many countries. It may not be so in your country. But something is vital. We must use every chance to tell other people about our faith. The Lord longs to use us in this way. So he will make the opportunities for us. We do not have to force the conversation to be about spiritual things. At the right time, people who are around us will make comments. They will ask questions. They will challenge us. Only a coward could avoid an answer to any of these people.

But we need to prepare for these chances that God gives to us. So we should pray that the Holy Spirit will keep on filling us. (This is what Paul means in Ephesians 5:18.) Only the Holy Spirit can prepare us. He will give the words that we need. He will give the love that we need too. (Read Romans 5:5.) But we must speak. The Father's love will become obvious. It will show by what we are. And it will show in what we say as well.

Do the Father's deeds

[Note: In his *gospel, John used the word 'sign'. It means 'visible evidence or proof.' Signs were *miracles that Jesus did.]

But, words only may not convince someone who does not believe. Christ taught faithfully. But people who did not accept Christ still wanted more. They wanted to have certain proof of his power. And people are the same today. God had spoken through Christ. But he had also worked through him. And Jesus made this clear to Philip. The Father had made possible the amazing 'signs' that went with what Jesus said. Words and deeds went together. 'The *words* that I say to you are not just my own. It is the Father, who is living in me. He is doing his *work*.' (14:10)

Jesus understood people. He knew that his words alone would not be enough. He was God. But some of them would still not be able to accept that truth. They would need to see something. They did not just need to hear it. Jesus was always patient, and he understood that. He explained it to Philip. 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Believe me when I say that. Or, if you do not believe my words, believe because of my work. Believe because of the **miracles* that I have done. (14:11)

We read in John's *gospel that the people kept asking for 'signs'. They wanted to know if Jesus' statements about himself were true. (Read 2:18; 4:48; 6:30.) Yet, this gospel makes something clear. It would not matter how many 'signs' that he gave them. Most of the people who lived at that time were determined. They would not believe in him (12:37).

Jesus' 'signs' would not convince them that he was the Son of God. He could restore those who were dying. He could heal disabled people. He could feed hungry people. He could walk on the waves. He could make blind people to see. He could make dead people come alive again. But it would not matter to the people who were there with Jesus They would still not put their trust in him. (Read Matthew 11:20-24; 12:38-42; Mark 8:11-12.)

But it was not just people who refused to believe. Even John the Baptist, the famous man of God, had doubts. [John 1:19-36 and 3:23-36 explains who he was.] Then 'John was in prison. He heard about the things that Christ was doing. So John sent some of his followers to Jesus. They asked Jesus a question. "Are you the man whom John said was coming? Or should we wait for another man?"'(Matthew 11:2, 3.) News about great *miracles did not stop John the Baptist's doubts. He was in a dark prison at Machaerus. This was on the eastern side of the Dead Sea. [Note: John the Baptist or Baptiser was his title. People gave him this name because he *baptised people.]

The place where John had served God was not far from his prison. He had warned the people that God's punishment was coming. He had urged them to turn away from their sin and to turn to God (repent). Many hundreds of people had responded to his message. And he had *baptized them. John would clearly remember those times. He had given many warnings to them. He had appealed to them. But God's judgement still delayed. And, perhaps John wondered why.

Jesus gave a message to John's followers. It was not just about what they had *seen*. It was also about what God had *said*. By his 'signs', Jesus was doing what the *prophet Isaiah had written about him. And this was many centuries before Jesus' birth. (Read Isaiah 35:4-6.) Then Jesus encouraged the man who had doubts about him. 'How happy are those who do not lose their faith in me!' (Matthew 11:6). And Jesus says the same thing to *believers today.

John had his own idea. The *Messiah should deal with people who did not believe in him. He should punish evil people like Herod and those who obeyed him. They were proud and immoral. But Jesus was doing what God wanted him to do at that particular time. It was a time that needed different 'deeds' from those that John expected. John heard much about the *miracles of Jesus. But he still wondered if the *Messiah had really come. The 'signs' were dramatic. But they did not always create faith or encourage faith.

All this is still important today. Many people believe what the Bible says. They would never doubt that God has the power to heal. Thousands of believers in the world have proved this personally. God can heal and God does heal.

But there is a group of Christians who suggest something more. People need to see *miracles today. Then they would have to believe. But that does not always happen. And it would declare something. It is this. Modern miracles would persuade people more than Christ's miracles did. But his miracles did not change everybody's attitude. People who refused to believe did not suddenly have a strong faith. And there were those who were like John the Baptist. They wanted to believe. But Christ's miracles did not completely persuade them.

And there is more. There could be a *miracle today. But it might not be clear that it is a miracle that Jesus did. Our neighbours who do not believe would have their own ideas. They would begin by saying that something natural had happened. There are also wise *believers. They know what it says in the Bible. And they will not just assume that every 'miracle' is what the Lord has done.

We too would have to admit something. People might describe some events as if they were 'miracles'. But they do not come from God. It was like this in the land of Egypt, in the time of Moses. People who did not follow God did great things. And God's Word does not hide it. (Read Exodus 7:10-11, 20-22; 8:6-7.)

There can be evil powers in our time as much as they were in Moses' time. These powers can cause changes in natural life. They can transform things. And science cannot explain them easily. In some Third World countries, *believers have gone to tell the people about Jesus. (They are called missionaries.) And they have seen evil things happen. But they are not 'miracles' from the Lord. And he would not honour them. In Western society too, people have seen what seem to be 'miracles'. Mediums have 'healed' people in Spiritualist séances. But that does not mean that such 'signs' are from God.

[Note: A medium is someone who claims to be able to speak to dead people. And they say that they receive messages from them. A séance is the meeting where this happens. They call themselves Spiritualists.]

Christ's 'signs' were unique. But even they were not always successful. They did not convince people there who did not believe. Neither did they convince people who had doubts. So, we wonder about Jesus' amazing promise to Philip. He and the other *disciples would see 'signs' that were even greater. Yet, surely, nothing could be greater than to bring a dead person back to life again.

Jesus seemed to be saying something that was strange. His *disciples' deeds in the future would be more extraordinary than Jesus' deeds. 'I am telling you the truth. Whoever believes in me will do the same things that I have done. That person will do even greater things than I have done. This is because I am going to the Father.' (John 14:12) What Jesus said is very dramatic. And we need to understand what it means for modern *disciples.

There are three important things about Jesus' words. He promised 'greater things'. The quality of these things could not be greater. But their extent would be greater. And their

character must be greater. [Note: The full meaning of these words will become clear in the next sections of this chapter.]

The 'greater things' could not be greater because of their quality. Jesus brought Lazarus back to life again. And the *disciples could not do anything that was greater than that. But some people insist on something. It is this. Jesus was referring to many more physical *miracles. But even they have to admit something. It is rare to see people come back to life today.

And this is good. Christ (not the devil) has the keys of Death and Hell. Read Revelation 1:17-18. This means that he has complete control. Jesus Christ is in charge. John was a prisoner on the island of Patmos. And Jesus spoke these words to reassure him and all *believers. At any time, the officials could arrest them and kill them.

Christ had gone back to heaven. And he was telling John something that was great. It was this. No believer would die until the moment when Jesus decided that it was time. Jesus is Lord of the next world as well as of this world. (Read Romans 14:7-9.) He decides when a believer's work on earth has finished. And we have no right to want to bring that person back to life again.

There is another thing that Jesus would not have meant. It was this. Christ's *miracles were dramatic. But the miracles that his *disciples did would not be more dramatic. And his followers who are in the modern world should not expect it. While he was on earth, Christ changed water into wine. Nothing could convince people more than this. Christ walked on the sea. People would not be able to forget it. There was a man who was blind since his birth. And Christ gave sight to him. Nothing could impress people more than that.

Certainly, we must not say that these things cannot happen. God will work in his world, as he wants to work. But more impressive *miracles are not the 'greater things' that Jesus was talking about.

So, the quality of the *miracles could not be greater. But their extent would be greater. And this would happen in three ways. First, it would happen as it related to geography. Christ worked mainly in his own very small country. He visited the coastal towns of the region of Phoenicia. (Read Matthew 15:21.) He visited the cities of the region of the Decapolis. (Read Mark 5:1; 7:31) That was just beyond the land of Israel's border. But that was all.

But Jesus had promised 'greater things'. They happened all over the world of that time. And it happened not long after Jesus' life on earth. People proclaimed his truth in countries that Jesus never visited. Paul explained the wonderful things about Christ. He started at Jerusalem. But he went all the way across Asia Minor, through Greece and up to Yugoslavia. He walked in the streets of Rome. And he longed to visit Spain. That was a 'greater thing', that related to geography.

It was 'greater' culturally too. Christ spoke in one language. He explained the truth to the people around him in his native language. But there was a change. It happened a few weeks after he went back to heaven. Visitors came from all over the Mediterranean world to Jerusalem. They were there for a religious festival. It was called Pentecost. And the Holy Spirit caused a unique *miracle to happen. It was definitely a 'greater thing'.

There were people who spoke the Hebrew or the Aramaic languages. None of these people had ever said such things. And none of them had heard such things. Everybody heard in their own language about God's wonderful deeds.

Thousands of people began to have a personal faith. There were huge differences between people in the first century world. But *believers proclaimed a truth that brought them all together.

The differences were • social: between free people and slaves. • religious: between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). • sexual: the belief that men were superior to women. • political: between people who supported the rulers and people who wanted a revolution. There was Matthew, who collected taxes for the Roman rulers. And there was Simon, who was opposed to the Romans. But they sat next to each other at the Lord's Table. [See below.] And they were the first of many thousands of other people in history. They became friends because of Christ. Cruel, violent hatred disappeared. Jesus began this 'greater thing'. Even his first followers would not have thought that it could be possible.

[Note: The Lord's Table refers to the Last Supper. It was the last meal that Jesus had with his *disciples before he died. [Read Mark 14:22- 26.] The Bible tells us to copy this event. This will help us 'to remember him'. (Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-33.) Today, Christians use different names to describe this event. There is The Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. And there is The Eucharist.]

Those new things would include 'greater' numbers too. The *disciples could expect them. The Lord had chosen a team of 12 men. And a small group of women worked with them. Other people believed too. But, after three years of hard work, only 120 people met in Jerusalem. This is where Jesus told them to meet. They needed power for the new task that Jesus had given to them. But Jesus said that he must go back to heaven first. Only then would the Holy Spirit come. And, only then would 'greater things' be possible.

And this is what happened at the religious festival of Pentecost. [Read Acts 2.] The Spirit came in a way that he had never done before. This is what Jesus said that he would do. And thousands more people soon joined the small group. In the years and centuries since then, this growth has continued. Millions of people have trusted in Jesus.

In 1989, someone estimated some amazing things. There were about 5.2 billion people in the world. One-third of these people called themselves Christians. And about half of that number were true *believers. About 14,000 people were trusting Christ daily. There were 1.5 million churches or Christian groups in the world. Just over 1,500 new local churches started every day. There were about the same number of radio and television programmes. And about a million people listened to or watched their programmes every day.

These data do not seem like a story of failure! They are certainly 'greater things'. They could not have happened during the short time of Jesus' work on earth.

So, there was a 'greater' extent in the 'new things'. But their character must also be 'greater'. Christ healed mainly in a dramatic way and in public. And they were immediate *miracles. But a physical change was not enough. These people could still be without God forever. They had to have a spiritual change too.

And Jesus showed the spiritual priority clearly. Four men had a paralysed friend. [This meant that he could not move his arms or legs.] So they carried him to Jesus. But there was a big crowd of people. And they could not reach Jesus. So they made a hole in the roof and lowered him. (Read Mark 2:1-12) Jesus said, 'Young man, I forgive your sins.' Those were the first words that Jesus spoke to the man. So that was the man's greater need. Those who opposed Jesus challenged him.

So Jesus showed the power of his Word to them. He gave immediate strength to the man's arms and legs. The man got up and walked out in front of them all. And this included people who opposed Jesus, as well as grateful friends. The Word that gave life was the same Word that guaranteed pardon.

Jesus had the right and the power to forgive. And he had the right and the power to change sinners. No sensible person could doubt it. That is the 'greater thing'. And Jesus would do it by means of his *disciples in the future. The disciples' deeds would not be superior to Christ's deeds. Christ would still do new *miracles. But he would do them by means of his disciples. And it would be because of the Holy Spirit's power. But the purpose would still be to bring honour to God. *Believers' prayers could be very sincere. They could believe that God would answer their prayers. But blind people might still not receive their sight again.

Instead, they would be able to 'see' in a spiritual way. That is far superior. Ordinary sight is precious. But it would be much better not to see on earth than to be in darkness forever. Lazarus came back to physical life at Bethany. But to come back to life from spiritual death is a greater *miracle. Lazarus still had to put his personal faith in Christ if he was going to enter heaven. He might live a little while longer on earth. But it would not be worth much if he had to suffer death forever.

These are the 'greater things' that Jesus promised. And we have witnessed them. These 'signs' in John's gospel were visible proofs that Jesus is God. But they were also symbols that persuaded people. They showed what Jesus would do during the rest of history. He would do it by means of men and women who believed. *Miracles like these might have happened in our own lives. That would be a great privilege. And we will want to see them happen in the lives of other people. Those people who love the Father will want to do 'works' like these. These 'signs' will last forever.

Of course, there is a danger. *Believers might try to do these 'greater things' by themselves. They might use their own strength. They might try to do it in their own way. Or they might try it with their own ideas. That is the reason why Jesus said important things to Philip about prayer. *Disciples must 'ask' for these 'greater things'.

Need the Father's help

In his *gospel, John had already shown the perfect balance that is in Christ. He is unique. He is God. But he is also a real man. And John emphasised this by what Jesus said. Jesus often showed that he completely depended on the Father. It is in the passage that we are studying. And it is in other places in the gospel too.

Christ's words and his deeds came directly from God. Jesus asked in prayer for those things that he needed for himself. (Read 11:41; 17:1-5.) He asked in prayer for those things that his followers needed. (Read 14:16; 17:6-26.) And he urged his *disciples to

do the same. 'I will do whatever you ask in my name...You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.' (Read 13-14; 15:7, 16:23-24, 26.)

Jesus knew that his best *disciples would be the same as him. They would rely on their Father too. And they would constantly express it. Their words would come from him. And the energy for their deeds would come from him. Prayer would be essential to them. Every day they would tell the Father how much they needed him. And they would make their requests 'in the name' of Jesus. This means four things. They would have his authority to ask. [They would use his authority.] They would ask for what he wanted. They would use his strength to ask. And they would ask so that people would see God's *glory.

Ask anything from the Father in the name of Jesus. This means to have and to use his authority. Something is important about the ancient world. If you acted in the name of somebody else that had a meaning. It meant that you were doing that task for them. You were there instead of them. Their good reputation, their importance in society and their influence helped you. You were just there to do what they wanted you to do.

John was thinking about something like this. So he told us to ask in the name of Jesus. We must remember this when we come to the Father. Jesus was the example. He told us to come to the Father. And Jesus has promised that he will meet us there. When we ask, we are asking with all his unique authority.

There is more about when we request anything 'in his name'. It is this. We are not demanding something that is selfish. We are asking for something that he wants. To pray 'in his name' means a deliberate choice. We want only those things that Jesus would ask for us. We recognise those things that are of the greatest spiritual importance. They are not things that have the greatest benefits of money or possessions. And they are not things that have the greatest social benefits.

Jesus prayed in Gethsemane's garden. To pray 'in his name' means to pray like him. And he said 'I want to do what you want' (Luke 22:42). So, like Jesus, we want to know what will please the Father (5:30, 8:29). We do not want things that will just satisfy us. It means to have the right priorities. And it means that we realise something. What might seem to be right for us is not always best for us.

I have a letter that is of great value to me. It is from Dr W. E. Sangster. He was a famous Christian teacher. I did not know that he was very ill. And I wrote to him, to ask for advice. I was studying for a university qualification. And it was a subject that he knew well. A reply soon came, with the information that I needed.

And I learned about his illness. It was a rare disease of the muscles. And there was no cure for it. He could only speak with difficulty. And, as the weeks went by, he could not do even that. All he could do was to hold a pen between finger and thumb. In the past, many thousands of people loved to listen to him. This was great suffering.

At that time, I was a young minister. And I was caring for my first church. I did not know him personally. But I had admired him very much. The last sentences of his letter were from a man who was dying. And they reminded me about what mattered most in life. These are the things that we should seek 'in the name' of Christ.

And now, in my sickness I am grateful to God for his many mercies (blessings). There are useful things that I can still do. I am glad about this. And I am ready for all his perfect will.

Dr Sangster could hardly move. (The word to describe this is paralysis.) So he could not do the many things that he had done so well. Previously, he preached [declared God's word in public.] He taught. He wrote. He cared for the members of a large church. He led major efforts to tell people about Christ. Now, all of that was gone. But the greatest things remained. And they are in the last words of his letter. He was grateful to God. He was willing to serve him. He submitted himself completely to God. To pray 'in his name' means this. We choose to limit ourselves to the priorities of Jesus.

When we make our requests 'in his name', it means something more. We are using Jesus' strength to ask. If we use our own power, prayer can never be effective. There are too many limits to our physical resources and our mental resources. Our bodies will soon become tired if we rely on our own energy. We might just use our mental powers when we pray. If we do this, our minds will quickly become tired too.

People who pray 'in his name' rely on the resources of the Holy Spirit. He is the one whom Jesus promised to send. He makes things clear in people's minds. He gives strength and energy to their bodies. Paul told the *believers who lived in Rome city about this. If they relied on his help, they would never get tired of prayer.

... the Spirit helps us. We are very weak. But the Spirit helps us with our weakness. We do not know how we should pray. But the Spirit himself speaks to God for us. The Spirit speaks to God with feelings that words cannot explain. God knows people. He knows what they are feeling. And he knows what is in the mind of the Spirit. This is because the Spirit speaks to God for his people. And he does it in the way that God wants. (Romans 8:26-27)

This was Paul's experience. And it can be true for us. The Spirit helps us when he prays *with* us. Christ helps us when he prays *for* us. (Read Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25).

But something else is the most important thing. It is for people who pray 'in his name'. We should be asking that other people would *glorify God. We will desire only things that bring praise to God. Things that make people realise how great Christ is. And things that give honour to the Holy Spirit. It is a deliberate choice.

We will not pray for things that may give pleasure to us. We will pray for things that give joy to him. This is what it means to ask 'for anything' in the name of Jesus. So, it does not mean that we can have whatever we want. Even Jesus wondered if he could avoid the suffering of death on a cross. (Read John 12:27.) But he knew that it was the only way to *glorify the Father.

*Disciples who have Jesus' priorities show their love for the Father. They show their love by the things that they do. But they also show their love by the things that they desire. The disciple's most sincere prayer should be this. It is that people may *glorify the Father. That is certainly how Jesus prayed.

This brings us to the last of those five things about which Jesus spoke. It was on the day that Philip asked to see the Father (14:8).

Desire the Father's *glory

The *disciple should have one aim. That aim should be to *glorify the Father. And this should show in every part of life. It should be in words, in deeds and in prayer. That is how Jesus lived, served and prayed. (Read 17:1-5.) And those who follow Jesus must have the same ambitions. We can easily spoil our service. And we can ruin the good effect of our lives too. And we do this if we have selfish motives. We can spoil the best things when we have the worst ambitions.

I know a church that is in southern England. One man was very generous. He paid for a grand church tower. It was in memory of his grandmother. But he spoiled this kind thought. There is a sign that everyone can see. We learn nothing at all about her. And we learn more than we need to know about him.

It was a kind act. And the sign gave him a good chance to say something about his grandmother. But the grandson used it to say something special about himself. It gives many details about his social importance and his many achievements. He used this chance to praise himself. It is a story that has a sad lesson for us to learn. And *disciples should think about it. People who are truly Christ's followers refuse attention for themselves. They want to live like Jesus. And this is only *to *glorify God*'.

Jesus always desired that his Father should receive all the praise. This was what his life was like from its beginning. And it was the same when he reached the end of his life on earth. His suffering on the Cross was awful. But Jesus wanted praise to go to his Father then too.

There was a famous professor of the Old Testament. His name was H. Wheeler Robinson. He described this well. 'The way that a man begins a job shows something. It shows what he will do with it. Then there is the way that he finishes it. That shows what it has done with him.' Christ's work on earth was finishing. And he had great peace. There was a reason for this. He knew that he had done everything in his life to *glorify God. Now he was ending his life in the same way.

Every life on earth must end. Then, the value of material things is not significant any more. Perhaps we have • social importance • plenty of money • mental abilities • educational awards • professional skills. But there is a time when these things are of little value. It is the time when we are going to leave this life soon.

Only one thing will matter then. It will be whether we *glorified God while we were on earth. Even some *believers refuse to think about death. It is too unpleasant. People should not give the subject of death too much attention. This is especially so when life is good. People might be feeling cheerful. Life has plenty of excitement. So they might think about death much later. But this is strange for a Christian, because Jesus said important things about death.

And so does a famous author. His name is R.D. Blackmore. He spoke about when we reach that moment. He reminds us in a poem about the most important things then. [Remember that this is a translation. So the words are not exactly the same as the author wrote them.]

In the hour of death, when this life comes to its end,
When the heart beats slowly, and the eyes' sight fades.
And the pain has made weak every limb –
The lover of the Lord shall trust in Him.

When the will has forgotten the lifelong aim,
And the mind causes disgrace to its fame,
And a man is uncertain of his own name –
The power of the Lord will fill this frame.

For even the best delight may become dull.
And power must fade, and the pride must fall.
And the love of the dearest friends grow small –
But the *glory of the Lord is all in all.

[Note: 'Frame' means 'body'.]

'The *glory of the Lord' is vital. All the great New Testament leaders agree with the Christ whom they loved. They all urge us to *glorify him. That should be our greatest aim.

Paul linked the subject in all his letters. So, the first Christians would realise its importance in their daily lives. (Read Romans 11:36; 15:17; 16:27.)

Peter insisted on something. It is about every time that a Christian speaks. It is about every act of service. We will always have the strength that we need. But we must do it to *glorify God. We must not do it so that people will praise us. (Read 1 Peter 4:10-11.)

John described heaven in a way that makes it seem very real. And nothing is more important than two things. There is the Lord in great *glory. And there is the huge crowd of very happy people. They are worshipping him. They are singing about the Lord Jesus Christ. 'He has *glory and power forever and ever'. (Read Revelation 1:6; 4:9, 11; 5:12, 13; 7:12; 11:13; 14:7; 19:1; 21:11, 23.)

*Disciples on earth must try hard to do the same thing. Human life is short. It is their unique chance to *glorify God. They pray with their Master, Jesus. 'It was for this reason that I came to this time. Father, *glorify your name. (Read John 12:27-28.)

Word List

[Meanings of difficult words]

In the text, there is a * before such words

- baptise** A Greek word. It is a ceremony. (Baptism is the name for the ceremony.)
It means to put a person in or under water for a brief time.
Read Mark 1:4-11 and Romans 6:3-8.
These verses explain why it is a Christian ceremony.
- believer** A person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.
It is someone who belongs to Christ and who follows him every day.
This is another name for a true Christian.

disciple	A person who follows a leader. It could refer to a student of a teacher. It especially refers to the 12 men whom Jesus chose. It is also a person who follows Jesus today.
glorify	To give honour and praise to God; to admire him. It is to show love for him and to worship him. To put him in the position that belongs to him. The desire is that other people will understand who he is too.
glory	The power and greatness of God. It includes God's great beauty. In the Old Testament, people saw God's glory as very bright light or fire. (Read Exodus 24:16-18; 30:34-38; Ezekiel 1:26-28). In the New Testament we see God's glory especially in Jesus (John 1:14). We are not good enough for God's glory (Romans 3:23. But the answer is in Romans 6:23). Christians can show God's glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). Christ will return to this earth. Then everybody will see his glory. (Read Colossians 3:4; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Titus 2:13).
gospel	Good News. It refers to all that God has done. It is about all that God is doing. It is also about all that God will do because of Jesus. The first 4 books of the New Testament are called 'The Gospels'.
mercy	Kindness to someone who does not deserve it. It is a very strong word. There are several meanings in it. There is love and pity. 'To have mercy' also refers to when God or a person forgives.
Messiah	Lord Jesus Christ. It is a Hebrew word 'meshiah'. The same word in Greek is 'Christos', Christ. God promised the Jews that the Messiah would save or rescue them. We read about him in the Old Testament. Then, Jesus came. But the Jews did not believe that he was the Messiah. (John 1:11). And the Jewish nation is still waiting for the Messiah to come.
miracle	A wonderful thing that only God could do. It could not happen in a natural way.
prophet	A person whom God chose. Then God gave special messages to that person. The messages could be for an individual, or for a group of people or for a nation. The prophet would hear God's words and tell them to the people. In Old Testament times, a prophet often wrote down these messages. And the Jews still call a group of books 'The Prophets'. These books are also part of our Bible.
Temple	The Jews' special large church. It was in Jerusalem city. And the enemy destroyed it in AD70. (This was 70 years after the birth of Jesus.) Smaller church buildings for Jews are called synagogues. (Other groups build temples too. They worship false gods in them.)