

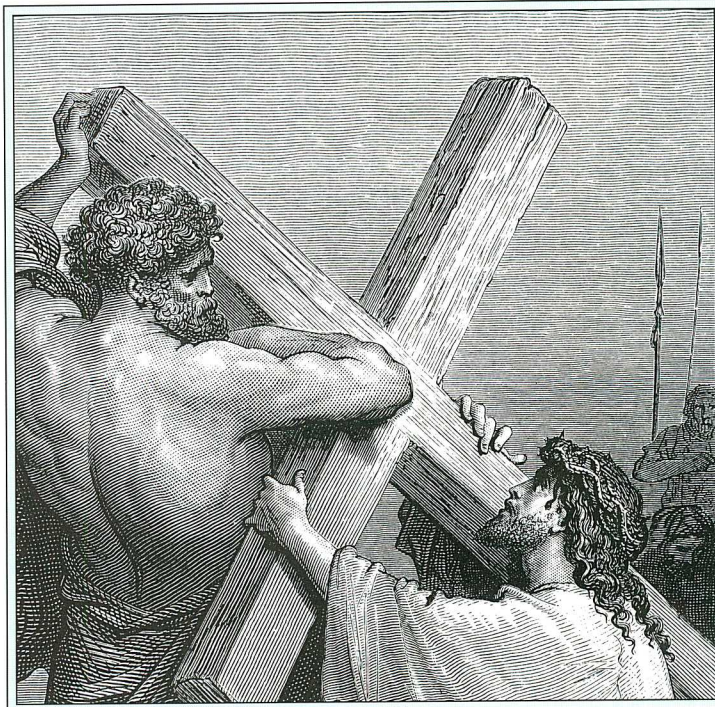
God with Us

CHRIST IN ALL THE GOSPELS-3

“John Tells Us About Jesus”

by Desmond Ford

*John tells us less than Matthew, Mark, and Luke
about what Jesus **did**, and more about who Jesus **is**.
John reveals the inner, invisible Jesus—the Jesus who is God.*



John's Gospel is the deepest, most beautiful, most wonderful book in the world. It's a book where a child can wade, or an elephant swim.

When you are studying Greek at seminary, the professor starts you on John's Gospel. “En arche een ho logos,” or “In beginning was the word.” It is simple Greek yet very profound.

John presents Jesus as God.

In the beginning was the

Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.... He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.... No one has ever

seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. (Jn 1:1, 3, 10, 14, 18 NRSV)

All this is in the preface to John's Gospel.

John Calls for Decision

John's Gospel is the Gospel that calls for a decision.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are what are called the synoptic Gospels. “Syn-

optic" is a technical word meaning "to see the same way," or "seen together" (syn-optic). Matthew, Mark, and Luke emphasize the human aspect of Christ and focus on what he **did**.

John's Gospel emphasizes the divine aspect of Christ and focuses on who he **is**, and what he **is**. John lingers more on Jesus' words than his deeds, more on Jesus' inner nature than his outer actions. John's Gospel is the Gospel of the divinity of Christ.

It is also the Gospel that calls for our decision.

In effect, John's Gospel says, "In Matthew, you've seen Jesus as King. He has the right to command us. Our lives are in his hands. In Mark, you've seen Jesus as Servant. We are to serve him with like compassion. In Luke, you've seen the human Jesus saying, 'Love's activity grows out of love's contemplation.'

"Now," says John. "Do you receive this Man?"

Believing Is Receiving

Nearly one hundred times (98 to be exact) John's Gospel uses the word, "believe." In about every chapter, John uses the word "believe."

Believing is receiving, and receiving is believing. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (Jn 1:12 KJV). Chapter after chapter, John asks, "Do you believe?" Believing is receiving and receiving is believing.

The person who believes is not condemned. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (Jn 3:18).

Eternal life begins the moment I believe. "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (Jn 5:24).

We have eternal life now, in Christ. The moment I believe, I am not only not condemned. I am justified!

Justification

"Justified" is the opposite of "condemned."

"Condemned" does not mean to **make** bad. It means to **declare** bad. "Justify" does not mean to **make** righteous. It means to **declare** righteous.

God calls the repentant sinner per-

fect the moment he or she believes. That is the essence of the gospel, the good news. Though we are not good, God declares us righteous. For Christ's sake.

We were ruined in Adam without asking for it. We have been redeemed in the Last Adam, Christ, without asking for it. "Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (Rom 5:18 NIV). Justification is the same as acquittal.

Justification is not forgiveness. In a practical sense, it includes forgiveness, of course. But the word means much more. It means to be treated as innocent.

The gospel says that God does not see in you and me the likeness of a sinner. God only sees the likeness of his Son. The **standing** of the Christian is always perfect even though the **state** of the Christian is never perfect.

Justification is over us **all** of our lifetime. Don't think it just happens when you become a Christian. "Now I have to roll up my sleeves and get sanctified!" No, justification is over you all of your life. Justification **always** determines your standing before God.

In God's sight, you lived in Jesus, you died in Jesus, you were buried in Jesus, you rose with Jesus. In God's sight you are already seated in heavenly places with Jesus (see Eph 2:6). That's why we read, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1). God counts that we are risen with Christ.

John's Gospel is asking, "Do you believe? Have you received? Do you have life eternal? Have you received the favorable verdict of the Last Judgment now?"

The Judgment takes place as you hear the gospel. If you don't resist the good news and the love of God, faith is born. Faith is the beggar's hand that lays hold of Christ. Believe! Believe! Believe! is all the way through John's book.

First and Second Miracles of Transformation

Jesus is set forth in John as the great Transformer. Life needs transforming. I need it, you need it.

John tells us of seven major miracles of our Lord before Calvary. Those seven miracles represent our human condition.

In the first miracle, at the marriage

in Cana, the wine runs out (Jn 2:1-11).

Anyone who grows past their twenties finds that the wine runs out. The first 25 years of life tell many lies. You only wake up to that when you get past your twenties. Getting older is losing one veil after another. Now you begin to see the reality of life. The wine runs out: the wine of youth, health, joy.

But Jesus changes things. "Do whatever he tells you" (verse 5) his mother said. When the servants heeded the virgin Mary's secret, there was a transformation of the circumstances. There appeared a wine that satisfied, that was much better than the former wine. A wine that never runs out!

The second miracle begins with a young man without health (Jn 3:43-54).

His father, a royal official, comes pleading to Jesus, "Sir, come down [to Capernaum] before my child dies." But Jesus heals the boy without going. There's God!

As a man, Jesus is seen in the flesh, there in Cana. But Jesus is the God-man. He heals the boy miles and miles away in Capernaum by willing it, simply with a word! Jesus is the Person who changes and transforms.

Third Fourth and Fifth Miracles

The third miracle is for a man without strength (Jn 5:1-15).

The man lying at the Pool of Bethesda has been an invalid for 38 years. Local legend had it that when the waters were agitated naturally, the first person in the water would be healed.

Jesus asks, "Do you want to get well?" (v. 6). The invalid answers, "I have no one to help me get into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me" (v. 7).

"Then Jesus said to him, 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk'" (v. 8).

At once, the man was cured. His health was restored.

The fourth miracle involves people who are dying because they have no food (Jn 6:1-15). The crowd of over 5,000 is pale and anemic looking. They are far from anywhere where they might buy bread. Jesus provides them with miraculous bread. It is the bread of life to them. (See 6:25-59).

The fifth miracle is Jesus walking on water (Jn 6:16-24).

His disciples are in a boat. A night storm breaks on them, and it looks as

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though the boat will go down. Jesus approaches the boat, walking on water. He says, "It is I; don't be afraid" (v. 20). It's all right. God is not dead. Don't be afraid.

Sixth and Seventh Miracles

The sixth miracle is in John 9:1-41.

Jesus heals a man born blind. There is widespread opposition to this miracle. Jesus explains that the spiritual meaning of the miracle is that he came into the world to bring sight to the blind. However, Jesus spiritually also makes blind those who claim that they can see quite well, thank you.

Finally, the seventh miracle is for a man without life (Jn 11:1-44).

Jesus is near the Jordan when the message comes that Lazarus is sick, miles away in Bethany. But Jesus already knows. As God he watches Lazarus wrestling with his strong foe, death. As God he tells his disciples what is happening to Lazarus (vv. 11-13). The moment Lazarus died, far away, Jesus could tell them.

At just the right time, Jesus goes to the family, and raises Lazarus from the grave!

Jesus' seven miracles of healing reveal our lost estate.

We are without the wine of joy. We are without spiritual health. We are without spiritual energy. We have no real sustenance, no bread of life. We are without real safety in this dangerous, storm-tossed, world. We are born spiritually blind. Worst of all, we are, like Lazarus, without life.

Jesus Can Do What We Can't

We live in a dangerous world. It is full of terrifying possibilities and awful certainties. It is an upheaving, tempestuous sea. The world in which we must live is without safety, without sight, and without life.

But, miraculously, Jesus transforms all these circumstances. In John's Gospel we see Jesus doing—as God—what you and I cannot do. Jesus deals with time, space, quantity, quality, nature's laws, chance, death—all the things you and I cannot deal with.

Which of us can roll back time? A little dye might help, but it doesn't solve the problem. Jesus can deal with time. He heals a man ill for 38 years.

Jesus can deal with space. The royal official's son was way over there, miles away. "Come down and heal him." Jesus does not need to go down. He can deal

with space.

I have a son and a daughter in Australia. I see them once a year (unless they come over here). The Pacific Ocean is between us. That space between us is a problem. We can't deal with space. It's no problem to God!

What about quantity? Where could we get enough bread to feed over 5,000 people? The number is probably nearer 20,000. The 5,000 is only the men. Counting women and children, it's probably nearer 20,000.

Jesus can deal with quantity. He feeds them all, and there is plenty left over (Jn 6:12-13)!

Quality? Jesus transforms the water at the wedding into wine. The finest quality wine. Jesus does this all the time, but he speeds things up at Cana. The miracle enables all to see and understand that God turns water and sunshine and soil to wine.

All the things we cannot deal with—time, space quantity, quality—God can handle.

Belief and Belonging

The gospel brings transformation. When we believe—really believe—we are transformed. The evidence that we believe is a changed life. No change? No faith! The gospel is not about "cheap grace."

When we are transformed we henceforth know, "You are not your own; you were bought at a price" (1 Cor 6:19-20, see also 7:23).

We are not our own. We belong to God. Therefore, everything we have belongs to God. Every cent, every moment, every talent, every opportunity. Everything belongs to God. We are simply stewards

That is the fruit of belief. That is the evidence of transformation.

Sanctuary Courtyard

John's Gospel is rich, but we can only talk about one more thing. John's Gospel is a "Pilgrim's Progress."

It is a pilgrim's progress through the sanctuary of Israel, the tabernacle or temple.

At the beginning of the pilgrim's progress, we stand in the courtyard of the sanctuary.

We read that John the Baptist cried, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). Aha! The courtyard of the tabernacle was where the lamb of sacrifice was brought. The lamb was slain at the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard.

Beyond where the lamb was slain was a laver [large basin for ceremonial washings] of water. Here the priests washed themselves before they entered the temple. Jesus said, "Except a man is born of water" (Jn 3:5). Then, "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14). The next chapter of John brings us to the waters of Bethesda where people wait in hope of healing.

All this typifies the laver. John chapters 3, 4, and 5 bring us in our pilgrimage to the water in the laver.

Next in our journey is the table of shewbread. "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:48).

Jesus is the true manna (v. 33), or bread from heaven. The manna that God sent to his people in the desert was round, white, and nourishing (Ex 16:14, 35). This typifies Jesus. Something round or circular symbolizes perfection. Whiteness symbolizes purity. Nourishment is found in "If a man eats of this bread, he will live forever" (Jn 6:51).

Sanctuary Holy Place

Our pilgrimage now takes us inside the main building of the sanctuary.

In the first apartment is the candelabra, the candlestick. As we move on in John, we read Jesus saying,

"I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12).

He continues, "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jn 9:5). Jesus is the candlestick.

Our next point of pilgrimage is the altar of incense, the place of communion. This is pictured in John 14-16.

There is a tremendous difference between Jesus' first speech in the New Testament (Mt 5-7) and his last speech in John 14-16. There is a progression, a growth in intimacy. There is progression in the Gospels.

Here at the altar of incense, the place of communion, Jesus speaks to us intimately:

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be

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Well done, San Diego AAF, and Jim Kaatz.

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A contribution of \$2.00 is much appreciated to cover mailing and handling costs. ❖

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"Yet will I not forget thee" (Isaiah 49:15).

also." (Jn 14:1-3 KJV)

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Don't worry. I give you four good reasons not to worry. 1) You believe in God. 2) You believe also in Me. 3) In My Father's house are many mansions. 4) I will come again, and receive you unto Myself."

Here we are at the altar of communion.

Sanctuary Most Holy

From the altar of incense, we pass through the veil that separates the holy place from the most holy place. Only the high priest can pass through this veil.

In John 17 we find Christ's high priestly prayer. He speaks to his Father as only a high priest can. He offers his consecrated church to his Father.

We move on, through the veil, to where the blood is sprinkled on the mercy seat. Now we are at Calvary.

Now we see Jesus' side pierced. Now we see the blood and water coming out.

Christ is the mercy seat. The blood must be on the mercy seat, so the blood flows from his brow, his side, his palms, his feet. His back is bleeding from being whipped.

There are many ways to die without the shedding of blood. You can be poisoned, or strangled. But Jesus must die a bloody death because he is the mercy seat that must receive the sprinkled blood.

Law a Standard Not Method

In that most holy place, beneath the mercy seat, within the ark of the covenant, is the law of Ten Commandments. (This is the great moral law, the law of love. This is not the law about ceremonies.)

Jesus has the great moral law within his heart.

We are not to despise the law of God—except as a **method** of salvation. It is too late for a method. The law demands **perfect** righteousness. It demands **perfect** thought, **perfect** nature, **perfect** motives from our very first breath!

No one can hope for favor from God based on a law they've broken. The law is a terrible way of salvation.

It's a wonderful **standard** of righteousness.

Jesus said, "Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb 10:7 NIV). "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Ps 40:8).

We should never despise the law. It is in Jesus' heart. It is the standard, but never the method of salvation. As a standard, the law could not be changed. At Calvary, Jesus' death is evidence of that. One reason he died for our sins is that the great moral law cannot be changed.

Shekinah and Spirit

Above the mercy seat, shines the shekinah glory. It illuminates the most holy place with bright shining light. This mysterious, magical, glorious light symbolizes the presence of God.

At the end of the Gospel of John, the risen Christ meets with his disciples. Though they had all failed him, he does not say, "Shame! Shame!" He says, "Peace! Peace!" (see Jn 20:21). "And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (Jn 20:22).

Dear friends, we come to Christ—and then he comes to us. Calvary is always followed by Pentecost. The Christian is never left alone.

The moment you believe, you receive. Jesus comes to you through the indwelling Holy Spirit. He comes never to leave you.

Too often, sadly, he is resident but not president. We often forget him or shut him up in some distant room. But he is there.

Jesus wants to be king of your life. He wants to be the motivating power for all you do. Looking unto Jesus is our **first** business. Nothing else is. Adoration is the Christian's first duty.

As we behold Jesus, he indwells us through his Holy Spirit. So at the end of John's Gospel shines this shekinah glory. This is the acme, the pinnacle, the completion, the consummation of Christian experience. To have God within! To be possessed of God!

"I'll not leave you comfortless. I will come to you. I will dwell in you." We dwell in Christ, and Christ dwells in us.

Christ Must Die

Let me make one last point. An important one I believe.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John differ in many things. But all of them insist on a Christ who must suffer and die and rise again.

It is rare for all four Gospels to record any single event in the life and ministry of Jesus. One Gospel will record something the others omit. There are a few exceptions. All record the feeding of the 5,000 and the anointing of Jesus'

feet—but that's about it.

However, each of the four Gospels records at length the story of Christ's Passion. From a quarter to a half of **each** Gospel is devoted to the last week of our Lord's life.

This is the death knell for the "moral influence theory." That theory tries to tell us that Jesus came simply, and only, to show us the pure love of God. The theory says Jesus did not **need** to die.

But we cannot understand the love of God without understanding the holiness of God. And the holiness of God is affronted by the sin of humanity. The sin problem is not a mere academic, theological matter. It is a personal affront to a holy God! Something had to be done about sin!

The Gospels put their emphasis on the death of Christ. Not on his birth or childhood, his adulthood or even his ministry. The proportion and amount of coverage indicates his death was **necessary**. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb 9:22).

"The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). Either we pay or God pays. And God paid.

We Suffer Too

The four Gospels focus on the death of Christ. If we are Christians we must share in the Passion of Jesus Christ.

Before Jesus dies, he must be betrayed. He must go into the dark recesses of Gethsemane that prefigure the darkness of Calvary. At Calvary the sun veiled its face. The sun's darkness was in sympathy with the darkness of Christ's soul. On the cross, his soul suffered sheer horror and abandonment.

We cannot be Christians and at the same time hail-fellow-well-met type characters, get-on-well-with-everybody-and-anybody types.

Christians have to stand for something even if everyone else opposes them. You may be a lonely figure because of your faith. You may be betrayed by your friends as Jesus was. You may be sold out by your friends, as Jesus was. You may have all your reputation stripped away—they did it to him—but you have to be a whistle-blower.

There's no dodging the cross. There's no dodging betrayal. There's no dodging Gethsemane.

This is the price we pay for being a Christian. It costs nothing to **become** a Christian. It may cost everything to **remain** one.

Never Forget Resurrection

The one thing the four Gospels have in common is a Christ who must not only die, but also rise again. In the New Testament, Christ's resurrection is part of the cross event. They belong together. The old spiritual says, "That was Friday; Sunday's A-Comin'!"

Jesus was condemned for our sins, but was raised for our justification. The Christian learns not to look at things that are seen, but things that are unseen. Things that are seen get progressively worse. You can see more clearly every day that things in this world are deteriorating. But things that are unseen get progressively better. I tell you, eternity is a lot sweeter the older you get.

The great and glorious future resurrection must never be lost sight of. We have its beginnings now in the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit energizes us with faith, hope and love—but that is only the first fruits of a glory that is to come.

It's a wonderful thing to know, dear friends, that now you are a Christian, now you are in Christ, you are immortal.

You may sleep in the grave, but only until the great Resurrection Day. You cannot perish or die. In Christ you have everlasting life.

In Christ you have the verdict of the Last Judgment. In Christ you have received the Holy Spirit.

Isn't it a wonderful thing that by his incarnation Christ took humanity up into the Godhead? Now, through the Holy Spirit, this Godhead dwells within you.

Christ says that because we are in him, he is in us.

The Four Gospels Say ...

We have skimmed only the surface of the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The limits of these inspired classics are beyond our finding out.

Yet we have penetrated to the heart of their message and learned what these four masterpieces are saying.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"
(Jn 3:16 KJV).

That's the good news of the four Gospels. ❖