

A summary of John 15:18-27

- 1. What is the world? (v.18-19; 1 John 2:16)** Chapters 13-17 of the Gospel of John are Jesus' final words to His twelve disciples. His words are deep and meaningful because this was the last time He would have to speak to them before His death. In 15:6,7,10,14, Jesus challenges His disciples, and us, by laying down a condition "If." If we love Him, we will keep His commandments. If we are His friends, we will do what He commands us. It is easy to say we love the Lord. But do we keep His commandments? Either we love Him, or we do not. Then, in v.18, Jesus says that if the world hates us, it has hated Him long before it hated us. Satan is the ruler of this world (John 12:31). The world is a realm. The Greek word for world is **cosmos**, which means world system, of which Satan is the author. Christ is another realm (John 15:1). Either we are in Christ, or we are in the world. We cannot be in both, and we cannot deceive ourselves that we are in Christ, when actually we are in the world. What is the world? We need to go to 1 John 2:16: ***For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.*** In this verse, we see three aspects of the world: the material or sinful world (***the desires or lust of the flesh***), the soulish or psychological world (***the desires or lust of the eyes***), and the religious or spiritual world (***the pride of life***). In a sense, the material or sinful or fleshly world is the easiest to identify and recognize, if we are believers. We generally know when we are engaged or caught in something sinful (see Galatians 5:19 for a definition of the works of the flesh) because our conscience will let us know. Often, when we commit a blatant sin (such as losing our temper, or telling a lie, or taking something that does not belong to us), we feel ashamed, and we come to the Lord to confess our sin, and, if we have offended someone else, we confess to that person also. However, the soulish or psychological world is harder to recognize. This is the world that we see with our eyes, that attracts us. This may not be the sinful or material world, but the "good" world. For example, we all need to study. We all need to work. Studying and working are not sinful things in themselves. We need to be diligent, and we need creativity. We need to plan for our future, and have goals. However, do we do everything by depending on the Lord? Do we pray before we apply for a job? Do we pray to the Lord before applying to a school? Before an exam, do we ask the Lord for wisdom? If we get a good grade, or appear for a job interview and get accepted, do we even acknowledge and thank God? If not, then we are caught in the soulish world. There is no evil involved. We may have no bad intentions. However, unknowingly, we begin to live our lives like everyone else in the world. We do the same things that everyone else does (good things, not bad things). We get married, we have children, we raise a family, we work hard to support our family, and we like to be the best parents and the best children. All of this is necessary and commendable, but without God, we become common (just like everyone else), and we are caught in the world, and controlled by Satan, without our knowledge. The third aspect of the world (the pride of life) is the most subtle of the three. This is a trap to those who love the Lord, who are committed to Him. If we did not care for the Lord, we would not care for spiritual success or spiritual attainment. Once we begin to follow the Lord in the church life, we may begin to do things out of routine, or out of duty. We may come to the Lord's day gathering, we may even offer praises, we may go out to preach the gospel, and we may participate in the corporate prayers. These are all fundamental exercises, but do we have the Lord's speaking when we participate in these graces? Are these graces to us, or are they the law? Do we have peace and joy when we preach the gospel, or when we visit someone? Do we feel joyful when we meet the brothers and sisters on Lord's day morning, or when we see the children? If not, we may be caught in religious duty, or doing things without the Lord's speaking and His leading. This is the hardest aspect of the world to realize, because we may be self-satisfied, thinking that we are pleasing the Lord, or that we are a good brother or sister. We need the Lord's mercy to realize that these three aspects are with us, and even in us.

- 2. Hatred and persecution (vv.18-21,25).** We do not like to be persecuted. We would rather like to have a good, comfortable Christian life. The Bible states the contrary. Jesus said that because we are not of the world, the world will hate us (v.19). Jesus was persecuted His whole life. He is our master. What about us, His servants? We are not greater than Him (v.20). Obviously, in North America, we do not experience persecution to the same degree as in Middle Eastern countries or some places in Africa, and more recently in Sri Lanka. We do not necessarily need to go to these countries to experience persecution, though we praise the Lord for those that the Lord has burdened to go. Nor do we ask the Lord for persecution. At the same time, even though we may not have the same kind of persecution here in Canada, do we live a kind of life where we are willing to give up, or sacrifice the comfort that we are used to? Recently, a brother did research on the number of times in the New Testament that the reference to “preaching the gospel” occurs. The result was staggering. In the entire New Testament, the preaching of the gospel is mentioned about 131 times. Do we respond by preaching the gospel? Do we renounce our comfort Sunday afternoon to go out with the brothers and sisters to preach the gospel? Do we preach the gospel in our daily life, at work, at school? Do we sacrifice our comfort to go out and care for someone going through a divorce, or someone with poor grades, or someone having a hard time finding a job? Many times, we reject such a revelation. Again and again, the Lord speaks to us, but we want the Lord to bless us if we come to one meeting on Sunday morning. We come to one meeting and we think we love the Lord! If we are not willing to be persecuted, we may not bear “much” fruit. In John 15:2, the word for “more” fruit refers to quantity, whereas in 15:8, the Greek word for “much” refers to quality. Thus, both quantity and quality are essential to our growth. Without persecution, we will not bear much, or abundant fruit (our own growth in the divine life to produce the fruits of the Spirit), nor will we affect other people around us (bearing more fruit in quantity).
- 3. Guilty of sin (vv.22,24).** The Lord has spoken so much to us, and He is still speaking. Do we respond? Again, 131 verses show us the importance of preaching the gospel. Do we do it? We have no, or little response! Are we sensitive to that? Do we feel guilty? Sometimes, we do not like to feel guilty. Actually, guilt is an indication that we are not insensitive, and that we are growing in the divine life. If we do not go out to wash the feet of the brothers and sisters, we should be sensitive to the fact that we did not hear the Lord’s speaking, or if we did, we did not act upon it. We should not feel so comfortable. For example, if we feel comfortable not preaching the gospel or visiting the saints, that may indicate that our level of life (the divine life) is quite low. We may not be that sensitive to sin.
- 4. Bearing witness (v.27).** The same Greek word is used for “martyr,” as in Acts 1:8. This means that as witnesses, or martyrs, we do not care for our own life. Some Christians go to other countries to preach the gospel and lay down their lives for Christ. Do we bear witness in our living? Do people know that we are Christians? This does not mean that we shout to all our coworkers that we are Christians. Rather, we testify through our living, and through our prayers for them. For example, if our coworkers at work say something bad about us, or to us, we should not blame them. Rather, we should pray for them. Maybe we can pray for one coworker. If he or she is open, then we can speak only to that one. It is not a matter of how many people we can witness to, or how many people will get saved through us. The Lord should get all the glory. Often though, we get all the glory, and the Lord is persecuted! During the break time on Sunday morning, and during the love feast, do we talk to at least one person whom we do not know? Do we pray for one brother or sister? Do we pray for the children? May we pray for people, pray for that one whom the Lord has put on our heart. May we not condemn them. Jesus loved the world (3:16). He did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through Him (3:17). May we have such a heart to pray for others and bear witness of Jesus Christ through our living.

A summary of John 15:1-17

- 1. The Father must be glorified in everything we do, related to bearing fruit (v8).** This pertains to our relationship with the Lord, and to the matter of bearing fruit. In chapter 15:1-17, Jesus refers to His Father six times (v.1,8,9,10,15,16), identifying Himself as the Son of Man, fully dependent on the Father, as an example for us. The Father is the husbandman or the cultivator, the source. The Son is the true vine, which means that everything else in this world is not true, but, at best, is a shadow. Everything that the Father and Son are doing is with the purpose to bear fruit, to be glorified or expressed. What is fruit? Galatians 5:22-23 mention the fruit of the Spirit, referring to the condition of our heart, our exercise and our growth. For example, we may read the Bible, attend the Lord's table gathering, praise the Lord, participate in the corporate prayers, even participate in the financial grace offering, visit and accompany people, and preach the gospel. As a result, we may grow in life and be perfected. This aspect concerns our own heart. The other aspect, as seen in John 15, concerns the saints and people around us, and their heart. Do they bear fruit? In a sense, God is the one who bears fruit in us and others. In another sense, people themselves are responsible for their own heart. For example, we may preach the gospel to a hundred people. Will everyone believe in Jesus? Indeed, we must be in spirit and one with the Lord when we preach the gospel, but much depends on the condition of the heart of the people who are hearing the word. This aspect is harder. It is so difficult to bear fruit in this aspect, where others' hearts are affected. That may be one reason why the Lord takes away the branches that do not bear fruit, and prunes the branches that bear fruit so that they can bear more fruit. He may arrange the environment in order to perfect us. For example, the world, in vv.18-19, may hate us because we follow Jesus. This is actually a pruning. If we do not experience these challenging situations, we may not grow. In all the pruning work, and our struggle to bear fruit, the Lord must be glorified. If we preach the gospel, if we shepherd people, if we praise the Lord, if we pray, the Father must be glorified.
- 2. Abiding or remaining in the vine, in order to bear remaining fruit (vv.4-7,16).** In v.2, the Father takes away every branch that does not bear fruit. This may seem that the Father is the One responsible for the taking away of the fruitless branch. On the one hand, this is true. However, if, as branches, we ourselves depart from the vine (Christ and the Christ in the brothers and sisters, or the Body of Christ), then we take ourselves out of the vine or the church life. We cannot blame the Lord. We have a life relationship, not only with the Lord, but also with the saints. If we withdraw, and stay at home, independently, to follow the Lord, we may wither or dry up (v.6) and become useless, or functionless. This does not mean that we lose our salvation. However, in the church life, we may continue to be a "good" brother or sister, even zealous, but we may not bear remaining fruit. The same Greek word is used for "remaining fruit: (v.16) as "abide" in me (v.4). If we remain with the Lord, if we remain in the *logos* word of God, so that we may eventually receive the *rhema* word (God's speaking to us), if we remain with the brothers and sisters, if remain or abide in the teaching and fellowship of the Lord's servants, if we are not independent of other churches, but willing to learn from others, and seeking to see how the Lord can bless even more our own locality, the people that we are accompanying may remain. However, there is no guarantee. It is always a losing battle. According to our observations, an average of one out of a thousand tracts distributed will result in someone believing in Jesus, or coming into the church life. How hard it is for someone to enter into the church life and remain. Only if we "remain" can others have a remote possibility of remaining.

- 3. Abiding in the Lord's love, having the assurance that He loves us, and keeping His commandments (v.9,10,12,14,17).** Do we have the assurance that the Lord loves us? We may agree abstractly that the Lord loves us, but do we really believe it? When we are in a comfortable situation, we may confidently claim that the Lord loves us, and even thank the Lord for His love for us. How about when we find ourselves in difficult situations? Will we abide in His love at those times? Actually, the "difficult" situations that we find ourselves in may seem difficult to us, but may not actually be so. Compared to what Jesus or the apostles in the New Testament went through, the "trials" and "hardships" that we go through are nothing. Yet, when we go through them, how easy it is to say that the Lord no longer loves us. If He did, why would He allow these things to happen to us? However, if we know that He does love us, and that the experiences that we go through are for our perfecting and growth, we may then abide in His love, and even keep His commandments. What is His commandment? That we love one another (v.12), even as He has loved us. Many of us, if asked to take an exam on love, will probably get high marks. We may answer all the questions right concerning the definition of love and how to love others. Do we love others? We actually have very little time to love others. We most certainly love our family, and perhaps a few friends. But do we have the time and the inclination to go search for a "lost sheep" on the mountain, and love him? We may talk about love, but we may not practice it. One practical way to love others is to talk to one new person every Sunday morning, during the bread breaking gathering. Another way is to love the children, know their names, one by one, and pray for them, and even serve them. Another way for younger ones to love others is to visit hospitals or orphanages, to come into contact with those who are suffering. This very much concerns our humanity. The Lord Jesus has the highest humanity, and is the best example of someone who loved the Father and loved every human being with whom He came into contact.
- 4. How may we keep the Lord's commandments? Through asking the Father in Jesus' name (v.16).** Do we come to the Lord to ask? What do we ask? Do we ask only concerning our job or our studies? Yes, we need to ask concerning that. But what about the church? What about the brothers and sisters? What about gospel friends? What about the children? If we ask, when was the last time the Lord answered our prayers? Can we point to a specific time that the Lord did so? For example, we may pray to the Lord for the brothers and sisters, perhaps by name. Because we pray, the Lord may then ask us to contact them (v.16), to send us forth to find them. Do we go? Do we obey His *rhema* word to us? In other words, do we keep His commandments? Do we continue to abide in such a word, and do we continue to pray to the Lord for them? This is not easy. How many times do we pray, and then go to contact someone for a while, and then give up because we are too busy, or they are not open, instead of contacting other people? This may indicate that we do not keep the Lord's commandments. To keep, in Greek, means to guard or hold on to. We must seek the Lord in order to continue to keep His commandments.
- 5. Laying down our life (soul life) for friends (vv.13-15).** Jesus laid down His life (*psuche*, or soul life) for us sinners, whom He called "friends." In Greek, such a word means "close associate" or "companion." However, in Matthew 26:50, Jesus called Judas His friend, but the Greek word there means "clansman" or "comrade," less intimate than John 15. This shows that Jesus died even for Judas, the one who ate bread at His table (Psalm 41:9), and who betrayed Him. What about us? Can we pray for one or two children? On Lord's day, can we talk to one person we do not know? It is easy to talk to those we know (our companions or close associates), but very hard to talk to someone we do not know (comrades).

A summary of John 14:15-31

- 1. Be careful to say that we love the Lord (vv.15,21,23,24,31).** In v.15, Jesus says that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments. Whoever believes in Him will also do the works that He does. In v.21 and 23, He continues by saying that whoever has His commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Him. In v.24, we have the reverse: whoever does not love Him does not keep His words. Finally, in v.31, Jesus does what the Father commands Him. Two of the Greek words for “commandment” or “words” or “sayings” are **logos**, referring to the constant word, and the other three mean “injunction” or “charge.” If we love the Lord, we will keep His commandments. His commandments are His words, specifically the words that He speaks to us, which become **rhema** (the instant word) to us. Do we come to His word (the Bible), and do we come to the servants of the Lord, and to the brothers and sisters, to hear the word in them? Then, do we abide in such a word, and keep or live out such a word? The Greek word for “keep” means to guard from injury or loss, as in a fortress, in a military sense. It is easy for us to say that we love the Lord, or that brother or sister so and so loves the Lord. Peter, in chapter 21:15-17 of the Gospel of John, was not so bold. Jesus asked him three times if he loved Him. The first two times, Jesus used the Greek word **agapao**, referring to the divine love, the highest form of love. Each time, Peter answered with the Greek word **phileo**, referring to the soulish love. Finally, perhaps in exasperation, Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him (using **phileo**, the soulish love). Each time Peter answered, Jesus did not commend him for loving Him, but rather commanded him to feed His lambs and to feed His sheep. This shows us that at best, our love is soulish. We do not love with the divine love. Yet, surprisingly, even according to Jesus’ standards, to love in a soulish way (**phileo**) is already very high, and even then, Peter did not boast but deferred to the Lord, saying each time “Lord, you know...” It is easy to make claims that we love the Lord, but it is difficult to live out such a statement. For example, the Lord may speak to us to preach the gospel, perhaps while we are reading the book of Acts (1:8). Do we respond? Do we keep what we heard, or do we forget it? In one sense, the Lord is very gracious. In John 12:47, the Lord tells His disciples that if anyone hears His words but does not keep them, He (the Lord) will not judge him, because He did not come into the world to judge it, but to save it. However, in v.48, Jesus continues that the one who rejects Him and does not receive His words has a judge; the word that He has spoken will judge him on the last day. This word is **logos**, which will judge the one who rejects. We may hear the word, for example, through the Lord’s servants, or through the brothers’ speaking. Then, we must live that word out. This is **rhema**, the instant word. During that short time, the Lord may tell us that He loves us, but that is not for us to say or boast about. At the most, we can pray to the Lord to ask Him to grant us to love Him more.
- 2. We need to worship the Triune God, since He lives in us (vv.17,20).** In v.17, the world cannot receive the Spirit, since it neither sees Him nor knows Him. However, we, the believers, know Him, for He dwells with us and is in us. Then in v.20, Jesus continues that in that day we will know that He is in His Father, and we in Him, and He in us. This is perhaps the first time that the Triune God (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is revealed in the Bible in such a way. Such a revelation should lead us to worship the Lord. During the Lord’s Table (bread-breaking) gathering, we typically worship the Lord (the Son) during the meeting. However, there is also the worship of the Father, usually after we have broken the bread, where all our praise returns to the Father who is the source or the origin. The Son, whom we worship during the Table gathering, is the course, that is, the One who executes or carries out redemption and the work of salvation. However, all our worship of the

Son and the Father must be in the Spirit, who, as the reality of the Father and the Son, transmits all that the Father has planned and purposed, and all that the Son has accomplished, to us, for us to enjoy and experience. Such a realization may enhance or elevate our praises, not just of the Son, but also of the Father, and consequently of the Triune God, in spirit, during the bread-breaking gathering.

- 3. The Holy Spirit, as the Helper, will bring all the things that the Lord has spoken to us to our remembrance (v.26).** The Father sent the Holy Spirit in the Son's name (Jesus). This sending was not just a sending, but actually a "co-sending," or a "sending with." In other words, when the Father sent the Holy Spirit, He came with the Holy Spirit. Such a co-sending will bring everything that the Lord speaks to us to our remembrance. For example, if we read the book of Ephesians, we may not understand most of what we read. We may read much of the Bible, and not understand that much. However, when a servant of the Lord expounds a certain passage from the Bible, some word (**logos**) may become **rhema** to us. Recently, Acts 20:35 became **rhema** to some saints ("It is more blessed to give than to receive"). This verse was shared in a gathering, and applied to love, and not to money. In response to such a sharing, seven saints expressed a desire to serve the 3-7 years olds in Montreal. This indicates that the Spirit, who is in the spirit of the speaker, and in his speaking, brings many things to remembrance. Seven brothers and sisters raised their hands and responded. This shows that the Spirit in the speaking brother and in the saints brought the **logos** word (Acts 20:35) concerning loving others to the remembrance of these seven saints. This may also show that the Spirit is not just in each born-again individual, but this Spirit is a corporate Spirit to teach many things to us and bring these things to our remembrance. Therefore, we need to treasure the Lord's day gathering and the Thursday night skype prayer and fellowship, so the Spirit can enrich us. We also need to treasure the opportunities to serve in the church life. It is often while we are serving that the Lord will bring a word spoken in the Bible, or through a brother or sister, to our remembrance.
- 4. Despite our outward situation, however discouraging it may be, we have an inner peace that the world cannot give us (v.27).** How do we remember what the Lord has spoken to us? The very word (**logos**) and the Spirit are in the brothers and sisters. They will strengthen and encourage us. Such a word, as Spirit, not only in us, but corporately in the saints, will become our inner peace, even though we may be struggling humanly, perhaps with our studies or financially. Such a Spirit will give us peace, not necessarily the outward material blessings that the world may give. For example, the Lord blessed the Church of God in Montreal in 2018. How then can He bless the church a little bit more in 2019? It is not easy. We are definitely struggling to give the Lord a way to bless us more this year, through the corporate prayers, the gospel preaching, the accompanying and shepherding and visitation of people, and the financial grace offering. But it is a struggle, and often a losing battle. It is easy to get discouraged. Yet there is a peace. Why? Because we have the Lord's commandments, or **logos** word, in us, and in the saints. We have the Spirit indwelling us, and the saints. In the church life, there is no judgment or condemnation as to why someone is not doing this or that. Rather, the Lord must speak to me. For example, the Lord may speak to me to have coffee with someone or preach the gospel. However, this is not just individually, but with companions, as a team. Yes, the Spirit is in each one of us, but we are so weak. If we have companions, their spirit will support us. We need the church life and the church gatherings. May we not be independent, and may we not be independent of other churches. May we treasure, and long for, more corporate prayers and fellowship.

A summary of John 14:1-20

- 1. Prayers that increase our faith (vv.11-14).** In v.12, Jesus says that whoever believes in Him will also do the works that He does. In vv. 13 and 14, He continues by telling His disciples that whatever they ask in His name, He will do it. To believe, in Greek, means to commit, or to trust, that is, to have faith. This means that we must have faith to ask the Lord. When was the last time that the Lord answered our prayer? We may pray much, but can we say that the Lord has answered our prayers? What kind of prayers? Many times, we may pray for personal needs (finding a job, getting good grades, or getting a promotion). We may even pray for miracles. However, what is the asking, or the prayers, that, when answered, cause our faith to increase? These are the prayers “in His name,” that is, when we are one with Him, and we know His need, His burden, which is the church, and the building up of the church. Practically, what does this mean? Do we pray for the brothers and sisters? Do we pray for the salvation of people? Do we pray for the gospel? Do we pray for pillars, that is, serving ones, to be raised up? Do we know the needs of individual saints, and pray for them, one by one? Do we participate in the corporate prayers of the church? We may want the Lord to bless the church, but the Lord will only bless His church if we pray for the church, not just for our own needs. The more we pray for the church, the more the Lord will answer our prayers, and the more faith He will generate in us. This will cause us to pray more, even to adjust and even enhance or elevate our prayers according to the current need of the saints.
- 2. The Father gives the Holy Spirit as the Comforter to us, to indwell us (vv.16-20).** Jesus prayed to the Father to give us another Comforter, which is actually the Spirit, the Spirit of truth (v.17). In Greek, the word *parakletos* is translated either as Comforter, or Helper, or, in other passages in the New Testament, as Advocate (1 John 2:1). In v.16, Jesus says that the Comforter will be with us, with the thought of accompanying us, of being alongside us. However, in v.17, Jesus continues to reveal that the Spirit, or the Comforter, will not only be with us but also in us. This actually is the entire Triune God (the Father, the Son, and the Spirit) dwelling in us, the believers. He dwells in us, and we dwell in Him (v.20). This is a mutual indwelling. How blessed we are! Sometimes, we bemoan the fact that we cannot see Jesus physically, as the disciples in the Gospels were able to see. “If only I had been living in the time of Jesus, how easy it would be to believe in Him!” we sometimes exclaim. Actually, we do not realize that we are much blessed than the disciples in Jesus’ time. The Holy Spirit dwells in us, to comfort us. How much we need comforting! This again is not just to make us feel happy when we are sad or down. No, this is related to the church, to God’s need. Do we mourn, not for our own situation (because we do not have a job), or do we mourn for the church, for the saints, for the condition of the brothers and sisters? Does our mourning lead us to pray for the saints? Then the Holy Spirit will be the Comforter in us, to comfort us. Actually, the answering of our prayers (see the first point) may be the real comforting to us. Even in our prayers, it is not us praying, but the Holy Spirit in us praying and answering His prayers in us, which eventually becomes our real comfort. For example, when we see brothers and sisters pray, and have their prayers answered, that may be a comfort to us. When we see saints eager to pursue the word (the Bible), or preach the gospel, what a comfort that is to us. When we speak something for the Lord, and several saints respond, or remember what we said, the Holy Spirit comforts us. The Holy Spirit in us, and in the saints, is a marvelous comfort to us, to cause us to give ourselves more to the Lord, and love Him more.

- 3. Our works must become our living (vv.11-12).** Jesus was in the Father, and the Father was in Him (v.11). This indicates the union that He had with the Father. He was one with the Father in His living. Therefore, all that He did (His works), reflected His living. His works were not apart from His living. What about us? Do our works match our living, or are they apart? For example, the church may preach the gospel every week, on a certain day and at a certain time. We may participate in the gospel preaching, to distribute tracts. This is very good. However, we need to grow so that our preaching of the gospel is not merely an activity, to be done at a certain time and place, or a work, but eventually becomes our person. Am I in the Lord when I preach the gospel? If so, then I will also have His burden for people, to testify not as a duty, but as an expression of my person. Wherever I am, I may be a person of the gospel. This does not necessarily mean that I become a capable gospel preacher, or an evangelist, but preaching the gospel becomes my joy and my living.
- 4. We may do greater works than Jesus! (vv.1-2,10-12).** This may seem hard to believe. Why did Jesus say this? We must go to vv.1-2. In v.1, He tells us to believe not only in God, but in Him. Then, in v.2., He says that in His Father's house are many abodes. Many believers have misunderstood this verse to mean physical mansions in heaven, perhaps because of the translation of the Greek word *manay*, which means abode or residence. These abodes do not refer to mansions, but to all the believers (those who believe in Jesus), together, to form the house of the Father (v.2), or the Body of Christ. This is perhaps the first allusion to the Body of Christ in the New Testament, not referring only to the individual Jesus, but to the many believers to form His body. It is the Body of Christ which would do the greater works, that is, to preach the gospel, to spread the testimony and kingdom of God, not just in Jerusalem, but throughout the earth (Acts 1:8). When Jesus was on the earth, His sphere of operation was the nation of Israel. After His death and resurrection, His sphere of operation is the entire earth, through all His believers, in whom He indwells, preaching the gospel and multiplying His eternal life. For example, every time we preach the gospel to our friend, or neighbor, every time we pray for the church, every time we visit someone, in union with Christ, the Body of Christ is being built. The indwelling Christ in us, in all the believers, as His Body, is engaged in greater works than the individual Christ could ever do. Again, how privileged we are to participate today in the spreading of His testimony.
- 5. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (v.6).** How can we know the Father? We must come to the Son (Jesus). He is the way. In Greek, the word *hodos* means road, or journey. To know God, we must begin to walk on a way. The world never provides a way to know Christ or exalt Him. Only the church life provides a way. What is the church life? Christ, but practically, Christ in the believers (the brothers and sisters). How do we come to God? Through Jesus, but through Jesus manifested and lived out of believers. Then, as we live in the church life, we hear the word of God, the Bible, spoken by the brothers and sisters, or servants of God. Or a brother or sister may begin to accompany us and read the Bible with us. The word of God begins to become truth to us. God becomes more real. The church life becomes sweet and joyful. The brothers and sisters become more lovely. Eventually, we begin to enjoy the divine, eternal life. We no longer come to the church gatherings just because of the social life, or to receive some blessing. We may begin to view the saints, not just as our friends or helpers, but we may begin to know the Christ in them. We may begin to live, not just for this age, but for the next age, that is, for eternity. Our faith in the Lord begins to grow, as well as our faith in the Christ in the saints. We may know Him more, and we may even be more willing to follow His way, that is, to deny ourselves, even as He denied Himself to go to the cross (vv.3-4).

A summary of John 13:1-30

- 1. If our feet are not washed, we have no share or part with the Lord (vv.1-10).** Verse 1 says that Jesus loved His own who were in the world, and that He loved them till the end. The Greek word for “love” in this verse is **agape**, the divine love. How is such a love demonstrated? Through the example of washing the disciples’ feet. The disciples (you and me), are in the world. Satan, as we see in chapter 12, is the ruler of this world (12:31). Even though we, as disciples, are clean, that is, we have believed in Jesus and experienced baptism (represented by v.10), we still need our feet, that is, our daily walk, to be washed and sanctified. A very good picture of this is found in Exodus 30:18-20, where Aaron, the high priest, and his sons, washed their hands and their feet in the bronze laver of water located between the tent of meeting and the altar. This picture in the Old Testament is explained by Jesus in John 13:8, where Jesus says plainly that if we do not go through this same process, we have no part with Him. What is the significance of the washing by water? We need other Bible references . John 19:34 tells us that when Jesus was on the cross, a soldier pierced His side with a spear, and blood and water flowed out immediately. Water here refers to the release and impartation of the divine life, which we receive when we believe in the Lord. Titus 3:5 says that God has saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit. This washing of regeneration not only refers to our initial regeneration (our new birth) but also to the continual experience of living a life of regeneration and renewal in our daily life and our church life. Ephesians 5:26 tells us that Christ cleanses the church (us) by the washing of water with the word. The Greek word for “word” in this verse is **rhema**, the word that speaks to us and touches us. Who are we? We are believers, disciples, perhaps even serving ones, washed by the blood of Christ, and regenerated by the life of Christ. We may serve the Lord, serve the saints, and take care of a lot of services, even visiting people. If, however, we are not washed by the water in the word, if we do not come to the Bible and experience the **rhema** word, we gain very little. Being in the church life is not a guarantee for gaining Christ. Moreover, if we are serving ones and do not come to the word, how can we wash the feet of others? We must realize how dirty we become by being in the world, in a realm usurped by Satan. The environment and the influence of the world cause us, again and again, to live apart from the eternal life that we have received. That is why we need our feet, that is, our walk, to be washed by the water in the word. When our feet are washed, we may, through the Lord’s mercy, be able to wash other brothers’ and sisters’ feet. Do we know them? Do we know their condition? We are not to judge or condemn them, but to know what they need, and lead them to live in the realm of eternal life.
- 2. We need a soft and receptive heart for our feet to be washed (vv.10-18).** The prerequisite for having the feet washed is to first have bathed (v.10). Yet Jesus acknowledges that not all were clean (vv.10-11), referring to Judas Iscariot. This may indicate that it is not the outward environment that causes us to be washed, but the condition of our heart. For example, Judas was with Jesus for three and a half years. We also may be in the church life for many years. We may come to all the gatherings. We may even offer many praises. However, if our heart is hardened, we cannot be washed. In fact, no one can wash us. If we come to the Bible just in order to understand it and say something about it to other people, we may be like Judas. No, when we come to the Bible, it is not for the purpose to speak to others, but for the Lord to speak to us. If there is no water (**rhema**) in the word, and nothing touches us, our heart may be hardened. We refuse to open to the word, and we refuse to open to other brothers’ and sisters’ speaking. We may not be involved in anything evil, but our heart is hardened. We close ourselves to the Lord’s speaking through His word and through other saints, and we are satisfied by living our Christian life and our church life in the same way as before. No one can wash us, and we cannot wash others. What is the result? Verse 18 says that “He who ate my bread has

lifted his heel against me.” The Chinese translation of “lifted his heel” has the thought of “kick,” a much stronger and emphatic meaning. Such is the result of an unwashed living. We may come regularly to the bread-breaking meeting and partake of the bread and the cup (“eat my bread), yet we may end up “kicking” the Lord or lifting up our heel against Him. This will trouble the Lord in His spirit (v.21). We often criticize Judas and wonder how he could ever betray the Lord after accompanying him for three and a half years. What about us? Do not we, time and time again, “betray” the Lord in our living and our actions, all the while thinking that we are engaging in good Christian services? Therefore, our heart needs to be soft, and we need to be washed over and over again.

3. Are we truly a slave of the Lord, or do we live as a comfortable servant of the Lord, respected and honored by all (vv.13-16;v.20)? The Greek word for “servant” in this verse is *doulos*, which means slave or bondman, someone who has lost his rights. The slave is not greater than his lord. The Lord is our example. He lived a crucified life, even before He actually went to the cross. Are we willing to be a slave, or do we prefer to live as an honorable and venerated “servant of God?” Some servants have a comfortable and even luxurious living. Does our living match that of our Lord? If our living is “higher,” then we are, in a sense, “greater” than our Lord. What an irony! If we come back to Exodus 30:18-20, we realize that before the priests could wash their hands and feet in the bronze laver, they had to first pass through the bronze altar of burnt offering. This means that we first have to know who we are. We are fit only to be consumed. We are not qualified to serve God. All our “serving,” and everything of which we are proud, must go through the altar (the cross). As the Lord took off His outer garments (plural), we also need to lay aside our outer garments, that is the things of which we are proud (our strengths and virtues), and also the things of which we are ashamed (our weaknesses and failures). Neither can satisfy God, and both must be consumed on the altar. Only then can we be qualified to be a slave. Such a qualification is precious, because it may enable us to live a life that is not above that of our Lord. It may also cause us to recognize other servants of God, who live as slaves, and receive them and their speaking (v.20). We need to treasure such servants of God, whom God sends to us. They are washed, and they realize that they are not qualified. Everything that they say and do goes through the altar (the cross) and the bronze laver (the washing of the water in the word). At the same time, we also need to exercise proper discernment to identify those so-called “servants” of God who are proud, who think they have something, but do not know the people to whom they speak, thinking that they can impart something to them. Such a speaking may not be helpful, and may in fact prove detrimental to the church. May the Lord give us such a discernment, and touch our living so we can exercise to live a life not greater than that of the Lord Jesus.

4. The word of the Lord is difficult to understand (vv.7,12). In response to Peter’s indignant protest against Jesus washing his feet, Jesus tells Peter that he (Peter) does not know now what He (Jesus) is doing, but that he will know later (v.7). The Greek word for the first “know” is *eido* (an inward knowing). The Greek word for the second “know” is *ginosko*, an outward knowing. When the Lord speaks to us, we may receive His speaking, and our heart may be soft. However, we do not know His intention or His purpose, but we still respond to Him. Later, we may know or understand what He said to us, but this may become outward knowledge. In other words, we may understand outwardly what He said, and we may even practice it, but in an outward way. For example, many practices in the Bible, including foot washing, baptism and the Lord’s Table, may become outward knowledge to us, causing us to practice them in a religious or outward way. In v.12, Jesus, after washing His disciples’ feet and sitting down again, asks them if they know what He has done to them. The word used for “know” is *ginosko*, an outward knowing. Even at this point, the disciples did not fully apprehend the import of Jesus’ act of washing their feet. Do we? Again, do we desperately come to the word until the water in the word flows and washes us?

A summary of John 12:27-50

- 1. How can we glorify the Father's name? By living a crucified life (vv.24-28).** How did Jesus glorify the Father's name? In verse 24, Jesus says that "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Jesus is that grain that fell into the ground to die. Not only did He die on the cross, but His whole life was a crucified life. Even though He was sinless (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15), He denied His soul life (John 12:25). The words that He spoke, He did not speak from Himself, but from the Father who had sent Him (John 12:49). It was such a crucified living that bore much fruit. If we desire to glorify God, we must take the same way. Often, we may say that we love the Lord and that we want to serve Him. Such a declaration is commendable, but may be made without our realizing the true implications involved. In 12:26, Jesus says that if anyone serves Him, he must follow Him (Jesus), and that where He (Jesus) is, there will His servant be also. Where was Jesus? Spiritually speaking, Jesus was on the cross. Even when He was not physically on the cross, He was on the cross spiritually. If we want to serve Jesus, we must follow Him, and to follow Him, we must not only do things for Him, but be where He is. Are we on the cross? Is our soul life on the cross? For example, when we come to the Lord's Day gathering, are we exercised to come on time? Or are we content to live according to our habit of coming late? When we come to the gathering, do we offer praises to the Lord? Or do we live according to our natural preference of keeping quiet. Conversely, when we do offer praises, are we one with the Lord, or do we praise the Lord out of our zealously or natural enthusiasm? Or do we like to be praised by others for being a "good" brother or sister (12:43)? When we preach the gospel, do we realize that if someone believes in Jesus Christ, it is not because of our own ability or diligence, but because His crucified life in us will produce fruit. Our natural zeal and ability are only good to be crucified. It is Christ's crucified and resurrected life that will bear fruit in us. How will people believe in Jesus? What kind of testimony do we have? In vv.32-33, Jesus said that when He would be lifted up from the earth (referring to His death on the cross), He would draw all men to Himself. Are we willing to be lifted up on the cross, so that our friends and our classmates may be drawn to Jesus?
- 2. Not only receive the Lord's words, but believe in and keep them (vv.47-48).** The Greek word for "words" in v.47 is *rhema*, which is the instant word of the Bible, the written word that has touched us and spoken to us. We may read the Bible or the *logos* word (the constant word) without that word becoming *rhema* and having an effect on our lives. However, in v.47, Jesus is referring to those who have received the *rhema* word. Curiously enough, we may not believe or abide in the words that we have heard. When we experience the *rhema* word, we should not stop there. For example, we may attend a Christian conference or training, and receive rich speaking, revelation and even visions from the word of God (the Bible) through the speaking of God's servants. We may return home and testify how the Lord spoke to us during that time, how impressed we were, how much we realize we need to put into practice what we heard, and even encourage others to do so. Then we may go home and live the same way we lived before. What was lacking? Our desire was good, our heart may have been pure, the speaking of the Lord's servants was undoubtedly rich, and our response was sincere and genuine. Yet we may lack one crucial element, namely to keep or abide in what we heard. How can we keep what we heard? By outlining the next step that we need to take to make the *rhema* word practical and long lasting. For example, I may hear a word about preaching the gospel (2 Timothy 4:2 where Paul exhorts us to preach the word in season and out of season). What do I do with that word? Do I determine how to carry that out? This coming Sunday, after the gathering, I will go out to preach the gospel with my companions, at such and such time, for so many minutes. Without this step, all our good heart and good intentions will remain exactly that. Our testimonies will remain good testimonies, and our declarations will remain noble wishes or dreams, without a concrete, visible outworking.

- 3. Which realm are we in: light or darkness? (vv.35-36, v.36).** In the Bible, there are only two realms or spheres: light and darkness. The ruler or authority of darkness is Satan (Acts 26:18). What does it mean to live in darkness? To live in darkness is to live in the world, to be caught in the world system. In John 12:31, Jesus refers to the ruler of this world (Satan). What is the “world,” as defined by the Bible? One definition is all the people, whom God loves unconditionally (John 3:16). Another definition, applicable in this chapter, is the world system, that is, a living void of the cross, a living where we are free to do whatever we want, without God and without other brothers and sisters. This living consists of three aspects: the material aspect, the sinful aspect, and the religious aspect. This is not a matter of right or wrong, or good or bad. For example, a father and a husband may be consumed with working long hours in order to earn extra money for the comfort and security of his family. He may not have the time or the energy to attend the Lord’s day gathering, nor to pray or read the Bible. Some may say that this is good. After all, is he not providing for his family, as a good husband and a good father? Others may say that this is bad. As a Christian, he should set aside time for God. Actually, in God’s eyes, it is rather a matter of a realm, not so much of what we are doing. Where are we? In the world, or living a crucified life? In darkness, or light? Of course, darkness and light have their “works” or “fruit.” If we walk like the world, we will be in darkness. When we are in darkness, we do not know where we are going (John 12:35), even though we may be busy doing many things. We may not have the Lord, and we may not be able to gain the Lord.
- 4. How can we be brought into the realm of light (v.40).** Verse 40 is a quotation of Isaiah 6:10. This verse seems paradoxical, and many misinterpret this verse by blaming God for hardening their heart! A superficial reading of the verse may lead one to such a conclusion. A deeper reading of the verse will lead us to worship God for His mercy, rather than blame Him! God is so kind in this verse. It is as if He almost exonerates man of his refusal to believe, and instead assumes the responsibility of hardening man’s heart. Actually, other verses in the Bible reveal the contrary. 2 Corinthians 4:4 tells us that “the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers.” Pharaoh in the Old Testament hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:32). Even the disciples’ heart, right after the feeding of the five thousand, was hardened (Mark 6:52). God never hardens our heart. Satan hardens our heart, and we harden our own heart. What does God do? God endeavors to open our blinded eyes (Ephesians 1:17-18), to open our eyes, so that we may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God (Acts 26:18). If we realize that we are in darkness, then we may be brought into the light, not just once, but again and again. We also need to participate proactively in the church life, in the gatherings, to be with companions, and to preach the gospel, so that we may be brought more into the light. Unfortunately, not that many believers preach the gospel, thinking that people are not open, or that people will reject or throw away any tracts that we may distribute. Actually, according to our recent experience, no one has thrown away in our presence tracts given out by us. Our responsibility is to preach the word, in season or out of season (2 Timothy 4:2). Some will believe (John 12:43). This shows how merciful God is, not willing that any should perish (1 Timothy 2:4). This should inspire us to preach the gospel even more, and not to lose heart.
- 5. Confess and testify the Lord (v.42).** Many of the rulers believed in Jesus. This is marvelous, and disproves the common accusation that God hardens the hearts of unbelievers! However, those rulers who believed did not openly confess the name of Jesus because they were afraid of being put out of the synagogue. Are we ashamed of the name of Jesus? Are we afraid of losing our job, or losing our friends, or losing the approval and favor of our teachers or students? Are we afraid to invite our friends to the church gatherings? Do we love the glory that comes from man rather than the glory that comes from God (v.43)? It is always healthy for a new believer, as soon as he or she is saved, to testify to others and to confess the name of the Lord. Such a confession is a salvation to us, as believers, and can be the seed of eternal life sown into others.

A summary of John 12:1-26

- 1. Why did Jesus go to Bethany (v.1)?** John's gospel does not give us too many details concerning Jesus' visit to Bethany. John tells us in verse 1 that Jesus came to Bethany six days before the Passover. However, Luke tells us in 21:37 that every day He was teaching in the temple, but at night He and His twelve disciples (Mark 11:11) went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet, where Bethany was located (Mark 11:1). Why did Jesus go to Bethany every night during the six days that He was in Jerusalem? We know that there were thousands, perhaps as many as ten thousand, people who had believed in Him. Matthew 21:9 and John 12:12 tell us that there were crowds or multitudes of people who shouted "Hosanna" (meaning "God saves") while He entered Jerusalem on a donkey. He was royally welcomed and appreciated by many. Why, then, would He make the nightly journey to Bethany? This question may be beneficial to ask because it may challenge us by causing us to ask ourselves the following question: are we satisfied to live a church life where everything may seem to be going smoothly? Many people may be coming to the gatherings, and many may even believe in Jesus. Yet, in all of this, do we have the Lord's presence in the church life? Do we have the Lord's presence in our family life, at home? Do we know that the Lord is with us? The Pharisees knew the Old Testament Scriptures, but did they have Jesus, and did they believe in Him? However, there were a few that really loved Him. Martha and Mary and Lazarus were a family that really loved the Lord, as we saw in chapter 11. Simon the leper, in whose house the first eight verses take place, and to whose house he had invited the Lord and His twelve disciples, also loved the Lord. This shows that the Lord's presence does not depend on how many brothers and sisters there are in the church life, but on their heart, and on how many really love the Lord, like Martha and Mary. Just because a congregation is growing in number does not automatically mean that the Lord's presence is there. Indeed, many may believe, and many may also love the Lord, but is the Lord satisfied? Are we satisfied to be in Jerusalem, and "love the Lord" in a conventional or acceptable or "balanced" way, or do we desire to be where the Lord is, at "Bethany," and love Him in a "crazy" way, like Martha and Mary. Sometimes, we may criticize, or murmur against, those who apparently love the Lord too crazily. Such were the Pharisees, who rebuked the disciples for crying out their Hosannas during Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:39-40). We need to grow, from the experience of being a part of the multitude in Jerusalem, to become those in Bethany who seek the Lord and love Him. This is not to say that those in Jerusalem did not love the Lord. Therefore, we must treasure the church life, and all the brothers and sisters, typified by Jerusalem. At the same time, we should also seek to find the Lord and treasure His presence, and satisfy Him by loving Him crazily (the experience of Bethany).
- 2. Loving Jesus is costly (v.5).** Mary's offering was costly. Judas, and in another Gospel (Mark 14:5) the disciples, observed that the ointment could have been sold for 300 denarii, one hundred denarii more than Phillip's estimate of what he thought it would take to feed 5000 men, not including women and children (John 6:7). According to Matthew 20:2, one denarius was a day's salary. Therefore, 300 denarii were the equivalent of 300 days' wages, almost a year's salary. Therefore, Mary offered almost a year's income to honor the Lord. Is our offering cheap, or costly? Are we willing to offer 300 denarii to the Lord? Again, this does not imply just money, but our heart, our time, from early morning to late evening, our energy, our mind, our intellect, our emotions, our living. To love the Lord is not something cheap, or relaxed, or something "to do" in our spare time, or when we have time. A costly offering is a desperate fight to find time, to make time. Is the Lord that valuable to us? Is He that precious of a treasure? The whole house was filled with the aroma or fragrance of Mary's offering. Is the church life filled with the aroma of our costly offering? Mary "wasted" herself on the Lord, without regard to consequences. She offered, in a sense, to the point of no return. She spent all on the Lord. May we grow in our love for the Lord to such a consecration.

- 3. Why not give the offering to the care of the poor? (v.5).** A good question! Actually, God treasures the poor, and the Bible looks out for the poor, and so should we. Many Christian groups care, or endeavor to care, for the poor, and we must honor them. We have seen how Jesus met so many human needs. He did not just come to teach, but He came to heal, to restore, to feed and to raise up people with sicknesses, needs and hurts. Even Paul was reminded of the need to remember the poor, and he appreciated that reminder (Galatians 2:10). Of course, Judas Iscariot's motive for objecting to the use of the ointment offered by Mary was impure (the Bible calls him a thief). However, in other Gospels, the other disciples raise the same objection. Notice Jesus' response in John 12:8. He did not negate the fact that we should care for the poor. He said that we always have the poor, but we do not always have Him. Therefore, when we endeavor to address human needs (people looking for a job, students struggling with their studies), do we have the Lord? Do we realize that the best gift is Jesus Christ as the eternal life, and as the resurrection? Yes, the poor need to be taken care of. But what about the gospel tract that we distribute? Do we realize that that is the best gift we can give to someone because God may use that to lead someone to believe into His Son. Human needs may be met, but they will arise again and again. Only God's life is eternal. This is the difference between Judas' "offering" and Mary's "offering." Judas' and the disciples' offering was not bad. Yet it lacked eternity. What about us? When we help people find a job or study, do we lead them to know Christ and His life in them. If they get the job, can they praise the Lord? If they do not get the job, can they still praise the Lord and stay in the church life? Much depends on the focus and the goal of our offering.
- 4. Do we rob God? (v.6).** Verse 6 says Judas was a thief. However, in Malachi 3:8-9, God accuses the Israelites, after the captivity of both the northern and the southern kingdoms, of robbing Him. In our church life, we may be captured by other gods. Yes, God chose us, but we end up in captivity, worshipping idols. God is not as gentle in Malachi as He is in the Gospel of John. He tells His people that they are robbing Him (progressive case, i.e. a continuous action). May we treasure Mary and the offering that she made. It is easy to say that we should not be like Judas, but hard to live like Mary.
- 5. We need to grow in our praising of the Lord (vv.12-13).** Many crowds praised Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. Many had believed in Him. Jesus even rebuked the Pharisees for criticizing such a praising (Luke 19:40). Yet the same crowds a few chapters later would shout "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" This shows that we need to grow in our praising of the Lord. For example, we may praise the Lord on Lord's Day for how He has blessed us with a job, or with a good grade. If that is our experience, we should still have the freedom to praise the Lord, where we are. But we need to grow to realize that if we get a job, the Lord has given us a job. If we lose a job, the Lord may have allowed us to lose the job. In either case, the Lord is in control. Can we praise the Lord for who He is, not just for what He does for us? If we praise Him only for what He does for us, we may not have much to praise Him for. In that case, we may shout "Crucify Him!," if not verbally, then in our heart.
- 6. Are we willing to die to ourselves (vv.24-25)?** The proof of the death of a grain of wheat is the yielding of many grains, or much fruit. Jesus was the one grain that fell into the ground and bore many grains. Who are the many grains? Millions of believers all around the world over the last two millennia. What a testimony. What about us? We may claim that we die to ourselves, but the test is how much fruit increase there is in the church life. We may like to be a "lone ranger." In other words, we may serve well and diligently, but alone, in an independent way. We may think we can do everything, and that we don't need anyone else. This may mean that we have not yet "fallen into the ground" and "died." Are we with companions? Are we serving in a team? Are we praying in one accord with the saints? If we preach the gospel, do we preach the gospel with other saints? Do we endeavor to blend with other churches? If there is little fruit because of our labor, or our serving, then we do need to ask whether we have indeed experienced dying to our self.

A summary of John 11:17-57

- 1. Do we know Jesus as the life (v.25)?** Jesus says that He is the “life.” The Greek word for “life” in this verse is **zoe**, which refers to the eternal or divine life. This is the first time, in the Gospel of John, that Jesus refers to Himself as the “life.” In 3:16, Jesus says that whoever believes in Him will receive eternal life, and in 6:47, He says that he who believes in Him has eternal life. However, at this juncture in chapter 11, the Lord wants to bring two of His disciples (and us) higher. Both Martha and Mary loved the Lord very much. Martha went outside the village to come to Jesus (v.20). Mary, upon hearing that Jesus was calling for her, hastened to meet Jesus in the same place where her sister had met Him, that is, outside the village. This shows that both of them were consecrated and pursued Jesus. Moreover, Martha knew the “Bible” very well. She had attended Jesus’ “conferences and trainings,” and had a heart to pursue the word. She knew that her brother would rise again in the resurrection at the last day (v.24). She also knew that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world, interestingly echoing Peter’s declaration in Matthew 16:16. Yet, strangely enough, her realization does not elicit the same excited reaction from Jesus that Peter’s did. This shows that we may love the Lord, attend the meetings, pursue the word, and even attend conferences and trainings, and yet lack the knowledge of the deeper and more profound meaning that lies behind the fact that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Martha and Mary, even though they loved the Lord so much, still longed for their brother to be raised from the dead by a miracle, and even rebuked Jesus for not coming sooner (vv.21,32). However, even though Lazarus was raised up, he still would eventually die (physically) later on. Eternal life, however, is different. For us to receive eternal life is the greatest miracle of all, far transcending the physical raising up of Lazarus. Often, we focus on the so-called “wonderful” miracles, such as getting good grades, finding a job, or finding the “perfect spouse.” Indeed, these are human needs which should be met, and to which we should pay attention. Yet, we must realize how much more precious is the miracle of eternal life. If we realized this, our lives would change. We would become so joyful to preach the gospel, to sow the seed of eternal life to our friends, family, classmates, neighbors, coworkers and strangers. We would treasure the gospel and exercise to speak to people so they can receive the wonderful, eternal life, and experience the greatest miracle on earth.
- 2. Jesus is the resurrection (v.25).** The Greek word, **anastasis**, denotes “a standing up again, from death, being raised from the dead.” It is an overcoming of death. The Bible reveals that death is the consequence of sin (Romans 6:23). Death and Hades (the kingdom of death) are the last obstacles to be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). Jesus overcame death through His death and resurrection (Hebrews 2:14; Ephesians 1:19-21). This same resurrection power is towards us who believe. Who are we? We are weak in the divine life, weak in our desire for the Lord, we do not know the Bible that well, we may not be gifted, and our operation in the church life may be weak. We may even serve the Lord, and people, but in our serving, we may become discouraged, and we may not even see much fruit. Do we give up? Do we abandon people because not that many people seem to be believing in or following the Lord? What do we need? We need resurrection. Resurrection will overcome every barrier, every obstacle, every frustration, every weakness, in our lives. Problems may not necessarily vanish, but resurrection will cause us to be above them, and not be controlled by them. The condition of the church may not seem that hopeful. New people come, but people also leave. Many attend the Sunday morning, but so many may seem to be content with just being part of the “crowd.” They enjoy a happy church life, they can come and go as they please, but few seem willing to pursue the Lord, to know Him, and to know His word. How many are willing to be perfected? If, on the other hand, we experience the Lord as resurrection, we will be joyful and encouraged to accompany people, to preach the gospel, to serve the church, and to pursue the Bible, not looking at ourselves or our achievements, or lack thereof, and focusing rather on Christ and His eternal purpose.

- 3. Through death and resurrection, we will enter into and gain Christ as the glory (vv.4,40).** If we desire to know Christ as the resurrection, we must know the death of Christ (see Philippians 3:10-11). We need to appreciate the weak situations we may find ourselves in our daily life and in our church life. We would like to overcome our weaknesses, and we long that the resurrection life would swallow up our death and weakness. However, for that to happen, are we willing to deny our soul life, to pick up and carry our cross, and follow Jesus by way of the cross? We may desire glory, but the Lord would tell us that we first need death. Death always precedes resurrection. Without death, there is no resurrection. Jesus is the best pattern. He was crucified in weakness, but lives through the power of God (2 Corinthians 13:4). If we think we are strong or prevailing, we may think we are in resurrection, and therefore in glory. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is precisely when we are weak, hopeless, with no way out, and we realize our true condition, that we experience the death or termination of our self efforts to be a good brother or sister, to try to meet certain standards. Eventually, we are brought into resurrection, and we become joyful and released from any religious laws, to pursue the Lord in spirit and with the brothers and sisters, to know Christ and to gain Christ. We realize that it is not how much I serve or how much I do for the Lord, but rather how much Christ I gain as the glory. Hebrews 2:10 tells us that God's goal is to bring many sons into glory. However, Jesus, the founder of our salvation, took the lead to be made perfect through sufferings. We cannot take a different path. Glory is God's final goal, but there is a process to go through, and not one step of that process can be bypassed (Romans 8:29-30).
- 4. Is our love for Jesus and the brothers and sisters a human love, or a divine love (vv.5,36).** In verse 5, Jesus loved Lazarus. This love is **agape** love, in Greek, that is, a divine love. However, the Jews, when Jesus wept, marveled at how much Jesus loved Lazarus (v.36). The Greek word used there is **phileo**, denoting human or brotherly love, the love of a friend, bespeaking human affection or personal attachment. We may love the Lord because He has met our human needs, or because He has given us some joy and peace in our lives. However, do we love the Lord because of who He is? Do we know Him? Do we know His heart's desire? Do we know His burden and what He wants? Are we willing to carry our cross and deny ourselves for His sake and for His interests? This is the **agape** (divine) love. We need to grow from **phileo** to **agape** love in our church life.
- 5. Do we have a testimony that will cause others to believe (v.45)?** Many Jews believed because they saw the things that Jesus had done. Do we have such a testimony? In our weak situations (typified by Lazarus' death), if we are willing to die and resurrect, people may believe into Jesus. However, if we forsake Christ in our negative situations, and we are not willing to come to Him, we may think that we are serving the saints and the church. Our poor condition may cause Jesus to weep or shed tears silently, according to the Greek word (v.35). May we be willing to speak out (testify) for the Lord in our weakness so others can see our testimony of death and resurrection, and believe in Him.
- 6. God is in control despite our tendency to be religious (v.49).** Because of the religious people, Jesus could no longer walk publicly (v.54). He had to withdraw near the wilderness and continue with His disciples. If we are religious, the Lord will not bless the church life. Do we continue to come to the Lord and to His word? Or do we seek to "put Him to death" (v.53)? However, God is still in control. Many believed through the high priest Caiaphas who declared that it was expedient that one person die for the people so the whole nation would not perish (v.50). This word or prophecy was actually true and according to the scripture and God's plan, yet it was not pronounced of his own accord (v.51). This may mean that we may say something, but we may not gain eternal life. People may even get helped through our speaking, but if our speaking was not one with Christ, and did not pass through death and resurrection, we may not gain much Christ. This indicates how important it is to know Christ and to know eternal life. At the same time, God is sovereignly still in control of everything, and people may still be blessed with eternal life through channels that may not be one with Him.

A summary of John 11:1-27

- 1. A family is mentioned for the first time in the New Testament (v.1).** In John, chapter 11, a family is mentioned for the first time in the New Testament: Lazarus (brother) and Mary and Martha (two sisters). This family can also be taken to represent a church or a family in the church life. In this family, there are three names which have significant meaning. "Lazarus" means "whom God helps," thus referring to someone who is weak. "Mary" and "Martha" mean "rebellious" or "rebellion." This is a picture of the church life. Who are we? Those who are weak, who need God to help us. Who are we? Those that are rebellious, full of opinions, not willing to take God's way, not coming to His word. Even if we hear His word, we still like to do our own thing, or interpret God's word according to our taste and preference. Yet God still loves us (His family), but with His divine (**agape**) love (v.5). God loves us, the rebellious ones, with His divine love. Ironically, the "rebellious" ones loved and served the Lord so much. Martha, we know from the Gospel of Luke (10:38-42) received the Lord into her home, and served. Mary, according to verse 2 of John 11, and also chapter 12, loved the Lord so much, to the point that she was willing to offer a pound of ointment (basically her life-savings) and pour it on the feet of Jesus, and then wipe the Lord's feet with her tears. Such a heart and exercise to serve and love the Lord are so inspiring, and yet in the midst of pouring out for the Lord, how much did Martha and Mary know the Lord? Verse 27 indicates that Martha acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. However, neither she nor her sister Mary had the revelation that Jesus was the resurrection and the life (v.25). This means that we may be very much involved in the church life, taking care of several services (for example, serving the children, taking care of the translation service, the meal service), and consecrating ourselves, but we may lack a higher revelation of who Jesus is. The revelation of Jesus in chapter 11 is higher than in all the preceding chapters.
- 2. Grab every opportunity, while it is still day (v.9-10. See also 9:4).** Jesus knew that He could only carry out His earthly ministry while He was alive. Likewise, we can only know and serve the Lord while we are alive on this earth. Therefore, it behooves us to grab the time today to come to the Lord, to know Him and to serve Him. No matter the difficult situations we may find ourselves in, even in death, we still need to serve. Jesus risked His life to serve the family of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, which is a picture of the church. He was willing to return to Judea, despite the remonstrance of His disciples (v.7-8). What about us? Are we willing? Thomas consented to go back with Jesus to Judea, along with the other disciples, in order to die with Him. Was this a noble or bold decision? Perhaps, but another way of looking at it is that Thomas, in deciding not to abandon Jesus, reluctantly reconciled himself to the inevitable consequence of being found with Jesus, that is death. We may follow the Lord, but it may be in a reluctant or gloomy way, as a martyr, rather than joyfully and enthusiastically. If we do not have a job, if we do not have money, if we fall sick, we easily abandon Jesus. We may not be willing to follow Him at the risk of our "life."
- 3. We must bring people to Christ as the light of the world (V.10).** Many people stop short of knowing Christ, or having a revelation of Christ Himself. We are generally satisfied to have our needs met, or to be a Sunday goer, or, if we are more serious, to engage in some kind of spiritual activity in the church life. How many are actually willing to pursue Christ? How many are willing to pursue the Bible? How many are willing to attend the pursuing gatherings? We may like to speak on Sunday morning, but if we do not pursue, we will express a lot of opinions, just like Martha and Mary. Without pursuing, our gatherings will become gatherings of opinions. What is the remedy? We need to preach the gospel so that some may be raised up to pursue the word, to pursue the saints, and to pursue people so they can get saved. The gospel should be preached so people can know that Jesus Christ is eternal life. Eternal life is the best gift. If people do not know Christ as life, our serving is in vain.

4. We need to come to Jesus (v.20). Martha, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him. Mary, when told by her sister Martha that Jesus was calling her, rose quickly and came to Him (v.29). In both cases, both sisters expressed their opinions. Martha rebuked the Lord for not being there. So did Mary. Neither knew the Lord according to what the Lord wanted to reveal to them. They still came to Jesus. This is our salvation. If we come to Jesus and hear Him, we have a chance to know Him more. Never stop coming to Him. To know the Lord is not automatic. It does not happen by osmosis. We may think that the longer we are in the church life, and that the longer we serve faithfully in a certain capacity, the more we will know Christ and have revelation. This is not the case. Statistics and data show us that many saints come to the church life, stay in the church life, even serve in the church life, and then leave. Why? Because they did not come to the Lord in all their serving and living. They were not willing to go higher, to be elevated. For example, they may have stopped attending conferences and trainings, or stopped attending the local pursuing gatherings, or prayer meeting of the church. Yet they still are faithful in certain respects. However, they may have stopped growing, and they may remain in the revelation that they received ten years ago. In John 11, the revelation of Jesus as the resurrection and the life is higher than that of Him as the bread of life in John 6, or of Him as the light of the world in John 8. This means that we must never stop growing in our receiving of revelations. Once we stop, the church will suffer and several may leave. We may have a heart to pursue, but a good heart is not enough. May we continually come to the Lord again and again, even in our opinions. The Lord will have a way to perfect us and cause us to go higher in knowing Him according to His current need and speaking.

5. All the negative situations are arranged by the Lord for us so the Son and the Father can obtain the glory (vv4,15). Jesus knows exactly what we lack. He knows that we are short of revelation. He knows that through situations of weakness and even spiritual death (v.4), we will know Him a little more so He can gain the glory. It is indeed so difficult to receive revelation from Christ. Again, we are just like Lazarus (weak), and Martha and Mary (rebellious), living in the church life in Bethany (meaning “house of misery”). In one sense, we are miserable, and even hopeless! Why do so many saints leave the church life? They have a heart to love the Lord, but so many other things come in, especially the negative situations, to draw them away. Therefore, we need a pure heart to pursue the Lord and the Bible with the saints. Otherwise, the Bible is so hard to understand, and may become a closed book to us. We need to preach the gospel, to resurrect us from our death situation, and impart life to us, that we may grow.

6. Mary offered to the Lord, not to meet a need, but to be a blessing to the church, and a testimony of the Lord (v.2). In chapters 2 through 10, Jesus addressed many human needs, and met them all. In chapter 11, there is another need, that is, the sickness and ultimate death of Lazarus. Yes, Jesus meets this need, but by revealing Himself as the resurrection and the life, not just physically, but also spiritually, to be enjoyed by us today. This was to the glory of the Father. Mary’s offering reflects this principle. Her financial offering (represented by the pound of ointment in chapter 12), stems not from a need that she observed, but rather from her consecration to the Lord and to the church, and her desire to bless the church. Her offering became a testimony. Do we have such a testimony? Are we willing to offer our financial offering to the Lord? Or do we wait for a special need? Mary “broke” her alabaster flask and “wasted” it on the Lord. This was not a requirement. She did not do so out of obligation. Rather, it was voluntary. Are we willing to bless the church in such a way? We may want higher revelation of the Lord, but if our financial offering remains in our pocket or our bank account, it is very doubtful how much more revelation we will receive. Mary’s offering afforded her the opportunity to come to the Lord, to listen to Him, and to know Him more. Without our offering, all our declarations, our desires (however sincere), and our expectations to grow in our Christian life, may be dreams.

A summary of John 10:22-42

- 1. The testimony of John the Baptist by preaching the gospel (v.41).** John the Baptist was the first man, as a forerunner and predecessor Jesus, to testify concerning Him. In John 5:31-35, Jesus said that John the Baptist bore witness concerning Him, as “burning and a shining lamp.” Now, in 10:41, we see another detail of John’s testimony, revealed for the first time through those who listened to John, in that he performed no miracle, or sign. His entire ministry was one of preaching the gospel. His preaching of the gospel in chapter 1 paved the way for many to believe in Jesus in chapter 10. His preaching of the gospel was a true and accurate testimony of Jesus Christ, and caused people to believe in Jesus. This, we can say, was the biggest “miracle.” When we preach the gospel, we should not focus on miracles, but on presenting Jesus Christ to people, to meet their human needs and their real need, which is God Himself. God will perform the miracle of salvation. Do we exercise to preach the gospel? Preaching the gospel is a testimony for the Lord..
- 2. The testimony of the works of Jesus (v. 25,37,38. See also 5:36-38).** Jesus, surprisingly, declares to the Jews that even if they do not believe in Him, they should believe His works (v.38). This testimony is His works or deeds or labor (according to the Greek word). These works are the works commissioned by the Father that the Son accomplished in His earthly ministry (healing, raising from the dead, feeding the 5000, casting out demons). These are also the works today that we may experience in our lives as He takes care of us humanly so that we may eventually believe in Him and be saved. Many brothers and sisters can testify that they came to salvation through some event that occurred to cause them to believe. Many offer prayers and thanksgivings during the church gatherings. These can be blessings to us if we are willing to receive them, and can cause our faith to grow in the Lord. We will realize that we are actually surrounded by many witnesses of the “works” of the Lord in the lives of many people. May we pay attention to such “works,” and treasure them.
- 3. Jesus uses the Old Testament to reveal Himself as the Son of God (v.34-36).** Jesus uses Psalm 82:1, and 6-7, to reveal His divinity as the Son of God. The "word" here is *logos*. Therefore, all our direction and prophesying must be based on the "logos," the written word of God. The *rhema*, or the Lord’s speaking to us, must be based on the *logos*. When we testify, or preach the gospel, it is not enough to just have experiences, however real they may be, but to also have a verse, or verses, to back up what we are saying.
- 4. None of Jesus’ listeners seemed to have believed in Him when He was walking in the temple. However, many believed in Him when He relocated by the Jordan, where John the Baptist was baptizing. Why? (v.40-42).** The temple was the place of worship ordained by God in the Old Testament. That was where the proper worship of God took place (the sacrifices, the offerings, and even God’s speaking to the high priest for the sake of the entire congregation). The priests, the Pharisees and the scribes were, in principle, serving ones appointed by God to lead the people in the proper worship of God. Thus, the temple may be taken to be a type of the church life (Paul refers to the church as being a holy temple in the Lord, Ephesians 2:21). Ironically, none of the so-called serving ones “in the temple,” where Jesus was walking, believed in Him. Rather, they took up stones to stone Him (v.31) and eventually arrest Him (v.39). They had religious baggage that hindered them from receiving revelation, even though they had all the right teachings. This may also frustrate us. For example, we may like to talk to people who may seem to us to be “open,” because they may know the Bible. Since they know the Bible, we may spend a lot of time with them, and eventually “waste” our time because their religious concepts may hinder them from really knowing the Lord. On the contrary, to go to the “Jordan,” where John the Baptist operated, is to go into the wilderness, that is to leave the religious

environment, and preach the gospel to people who may not have much religious baggage. When we preach the gospel, we need to “find the Jordan,” that is, cast our net wide and sow the seed to many. We may comfort ourselves, for example, in going to the Sunday morning meeting every week, and testifying or speaking in the gathering to people who may be coming every week, but who may not really “believe” what we are saying! In other words, our words may not have much effect. On the other hand, when we preach the gospel outside of the church gatherings, either in public places, at work or at school, some may be eager to receive our words and believe in Jesus. This is somewhat contrary to our way of thinking. We may rely too much on the gatherings (perhaps representative of the temple), and minimize the going to people where they are at (representative of the Jordan, or wilderness environment).

5. **Are we shepherds? (v.27).** Jesus Christ is the “Great Shepherd,” to shepherd us and cause us to know His voice and follow Him. He lays down His life for the sheep (v.11). What about us? Yes, the Lord shepherds us. Do we shepherd others? The Lord is the good Shepherd. Are we shepherds? Jesus said that His sheep know His voice, and they follow Him (v.27). What does that mean practically? Do the saints know Christ in our voice, and follow Him (Christ) by following us? Do we feed the saints, as parents feed their children? Or do we like to only teach the saints, that is, give them some Bible knowledge, or tell them what to do, without knowing them and their needs? Paul, in 1 Corinthians 4:15, told the Corinthian believers that they had countless guides or teachers in Christ, but not many fathers. Do we want to be fathers or teachers? To be a teacher requires a little knowledge of the Bible and some experience in the church life. To be a father or a mother means that we need to lay down our soul life to know the saints, their needs, to spend time with them, and to feed them.
6. **The Son and the Father work together so nobody can snatch the sheep (believers) out of their hands (v.28-30).** What a marvelous picture we have here of the Son and the Father working together to preserve the ones to whom they have given eternal life. Notice how the Son cedes the place to the Father by acknowledging that everyone who is in His hands has been given Him by the Father, who is greater than all, and that ultimately, no one can snatch them out of the Father’s hands. The Son yields to the Father, and we see a sweet, harmonious accord in which the believers are kept securely. In our shepherding of people, do we feed them eternal life so that the world will not be able to pluck them out of the Father’s and the Son’s hands? Just as the Son and the Father collaborate together, may we also collaborate with Christ, and with one another, to raise up people (pillars) who will grow and feed others. If our shepherding is weak, many people will come and go. Objectively, once a person believes in Jesus, he or she will never lose the eternal life they have gained. That is indisputable. However, for them to grow and become a blessing to others does require our shepherding and cooperation.
7. **Are we one with Christ, even as the Son is one with the Father (v.30)?** This is a challenging question. How can we be one with Christ, and if we are, how often are we? Do we have many prayers (individual, with companions, in small groups, in church gatherings)? Are we pursuing the Bible with brothers and sisters? Are we surrounded by many sheep? Are we close to many brothers and sisters? Do we spend time with them? Do we genuinely care for them? We may declare that we are in Christ, but it is good to ask ourselves how much time in a day we are in Him? How many minutes? Can we increase the number of minutes that we pray or read the Bible? Can we visit or contact one more brother or sister? Can we participate in the church prayer meeting and pray for a few seconds? Never underestimate the seemingly “insignificant” effort to bless the church by “one more prayer,” or “one more visit.”

A summary of John 10:1-21

- 1. Why does John 10 occur at this juncture in the Gospel of John?** Chapters 4,5,6, and 8 give us examples of individuals who had a human need, and whose need was met by Jesus. In each case, Jesus meets the human need in order to reveal the real need, that is, God's need, which is the purpose of our human life. To the Samaritan woman in chapter 4, Jesus reveals Himself as the living water. In chapter 6, He reveals Himself as the bread of life, and His words as spirit and life. In chapter 7, He reveals Himself as the Christ, and to those who are still thirsty on the last day of the feast, He reveals Himself as the living water. In chapter 8, He reveals Himself to the woman caught in adultery as the light of life. In chapter 9, He reveals Himself to the blind man as the Son of God. However, in chapter 10, the focus shifts from man's need to who Christ is. Four times, in v. 7,9,11 and 14, Jesus says "I am." He is the focus. We are brought from our need to a revelation of who Christ is. This chapter may be called the hinge or stepping stone to a further revelation of Christ. Eventually, we are elevated from our human needs being met to a realization that Christ is the unique **door**, the unique way, and the unique **truth**. Everything we say, do and are must go through, by and unto Him.
- 2. There are several key words in chapter 10: Thieves and robbers (v.1,8).** If we speak or do something that does not go through Christ, we may be thieves and robbers, that is, we may damage brothers and sisters and rob them, and ourselves, of Christ. Acts 20:29-30 mentions "fierce wolves" which, Paul warns the elders of Ephesus, will rise up from "among" them. They may be those that take the lead. This can also be our case, if we are not watchful. If our speaking and living are not in Christ, or for Christ, we may fall into the same category.
- 3. The voice of Jesus and the voice of strangers (v.4,5).** How can we speak or minister in Christ? We need to hear His voice, and follow Him. Do we know the voice of Jesus? The sheep (the believers) follow Jesus because they know His voice. Jesus knows each of His sheep by name (v.3). Not only do we need to know and hear the voice of Jesus, but also know each of the sheep (believers) that God has placed in our church life. Do we know the brothers and sisters? If we are shepherding some believers, do they know us, just as children know their parents? Or are we a stranger to the saints (v.5)? The saints should not regard us as a stranger, nor should they be a stranger to us.
- 4. The door, the sheepfold and the pasture (v.1,2,7,9).** All our speaking, serving and living must go through Christ as the door into the sheepfold, and out into the pasture. If our speaking and our serving are through Christ, the saints will be led into the sheepfold. The sheepfold, according to several Bible commentators, may represent the law of God, which is very good. The law can be described simply as God's speaking in the Old Testament. The law was given by God, and is something good and holy because it shows us who God is (His righteousness, holiness, uniqueness etc.). The purpose of the law is to guard us, or shut us up, as a protection, in order to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:23-24). The law, embodied by God's speaking in the Old Testament through His servants and prophets, is indeed the word of God spoken to us. If our faith is weak, the word of God spoken to us will indeed be **logos** to us, that is the constant word, which will instruct us, teach us and guide us (Galatians 4:1-2). This word, either read by us in the Bible, or spoken to us through God's servants, will be our protection, and even our pasture for our nourishment. However, we may still be children (weak in faith). In this case, we need to be in the sheepfold, and even live by the law (Galatians 3:12). For example, if we still trust our bank account rather than God, in one sense, we need the speaking of the "law" to correct us, and cause us to "live" by that speaking. This speaking, which is in the sheepfold, is our pasture. On the other hand, when the logos word becomes **rhema** to us, we are freed from the law. The word becomes spirit and life to us (John 6:63).

The word of God and our faith free us from doing things out of duty or obligation. For example, we may now attend conferences and trainings, not because some brothers encouraged us to do so, or because a “good” brother or sister is expected to do so, but because we are free to do so, and we find it enjoyable to do so, in order to gain more revelation of Christ. The **rhema** in God’s word (in principle, the New Testament), becomes the freeing element to lead us through Christ, as the door, into the pasture. At this point, our speaking, once we are outside the sheepfold, enables us to supply life to others. Inside the sheepfold, at the most, as children, we can be protected and live a healthy church life for own growth. Outside the sheepfold, we can be freed by the **rhema** word to grow relatively mature in order to be a blessing to others, to cause others to grow and pillars to be raised up. Others may then know Christ in our words, and eventually follow the Christ in us to ultimately follow the Lord themselves. We must realize that if Christ is not our door, everything we do in the church life will be death (that is, routine, dead works). If we have Christ, but we are relatively immature (children, weak in faith), we will enjoy the pasture in the sheepfold as a protection, and we will grow through the receiving of the **logos** word. However, once the **logos** becomes **rhema**, our faith increases, and the pasture that we enjoy will become richer and cause us to grow in life and maturity. Once our faith grows, we are no longer controlled by the guardianship of the law (teachings) (**Galatians 3:25**), though we still need to hear and receive them. As we continue to receive the **logos** word, this word, becoming **rhema**, and eventually truth, sets us free from the law, to live a joyful life with Christ, for Christ and unto Christ, as the way, the purpose and the goal of our living.

5. **Hired hands versus the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-15).** A hired hand does not own the sheep (v.12). There is no life relationship between a hired hand and the sheep. A hired hand (a serving one) will take care of the sheep (believers) because he may have been appointed, or, by seniority, assumed that position. As serving ones, are we willing to lay down our lives for the believers and gospel friends? Are we willing to forsake our rights (for example, our sleep, our time, our money, our comfort), to shepherd the saints? A hired hand is actually a stranger to the sheep. Are we strangers to the saints? Are the saints strangers to us? Are we available for the saints in every situation and in every need? If not, the saints may not know who we are. In that case, we are like a hired hand, and we may even be responsible for some saints not growing spiritually (suffering spiritual death).
6. **The logos word, if it only remains logos, may cause division. The logos word, if applied to us in our experience to become rhema, will give life (10:19-21).** Jesus’ words, in 10:1-18, were indeed life-giving and Spirit filled. However, when heard by certain of His listeners, they had a negative effect, and caused the listeners to accuse Jesus of having a demon. To these people, Jesus’ words were merely words, or sayings (in Greek, **logos**, v.19). However, other listeners disagreed, saying that these same words (now **rhema**, v.21), were not the words of someone who had a demon. For example, if we use the Bible to give the law to others, to tell them what to do and what not to do, those same words, which are righteous and good, can separate believers and even cause division. If, on the other hand, those words speak to us and touch us, firstly, they will cause us to change in our living. Secondly, they will cause us to know the people to whom we want to speak. Thirdly, what we share will be one with Christ, and take into consideration the life level of the saints we are talking to (different in every case). Rather than imposing something on others, we will encourage and lead others to live a free and joyful life in Christ, according to Christ, and for Christ. Instead of division, the **rhema** words will bring in the one accord. Since the saints are at different life levels, some words which are **rhema** to us may be **logos** to some of them. This reminds us that we need to know the saints and then speak. It also means that the serving ones need to be circumspect in speaking to many saints (eg. Lord’s day), but instead need to often shepherd the saints individually. Then the words which are **rhema** to us may be also **rhema** to them.

A summary of John 9:1-13

- 1. The *rhema* word to us must be lived out. Otherwise we may be more blind than before (9:6-7):** Like the blind man, we are those that are born blind. In contrast with the case of the paralysed man in John 5, and the sinful woman in chapter 8, the blind man in chapter 9 is not guilty of “sinful behavior.” However, he is still a sinner and thus, like us, cannot see God. Jesus anoints His eyes with His spittle (His word), mingled with the dirt from the ground, which may signify the world, to form a clay which may represent His speaking. Each time we hear the Lord’s speaking through His word, or through the brothers and sisters, or through His servants, and are touched, the words become *rhema* to us. However, Jesus did not stop there. He charged the man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam (v.7), which means “sent.” When we hear His speaking, that speaking must be obeyed and lived out from us. For example, we may hear a word concerning preaching the gospel. If we do not actually practice or live out what we heard and were touched by, that very word may cause us to be more blind than before, because the mud on our eyes remains. We may think we understand, and admire the rich speaking, and rave about how wonderful a certain conference or message was, and think we see, but if we do not preach the gospel, we have no further revelation, and our blindness remains. Unfortunately, our heart may become harder to resist the preaching of the gospel. Yes, we may have had revelation before, but we may block ourselves from having more. The hearing of the word must be accompanied by a submission to it, and a “sending” (the Greek word denotes being sent on a mission, like a soldier). It is only when we “wash away” or obey the *rhema* word that the Lord can give us further revelation.
- 2. Do we leave people to be beggars in the church life? (9:8).** The blind man was a beggar. He had parents (v.2, 18-23). But his parents liked to stay in the temple (a type of the church life), and surprisingly allowed their son to beg. Are we like the parents? If we do not take care of people, or raise up “spiritual children,” there will be many beggars in the church life, lacking spiritual food and nourishment, and not having their human needs met. This is a sober warning to us. We cannot expect people to automatically grow, or say that God will take care of everything. Yes, God will take care of everything, but through the brothers and sisters. If we do not preach the gospel, contact people, and take care of new ones, one by one, with companions and as a team, many people will fall away through our neglect.
- 3. Do we know the brothers and sisters around us? (9:8-10).** Ironically, some of the blind man’s neighbors had a hard time recognizing him, even though they had seen him, presumably every day, for a long time! They had seen him but had not really paid attention to him and noticed him! Isn’t this our case sometimes? We come to the church gatherings on Sunday morning, every week, or fairly regularly, and “see” so many brothers and sisters. Do we know them? Do we know whether they love God or not? Do we even know their names? Do we open our homes to them to get to know them? We can be around so many people, and think we know them because we see them so often, but who among them are our spiritual children? Do we know if they are growing?
- 4. How can we have further revelation from the Lord? (9:1).** Jesus knew the blind man, who he was and what his heart was like. In verse 1, the Greek word for “see” actually denotes “to know.” This means that Jesus knows us, and knows our heart. According to the condition of our heart, He will further open our eyes and reveal Himself to us. Yes, Jesus loves the world (signified by His spitting on the ground). But why did He “speak” to this man in particular? Because He knew this man’s heart, and He knows our heart. What kind of heart did this man have? Firstly, he was submissive (he obeyed Jesus and went to wash off the clay). Secondly, He became a disciple of Jesus (v.27). Thirdly, he knew the word a little (v.31). Fourthly, his heart was

pure (v.36). Even though He did not know Jesus as the Son of God, he called Him “Lord” and expressed a desire to believe in Him. Therefore, the Lord “passed by” (v.1) and found him. The Lord does not arbitrarily open people’s eyes. Yes, He loves every person unconditionally and without exception. But He will only open our eyes if our heart is pure and willing to know Him. For example, if we do not open our homes, or contact brothers and sisters, or preach the gospel, how can the Lord grant us more revelation? Indeed, we may have had revelation last year. But what about now? If we do not love the Lord more this year than last year, our eyes may remain closed in a particular area, and we will be frustrated in receiving more revelation from the Lord. In a sense, and here we have to be careful how we phrase it, we need to “earn” further revelation from Christ. But isn’t salvation not based on our works, but on faith alone in Christ? No doubt, and yet how much more faith do I have this year than last year? Of course, this is relative, depending on our level of divine life. The Lord will only reveal to us what we are able to receive, according to our heart and our willingness to obey that revelation.

5. **We must treasure every day the Lord gives to us (9:4).** Jesus treasured every day the Father gave to Him. He realized that there would come a time when it would no longer be possible to “work.” Do we have the same realization? Do we submit to His *rhema* word, so that the saints (the brothers and sisters around us) may not become “beggars?” Are we desperate to take advantage of the day, that is every window of opportunity the Lord gives us to spend time with people? For example, on Sunday morning, we see so many people (“neighbors” – 9:8). That is actually a window of opportunity to talk to at least one person whom we do not know. Are we also desperate that the saints around us may also have such a caring heart to reach out to and accompany a few people so that more and more would be rich in knowing and loving and pursuing Christ?
6. **What are the works of God? (9:3).** Jesus says that the works of God should be manifest in the blind man (us). What are the works of God? We may say that firstly, the work of God in us is our hearing of Jesus’ speaking. We are blind, but we may have a pure heart, a heart that wants to seek Him. Secondly, the work of God in us is our obeying, submitting to, and living out the word that is spoken to us. Thirdly, the work of God in us is our testimony and growth in the divine life. The blind man’s parents did not dare to confess that Jesus was Christ because they were afraid of being ejected from the synagogue by the Pharisees (v.22). They were reluctant to tangle with the Pharisees, and perhaps preferred their comfortable, childless, routine church life. However, the blind man (no longer blind) was not afraid to take on the Pharisees in a spirited manner. His level of life was higher than that of his parents. Sometimes, the newer ones may have a higher level of life than the older ones who invited them to the church life! Do we have such a desire, to testify Christ regardless of the consequences?
7. **When we do testify, how do we testify? (9:9-12).** The blind man, having recovered his sight, testifies according to his experience, no more and no less. For example, in v.9, he answers the neighbors’ question accurately, identifying himself as one who had sat and begged. He does not try to defend or justify himself. In v. 11, he simply states the facts. He does not preach or tell his neighbors what they should do. In v.12, he honestly tells them he does not know where Jesus is. How do we testify? Sometimes, we like to explain things, or talk about things that we don’t really know, or that are not our experience. In our speaking, we should first have the Lord’s instant speaking (something that touched us) from a verse or verses in the Bible. secondly, we should try to know our audience (the ones we are speaking to), and thirdly have an example or an experience in the church life to back up our testimony. If we are asked to explain or expound something in the Bible that we have no experience of, it is better to say “I know not.” If we try to explain without experience, that word may become head knowledge and may eventually frustrate us from receiving more revelation from the Lord.

A summary of John 8:37-59

- 1. There are two fathers and two realms: God and the devil (8:42, 44). Which one are we in, and how can we be transferred?** Before we believe in Jesus, we are children of the devil, in his kingdom. When we believe in Jesus, we are transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God, to become sons of God. This is our position as believers in Jesus Christ. However, in our living, we may still remain in the realm of the devil, and in this sense, he may still be our father. If we do not hear the words of God and stand in them (8:44), then, practically, we are living as children of the devil. This may be a hard word. Therefore, we need to be on the alert to pay attention to “hear the word of God” (8:43), so we can live practically as children of our Father and our God, and bring others into this realm by attracting them to the word of God. How? We need to accompany people, either in a team, or one-on-one, to read the Bible with them, or during the skype fellowships that we have during the week, so people can understand the word. If we only rely on the Sunday morning gatherings, we may be disappointed. The receptivity level, according to the data that we have begun to collect, is very low. How many listen and understand the fellowship during the large gatherings? How many are actually reading the Bible? How many actually understand what they read? Also, do we really know the saints in the large gatherings? When we spend time with saints to know them, the word of God (the *logos*, see 8:44) may be more liable to become *rhema* (see 8:47) to bring people from the realm of Satan to the realm of God. Do we have this burden? Many times, we like to rely on the *logos* word, to explain it and say what it means. But if we do not know the saints that we are talking to and their needs, it is difficult for that word to become *rhema* and cause a change in lives. People may still remain in Satan’s kingdom. They may say they are for God, but they may still deny or oppose Jesus (v.44). They do not stand in the truth and the truth (the word) is not in them. Are we willing to accompany such ones to bring them into the realm of God?
- 2. What are some characteristics of children of the heavenly Father? (8:42,43,47,44,51,55).** We love God (v.42). To love God is to be close to and intimate with Him. When we are intimate with the Lord, we will be in a position to be sent (v.42), just as Jesus was sent by the Father. To be sent here, according to the Greek word, is to be set apart and sent on a mission. However, to be sent, we need to know the Father’s heart and burden. How? By hearing or reading the written word (v.43). Then does the written word become *rhema* to us and speak a specific word to us (v.47)? Eventually, this word will become a word of truth that we will speak (not a lie or a word “out of character”) according to our experience, through our being one with the Father. Once we speak the *rhema* word, we need to keep this word (v.51). Interestingly, this word is now the *logos* word. This may mean that we need to abide in the written word that became *rhema* to us. The *logos* and the *rhema* word are not two different words, but rather a process that we go through by which the word of God becomes the basis and the direction of our living. The Greek word for “keep” means to guard from loss or injury, to fulfill a command, to serve, to watch. Eventually, this will lead us to know or see or perceive Him (v.55), just as Abraham knew God.
- 3. Do we rejoice? (8:56).** Abraham was joyful to see God and follow Him because He was attracted by the glory of God (Acts 7:2), and knew God as His reward (Genesis 15:1). If we do many services in the church life out a sense of obligation or duty, or because we are told to do so, we may not have much joy. Joy should characterize everything we do. When we go to the church gatherings, are we joyful? When we praise the Lord, are we joyful? When we preach the gospel, are we joyful? When we serve the children, are we joyful, or do we have a “tired” look? No matter how tired we may be, there should still be an inner joy within, and even an outward joy expressed in our demeanor. When others see us, do they see tired, zealous people performing some

arduous tasks, or do they see us willingly serving them because we genuinely care for them? This is to rejoice because we enjoy the presence of Jesus (His day).

- 4. We have prophets and servants of the Lord as our pattern, with their living and deeds (the example of Abraham (8:39,40,56)).** Abraham is considered as the father of faith. Paul refers to us as “sons of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7). Abraham, as a prototype of all the servants of God, is a pattern for us that we must treasure. We must treasure the living and speaking of so many servants of God who grant us revelation of who God is. They are a pattern and an encouragement for us to walk according to their vision, and do their “works” (“the works of Abraham”). For example, do we fight to participate in gatherings where we can hear different servants of God speak the word of God to us? Do we fight to see what they see, to lay hold of what they lay hold of? Do we really pay attention to their burden and operation? Or are we merely content, like those in John 8:37-59, to boast in our knowledge of God and His word, but have little desire to pursue His word and put His word into practice?
- 5. All the servants of God (represented by Abraham) must lead us to Jesus Himself, who is before Abraham (8:58).** Jesus, the Son of God, is “I am,” the One before Abraham. This means that every revelation communicated to us by the servants of God, however valuable, must become the Lord’s direct speaking to us. The Lord must become the “I am” (the ever-existing, self-existing One to us), that is, the One who can meet our every need. We must be able to say that we live our lives or our church life in a certain way, or that we serve or exercise to preach the gospel or accompany people, not because so and so told us to do so (they may indeed tell us to do so, and we need to receive that word), but because the Lord told us to do so. If this is the case, then the Lord becomes “I am” to us, the One before every servant of God, however crucial they may be.
- 6. Do we know Christ as the present Christ? (8:58).** The Lord does not say here that He was, but that He is, indicating that He is eternal, and that He is the present Christ, the Christ right now. It is not enough to have experiences of Him yesterday. What about today? Is He speaking to us today? Sometimes, we like to dwell on our past experiences, and boast in previous revelations. Maybe we preached the gospel a month ago. What about this week? Maybe we read through the whole Bible a year ago. What about today? Maybe we attended conferences and trainings to know more of the Bible. What about today? He is the “I am” right now.
- 7. Do we glorify ourselves or do we deny ourselves by passing through death and resurrection? (8:54; 7:39).** Jesus did not glorify Himself, even though He lived a perfect life, one with the Father. He denied Himself by going through death. The Father glorified Him only when He passed through death and resurrection (7:39). Our experience is the same. Human glory does not count, even in the church life. For example, we may labor hard and serve many people and actively preach the gospel, and be praised by other brothers and sisters as good servants of God. This is not glory. Glory is not how much I serve, or how much I am able to bless others. Rather, in everything I do, do I consider the profit of others, and the profit of the church? Even if I labor, do I look for a reward from the saints, or is the Lord my reward (Genesis 15:1). The more I serve, and the more diligent I may be, the more I need to die to my self, to what I can do, and to how I can help others. Our motives need to be purified so we can serve the Lord and the church because He is our unique reward, so He can be glorified.

A summary of John 8:12-36

- 1. We speak the things that we hear from the Lord (8:26, 28-29):** Jesus had many things to say and to judge concerning us, but everything that He said was what He heard from the Father. Even though He was God, as a man, He still needed the Father to teach Him and lead Him. At the beginning of chapter 8, He went up to the Mount of Olives at night time (v.1), to pray to the Father and be one with Him before returning early in the morning to speak to the people in the temple (v.2). As ones serving the church (relative, in whatever capacity), we need to be in fear and trembling when we speak to the brothers and sisters, or contact people, or serve or initiate anything. Are we close to the Lord? Do we hear from Him? Do we do or say things according to our previous experiences, according to previous blessings that the Lord gave us, however good and spiritual they may have been? Do we do things only out of a good and sincere heart? When we read the Bible, do we only seek to understand it, or do we really look for the Lord's speaking to us personally? The word, or the Bible (the *logos*, which is the constant or written word) must become *rhema* (the instant word, inspiration, revelation), to touch us and become relevant and applicable in our daily life and church life. In v.28, Jesus did nothing from Himself, according to His own authority or His own decision. He still needed the Father's instruction. Do we have such a learning heart, or do we rely on what worked in the past? Even if we prepare to speak or serve (and we must indeed do so), we still need the Lord to speak to us. In v.29, the Father was always with Jesus, never leaving Him alone, and Jesus always did things that were pleasing to Him. He sought to please the Father, never men. When we serve or interact with saints, do we seek to please them and not offend them? If we know God's heart's desire, our speaking and our testimony will seek to be faithful to His burden for the church, and not to please people or offer them something that will merely make them happy or satisfied. We speak only what the Lord has taught us, to please God, even as Jesus, though the Son of God, was taught of God. For this, we need much prayer, individually, with companions, and with a service team, along with much fellowship with brothers and sisters. Then, the Lord may be able to speak to us and lead us.
- 2. Many may believe because of our testimony or speaking that is one with the Lord (8:30).** Surprisingly, many believed into Jesus, even though Jesus' words were "hard to understand!" This is our experience today. Even though the Bible is hard to understand, even to us, many still believe. This shows us the value and effectiveness of a testimony that is initiated by the Lord. If we hear the Lord's words to us, our speaking and our living will reflect an intimate union with the Lord that will touch others, and cause them to believe into Him. This should be an encouragement to us. While many say that the Bible is hard to understand (v.27), we can be encouraged that we can still come to the Bible, and that the Lord can still speak to us, even though we may not understand everything. This living will attract others, who will desire Jesus and believe into Him, even as we speak to them (v.30).
- 3. Abide in the Lord's word, not just believe (8:31).** Even though we may believe, we must come to the "word." The word here, in Greek, is *logos*, which is the constant word, the same word used in John 1:1, to convey something that is spoken with a thought and a reasoning. In other words, to believe in the Lord, the *logos* word must become *rhema* to us, to cause our lives to change. Once we believe, having tasted the *rhema* word, we now have a greater appreciation of the *logos* word (the Bible). We realize the Bible is marvelous, divine, that there is no book like it. We realize we must come to it again and again. We would never let a day go by without coming to the Bible. We begin to abide in the word. Now, when we handle the Bible, we are no longer afraid of coming to it because we may not understand everything. The Bible (*logos*) also begins to become truth. This word, or truth, will eventually become our faith to cause us to follow the Lord as His disciples (v.31). During the hard times, during times of dryness, failure, weakness, and disappointment, the *logos* word, or truth, will keep us and perfect us to be His disciples to follow Him wherever He may lead us. Outward circumstances, inner success or failure, blessings or loss, will not cause us to depart from the Lord or the church life. How can we practically abide in the Lord's word? Two ways may be helpful. Firstly, we can develop a habit to **write down notes** in our Bible. When we read the Bible (*logos*), the Lord may speak to us (*rhema*). We can write down what He speaks to us. At a later time, especially when we are going through a difficult period in our life, we may come back to read what we wrote. This may help solidify our faith and trust in the Lord. We may then realize what a living and trustworthy God we have. Rather than blame God or blame the environment or people, we can be led to thank Him and praise Him for His mercy and faithfulness. Secondly, when we hear a brother or sister say that he or she cannot understand the Bible, we need to realize the seriousness of the consequences. It is a guarantee that people will leave the Lord if they do not understand His words. What should our attitude be? Rather than condemning them, we need patience to find time to accompany one or two to pray and fellowship with them. Together, we can come to the word. Encourage them to come to the word with a companion or in a team. This will help them to abide in the Lord's word, and this will perfect us also to abide by serving and taking care of people.

- 4. The Lord will not judge us, but He will judge what we do (8:15-16, 26).** In v.15, Jesus says that He judges no one. This is absolutely true. He does not judge us because, indeed, He has judged sin, Satan, the world, our self and the flesh on the cross, once for all. He never condemns the world, but desires to save the world (John 3:17). He certainly has the right and the authority to judge us. How many times do we depart from the Lord? How many times do we forsake Him when it is convenient for us? And we certainly deserve to be judged! We are sinners. Yet God will not judge us. Likewise, no one in the church life will, or should, judge us. But in 8:16, Jesus says that He does judge, and that His judgment is true. What is the difference between His not judging in v.15 and His judging in v.16? In v.15, Jesus never judges us because He has already judged our sin and sinful nature on the cross, so we can turn to Him, believe in Him, receive eternal life, and follow Him. He can never judge us again. However, He does judge the sinful things that we do. For example, He will judge murder, adultery, robbery and lies, to name a few of the “blatant” sins. He will never overlook our sins or condone sinful behavior. Otherwise, we would live lawless lives, and even the church life would become lawless. Therefore, we need to be alert, and in fear and trembling, how we live our lives. It is not a small thing to sin, and even more to abide in sin. We continually need the Lord’s mercy to forsake, and even flee from sin so we can be well pleasing to Him. We should never think that because we believe in Jesus and are saved, we can live anyway we want, and that our sins will be forgiven. Yes, they are forgiven, but we will have to account for what we have done (2 Corinthians 5:10). At the same time, we should not fall into self-condemnation or self-pity. Our weaknesses and failures, and even our sins, are not for us to wallow in self pity, but for us to come back to the Lord and follow Him joyfully and peacefully, because He has indeed forgiven us and saved us, and He is saving us and perfecting us day by day.
- 5. The truth will set us free (8:25, 32, 36).** The Jews asked Jesus, “Who are you?” This is actually a good question that we should ask the Lord. “Lord, who are You?” Who is the Lord? He is the truth, or the word (*logos*), which, when becoming *rhema*, can set us free. We need to know the Lord’s speaking to us (the *logos* becoming *rhema* (inspiration, revelation) so we can come back to the *logos* and have faith in the *logos* word. From what are we freed? We are free from sin, sins (v.21, 24, 34), darkness (v.12), self (v.28), the flesh (v.15), the world (the fleshly, material and religious world) (v.23), and earthly matters or attractions (v.23). When we come to the saints, we must be free from all these things. We need to be free from condemnation of others. Never use others as a negative example, but always use ourselves as an example. We are full of failures! If we think we have revelation, or that the Lord spoke to us, but not to others, we are actually in darkness, we may be a slave to sin, and eventually we will die in our sin (that is, we will not enjoy the eternal life) (8:34). To be free is not just to be freed from the negative things, but to be free to exercise and operate in the spiritual and heavenly realm. We are free to speak, to flow out the rivers of living water, but always one with the Son and with His word. This is the most free life, yet at the same time the most restricted life. Why?
- 6. We need to go through death and resurrection, just like Jesus (8:28).** In v.24, Jesus referred to Himself as “I am.” Again in v.28, He referred to Himself as “I am.” However, the second time, He specified a condition to knowing Him in this way: “When you lift up the Son of Man.” This means that it was only when He was crucified, that we would know Him as the “I am.” Jesus had to go through death and resurrection in order to become the “I am” in our experience. We also have to pass through the same process so others may know Him as the “I am.” How can people know Christ? We have to be “lifted up on the cross.” If we speak without going through death, our speaking will have no value. A reality check is to find out how many people actually listen to what we are saying, and know what we are saying. Very, very few, according to our observation! The receptivity level is very low! Surprisingly, in the past, we were never concerned. As long as we spoke and we felt we were in spirit, we were satisfied. What about others? We need to pay attention. We should never blame others. Rather, we must “die” to ourselves, to our “good or living” speaking. We like to speak to many saints, and we are satisfied. Do we know the people we are talking to? Maybe we need to speak to one or two saints. Perhaps we like to speak for 10 minutes. Maybe we need to speak less, maybe only 5 minutes. How? We need to live a crucified life, a life of denial of the self, of our propensity to speak high things or show how much of the Bible we know. We may need to die to that, so we can speak a few words that can become the *rhema* word to a few, and cause them to believe into and know the Lord. Maybe we need to have coffee with one brother or sister, and get to know them, their family situation and their job situation. Then, perhaps, the Lord may give us a *rhema* word to speak, that may set a brother or sister free. Finally, we need to check with the ones to whom we speak. How much did they listen? How much did they receive? If not much, we need to go back to the Lord and listen to Him again and again, so He can show us where we are lacking. This is to live a crucified life.

A summary of John 8:1-11

In John 8:1-11, a special situation of sin is exposed. How did Jesus deal with this situation, how did others deal with it, and how can we deal with it in our church life?

- 1. We are sinners who need to be saved by the Lord Jesus through His mercy and grace:** In each of the first seven chapters of John, Jesus reveals Himself as the Savior of sinners. In 1:29, He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In 2:19, He would die for us and be resurrected in three days in order to save whoever would believe in Him. In 3:3, all sinners need to be born again in order to see the kingdom of God. In 3:14-15, Jesus would be lifted up in the likeness of the serpent in the wilderness to die for our sin. Then in chapter 4, we see a sinful Samaritan woman, living in fornication (4:17-18), saved by Jesus, and then testifying concerning Jesus (4:28-29). In John 4:32, we see that the salvation of sinners was food to Jesus. In John 5:13-14, Jesus healed a man who was paralysed for 38 years because of sin. In 6:54, Jesus offered His flesh and His blood as food and drink for believers, signifying His death and resurrection for whoever would believe in Him to receive His eternal life. Then in 7:37-39, we see again that Jesus would die and resurrect, that whoever (sinners) would believe in Him would receive Him as the Spirit. Who are we? Only sinners saved by grace. What a salvation we have received!
- 2. Jesus did not condemn the sinful woman.** The Greek word for “condemn” in 8:11 is the same word that is used in Matthew 7:1 where it is translated as “judge.” In John 3:17, Jesus says that He did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. We can see Jesus’ living out of His word in His interaction with the Samaritan woman in chapter 4, and the paralysed man in chapter 5. In both cases, He did not condemn either individual, even in private. In both cases, His intention was to save them. This was His manner of life, to give life. What is our manner of life? Do we take the way of knowledge (the tree of knowledge of good and evil) to detect and point out faults of saints and try to correct them, or do we take the way of life? Practically, how can we avoid condemnation, or a condemning tone or attitude in the church life?
- 3. Testify Christ rather than try to explain the Bible and tell people what to do.** In our speaking and fellowship with brothers and sisters, we should focus more on testifying the Christ who has spoken to us, touched us, and had mercy on us. How much do we testify Christ in our experience? We need to testify the positive experiences of Christ, and avoid negative speaking that criticizes others or groups of people, or even the world. Our testimony is more necessary than our teaching. For example, we may want to criticize religious people, and even call them hypocrites, or we may criticize people who do not believe in Jesus, or who are in the world. We must be careful. We were exactly like the ones we criticize, and we may still be! Amazingly, even Jesus, in 8:1-11, did not criticize the scribes and Pharisees who were trying to “tempt” Him. Surely He knew their intentions. He should have exposed them and publicly humiliated them. Rather, He did not say anything to them or concerning them, except to ask whoever was without sin to throw the first stone, and then to ask the woman if anyone had accused her. What a tender humanity. Such an attitude and living touched all concerned in this story. The woman was convicted and saved. The scribes and Pharisees were touched in their conscience and left, one by one, from the oldest to the youngest, without any

condemnation. This shows that we need to trust the Lord in every situation where we may be tempted to criticize or expose some kind of bad behavior. We must be in fear and trembling. Anything negative we say may cause someone to stumble.

- 4. Go to saints individually to know them, rather than condemn them.** As we have seen, Jesus went to the Samaritan woman and the paralysed man in private. Even in private, He did not condemn them. The woman in chapter 8 was brought to Him in public. Jesus did not talk to her in public but waited till everyone had left, then talked to her. Do we go to saints individually, to know them and testify to them of who Christ is to us? Or do we condemn them for not “seeing the light,” and then try to correct them? To have this kind of attitude, we need to deny ourselves and carry our cross, to live a crucified life (John 7:39). Otherwise, we may think that we are right and others are wrong, or in the world, or in the flesh. We may think that the rivers of living water are flowing out of us as we speak and correct people. We need the mercy of the Lord again and again to die to ourselves, and attach ourselves to the saints so that we would know them, and not condemn them.
- 5. Do not abide in sin (8:11). Otherwise the Lord may discipline us.** Jesus told the woman to sin no more. He did not overlook or condone the sin. Yes, He died on the cross for our sins to forgive us and cleanse us once for all. But our living must please Him. If we continue to abide in sin, the church life will become lawless and chaotic. The Lord will discipline us. Discipline is quite different from condemnation. Condemnation is done out of anger and self-righteousness. Discipline is done out of love, for perfecting. Just as parents discipline their children out of love, the Lord will discipline us out of love. Peter was disciplined many times by the Lord. The goal is that we would know the Lord and know who we are. We are only sinners. We should never run away from discipline. If we abide in sin, or depart from the Lord’s heart’s desire, we must realize that the Lord will not let us go. He will discipline us because He loves us, so we can be perfected.
- 6. How do we fellowship certain portions of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, with new believers and gospel friends?** The scribes and Pharisees, in 8:5, quoted Moses’ injunction to stone an adulterous person. This is a hard scripture to understand. There are several such portions of the Old Testament which seem hard to take and understand, and might even be frightening to new believers. How do we fellowship such portions? We need to follow Jesus’ way, to bring people to Jesus Christ as grace and reality (John 1:14). We are living in the age of grace. Such a grace is available to us in Jesus. The Lord’s mercy and forgiveness is always ready to flow to us. We need wisdom and also intimacy with the gospel friends to be able to fellowship in this way. We need to preach the gospel and know the gospel friends so we can have a word of love and a word of grace. Otherwise, when we fellowship, and we do not know people, our words may stumble others and not give life. May the Lord have mercy on us to draw us and speak to us to contact people, be with them and know them. May we testify the Christ who is living and real to us, so that others may be drawn to Him, His word, and the saints.

A summary of John 7:25-52.

In reading the Bible, we always need to ask ourselves how the verses we are reading relate not only to us but also to the brothers and sisters around us, people around us, and our relationship with them. If we only read the Bible in order to understand it, we may understand certain parts, but there will be many parts that we will not understand, which may stumble us and cause us to give up. On the other hand, if we read in light of the church life, our relationships with brothers and sisters, and people in the world, the Lord may speak His instant (rhema) words to us. With this in mind, there are a few burdens which we may consider in this chapter.

- 1. How do we come to the Lord? (v. 37-39). Inner thirst (v. 37):** Do we have an inner thirst to contact the Lord and the brothers and sisters? Or do we come in a routine way to the gatherings? We may come to receive a blessing, to meet friends, because we are in the habit of coming, or, on a higher level, because we feel uncomfortable or not at peace if we do not come. Indeed, it should be our habit to come to the church gatherings. But in coming, are we thirsty for the Lord? Are we thirsty to find Christ in the saints? Are we thirsty to lay hold on one more aspect of the Lord, to receive one more revelation of who Jesus Christ is? Inner thirst should propel us to come to the Lord, to His word, and to the gatherings. Our thirst should be an echo of Jesus' desperate cry as He stood in the temple, reflected in our eagerness not to miss one word of the Lord that He may speak to us.
- 2. How do we come to the Lord? Come to the Lord Himself (v. 37).** It is not enough to have inner thirst. Such a thirst must drive us to the Lord, to be satisfied by the Lord Himself. We must not be passive and wait for the Lord to come to us. Rather, we need to actively seek the Lord and find Him for ourselves. Do we come to the Lord Himself, or do we come to His blessing in giving us a job or a good grade or a good name in the world, or even to the spiritual gifts that He may give us? Our prayer should be to come to the Lord alone, to find Him and to contact Him. Everything, of course, is relative, depending on our level of life. For example, I may come to the Lord because I failed my exam. Or I may come because I got a good grade. In either case, either in sorrow or joy, I must struggle to come to the Lord Himself, regardless of my circumstance.
- 3. How do we come to the Lord? To drink (v.37).** To drink is to take in. When we come to the Lord, we must take or receive Him into our being. Am I desperate to take in the Christ in the saints, to drink the words spoken by the saints? Often, we may subconsciously take the words spoken by the saints for granted. We may view the fellowship among us as common talk or exchange of good ideas and opinions. Do we realize that the words spoken are opportunities to hear the Lord Himself? One practical exercise to drink the Lord is to write down the words shared by the saints, and then to read the sharing later. Such an exercise may help us to retain, to a certain extent, the words of life that we may have heard, and reinforce them during our daily life.
- 4. How do we come to the Lord? Believe in Him (v. 38, 34, 36).** After we have taken the Lord into our being, do we believe in Him and His words? Yes, I may have an inner thirst. I may come to the Lord Himself. I may even hear His words spoken to me through the Bible and through the brothers and sisters, and even take them into me. But how much faith do I have in the Lord's words? Jesus' four brothers were with Him, accompanied Him, witnessed His miracles, and heard His teachings for at least twenty years. But they did not believe in Him! How then can we believe what the brothers and sisters say about Jesus? It is extremely challenging to follow Jesus. In v. 34, Jesus told the Pharisees that they would seek Him, but not find Him. We may have a seeking heart, but we may not find Him. We may have an inner thirst, but we may not find Him. We may come to the Lord and even drink of Him, but we may not find Him. We may even believe in Him, especially on Sunday morning during the church gathering, then go home and not believe because something happened to make us anxious or troubled. Easily, we forsake the Lord and the church life to try to take care of our problem. We see how difficult it is for people

to believe in Jesus, as seen in six categories of people represented in John 7. Some believed in Him because of the signs that He performed (v.31), some heard His speaking and believed Him as the Prophet (v.40), some heard His instant speaking and believed in Him as the Christ (v.41), some heard His speaking and marveled at it (v.46), some went to the feast of Tabernacles (church gathering), heard His speaking but did not believe in Him, and one person (Nicodemus), who was a Pharisee, believed in Him because he went to fellowship with Christ personally and privately. How can we believe? Nicodemus is an excellent pattern for us. As we saw in chapter 3, he took the initiative, forsaking his private interests (he was a Pharisee and risked his career, and perhaps even his life in seeing Jesus), to actively seek Jesus. In a sense, he denied himself in order to receive the words of Jesus. This aspect will be developed further in point 6.

5. **The outcome: rivers of living water flowing out from our inner being (v. 38).** We may be inwardly thirsty, we may come to Jesus, we may drink, and even believe in Him. We may hear much sharing concerning Him which strengthens our faith. But do we experience the joy and peace from within? Do we have a testimony, a word, a response that wells up within us and flows out to others in the church life? The drinking of and believing in Jesus should issue in a flowing out. However, it should not stop there. Most of the time, we are satisfied if we speak some words of life in the church gatherings. We feel satisfied, nourished, joyful and refreshed. But what about others? Has anyone even listened to what we shared? It is not usually our habit to ask such a question. Maybe those sitting in the first row heard us, and a few even grasped our burden. But what about those in the back rows, on the side, those who came late? What is their receptivity level? Do we even care? The rivers of living water flowing from the speaker(s) should not stop there, but should reach other saints, and in turn flow out of them. If others do not listen or receive, then there is not much impact in our believing and flowing out. That does not mean that the living water did not flow out from us, but the effect may be minimal. This is a reality check for those who share the word. Indeed, they believe, they have a pure heart, they testify, and they are joyful and living. But it must not stop with them. Their speaking should impact others, cause others to believe, to love the Lord and give themselves to Him. How can this happen?
6. **We need to experience the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (v.39).** The Spirit was not yet because Jesus was not yet glorified. Jesus had not yet died and resurrected. Therefore, He could not yet impart the Spirit into His believers. This is also our case. If we do not experience the death and resurrection of Jesus (which is a glory to God), we may not touch the Spirit. The genuine touching of the Spirit is predicated on whether or not I denied myself or my soul life. Do I put Christ's interests and the church's interests above my own interests and my own needs and my family's needs, which are endless? If not, I may go through all the necessary steps of coming to the Lord, coming to the word, praying over the word, even calling upon the Lord, and sharing the word. But if all that is not based on my dying to myself, much of what I share may remain knowledge and doctrine, and lack impact.
7. **We must listen to the brothers' and sisters' speaking in order to hear the instant speaking of the Lord(7:27-29, 42, 52).** Those who knew the Scriptures knew that no prophet came from Galilee. They knew that Christ came from the seed of David and from Bethlehem. They knew the physical Jesus of Nazareth outwardly (v.27, 28). But they did not know that He actually came from the Father. Nathanael, we will recall, had a similar reaction in 1:46. He did not believe that anything good could come from Nazareth. How is he different from the religious "Bible scholars" in chapter 7? What caused him to change? Nathanael heard the instant speaking of the Lord through the speaking of Philip ("Come and see, 1:46) and then Jesus (1:47-48). What about us? So often, we hear the speaking of the brothers and sisters. Who is speaking? Are we only hearing the speaking of young brothers or young sisters, or are we hearing the Lord Himself speak through them? Do we realize that the Lord sent them to speak to us? We may know them physically or outwardly, but are we touched by their speaking? We must listen to every brother and sister's speaking, even though they may be younger, and even saved for a much shorter time than us. We must never despise anyone. Otherwise, we may miss the Lord's instant speaking to us.

A summary of John 7:1-29.

John chapter 7 is a picture of the church life, typified by the feast of tabernacles (v. 2, 10) which Jesus attended. This may be one key to help us to unlock this chapter. With this in view, there are several burdens through which the Lord may speak to us:

- 1. Jesus went to the feast privately or in secret (v. 10).** Jesus' flesh brothers wanted Him to go to the feast openly and show Himself so that people would see the works that He was doing. However, they did not believe in Him (v. 5). They also went to the feast, but in an outward way. When we go to the church gatherings, how do we go? In an outward way or privately (in an inward way)? What does this mean? Jesus' siblings may typify us. We go to the gatherings, in particular Lord's day morning, but we may not recognize Jesus as the essence of the gatherings. We may know certain brothers and sisters very well, but do we recognize and treasure the Christ in them? The feast of tabernacles or feast of harvest, in the Old Testament, was the last of the seven annual feasts to be celebrated by the children of Israel, and functioned as the culmination of all the feasts. It was the richest and most enjoyable feast of all because it allowed the people to bring the rich produce of their harvest to offer to God and share with one another. Our gatherings should be like that: a presentation and celebration of the rich Christ gained by us. Indeed, we may go to the Lord's table meeting to celebrate, but do we know what we will bring to offer to God? Are we going in an outward way, to meet some people, socialize, or even sing some hymns and offer some prayers, or do we know Christ, and are we eager to gain Him and impart Him to others? Many go to look for Him, as did some in vv. 11-13. However, they had different opinions of Him, some concluding that He was a good man, and others disagreeing and saying that He was leading the crowds astray. This may be our case too. We seemingly go to the gatherings to look for Jesus, and we may even talk about Him, but we may come to different conclusions concerning Him. We may conclude that the gathering was great, joyful and that we felt loved and cared for. Or we may feel that the gathering was boring and the speaking too long. Neither conclusion indicates that we know Christ. In fact, if we do not know the Lord, we may even be affected by such murmuring (either positive or negative), and continue to come to the gatherings week after week, yet in an outward way.
- 2. The true essence of the feast (v. 14).** In the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. He went to the feast privately, in order to supply the *logos* (in Greek, meaning "constant word") and the *rhema* (in Greek, meaning "instant") words of life so people could receive Him as the eternal life. This is the essence of all our gatherings. The Lord must speak to us the words of life, and we need to teach with such words, just as Jesus taught. If we go to the Lord's day meeting, we must speak the *rhema* words. Verses 16-18 reveal to us the peak of the feast. Not only in our speaking, but in everything that we do, in our contact with brothers and sisters, and in the services in which we participate, we must have the Lord's leading (v. 17), and we must exalt Christ and not seek our own glory (v. 18). However, we are in between. Many times, we may speak on our own, without the Lord's speaking to us. For example, we may speak something that we spoke before and that had an impact, and we feel that we can say the same thing again, but without the Lord's speaking to us in a fresh way. Or we may speak to show how much we studied the Bible. We also need to know when to speak. Jesus spoke to a small audience and was willing to dialogue with them, but He also spoke to a crowd in 7:37.
- 3. The rivers of living water must flow out of every brother and sister, not just a few (vv. 37-38).** In our gatherings, it is not enough for the rivers of living water (Christ as the *rhema* word spoken to us, and then spoken by us to others) to flow out only of the brothers and sisters who speak, but from everyone. Nearly always, we pay attention to our speaking, whether it was rich and nourishing. Some brothers who are close to us, and who know the Bible, may encourage us by telling us how rich was the word that we spoke, and we may feel satisfied. Actually, such speaking may have very little value if we are not close to many more saints. We like to pay attention to the saints who

pursue the Bible, who sit in the front row. What about those who sit in the back, in the wings and in the corners? How much do they get when we speak? Do we even care? Our goal should be that not only do we, when we speak, flow out Christ as our enjoyment, but that the so-called weaker ones (in our estimation) or those on the fringe of the church life, would flow out. The opportunity to flow out is enhanced by the smaller gatherings where more are practically able to speak what the Lord has spoken to them. Hence the value of small groups and skype fellowships which are more conducive to participation.

4. **We need revelation in reading the Old Testament (v. 19-24).** Jesus uses the law and circumcision and the Sabbath in the Old Testament, but in a totally different way from the religious people of the time. The “law-keepers” read the Old Testament according to the letter, and judged according to appearance (v. 24), being bound by the very letter of the word that they were reading. They did not touch the spirit of the word (6:63). What about us? When we read the Old Testament, what is our understanding concerning circumcision? Do we realize that this is a picture of the death of Christ, and, applied to us, a picture of our death with Christ? More practically, do we live in this reality by losing our soul life and denying our self? Often, we look at the outward blessing. For example, we may see how the younger brothers and sisters carried out an activity with the younger children, and how well they shared with the church what they did. But do we see the “inward” operation, how they sacrificed their holiday and time with their family to serve the younger ones? What is our understanding concerning the Sabbath? Do we realize that the Sabbath is a picture of real rest and enjoyment? Do we ever marvel that someone got healed through the church’s persistent prayer, or that someone got saved and baptized through the selfless labor of some saints who go out week after week to preach the gospel and lose their face in the process? Or do we only see the outward appearance of the church life, for example new people coming to the meetings, the different activities that are scheduled and the sweet and enjoyable family life?
5. **It is not easy to grow in the church life.** It is amazing that Jesus’ brothers in the flesh, even after thirty years, did not know Him. This is a warning to us. We need to be close to brothers and sisters. Without that, we will not grow. Without companions, it will be very hard to know the Lord. Yet that very closeness may also be a hindrance if we are not careful, and may replace the Lord. We may be satisfied with the closeness with saints, but we may not grow. If we stay the same every year, we may be like Jesus’ brothers. When Jesus was crucified, He did not ask His flesh brothers, but John (the writer of this gospel), to take care of His mother. In the church life, we need to “find John,” that is a brother or sister with whom we can grow together. We should try to avoid growing up with Jesus’ “flesh brothers.” We should treasure such brothers and sisters and be close to them, but “break through” that closeness to find Christ and know Him for ourselves and struggle for His speaking to us through His word.
6. **Jesus , as a man, had limitations and lived a restricted life in order to save us (v.1, 6, 8, 10).** Chapter 6 seems to end on a discouraging note, with many of Jesus’ disciples not walking with Him any more, and even one of the twelve whom He had chosen being identified as a “devil.” Chapter 7 begins on an equally discouraging note, with Jesus facing opposition not just from the Jews, but from His own brothers. This shows the limitations of Jesus. He did not have the liberty to go up to the feast in a public way because His time had not yet come. He remained in Galilee and would not go into Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. These verses show us the human living of Jesus, in particular His family life and His interaction with His siblings. How is our living? Are we restricted? For example, in the church gatherings, we may feel it is “our time” to speak something because we think we have the Lord’s leading, or because we think we understand a passage from the Bible, and therefore can “educate” others. Yet, we may not have contacted anyone during the week. We may not have preached the gospel. We may not have been close to a brother or sister. Jesus could testify concerning the world because He knew the world (v. 7). Do we know the saints that we are speaking to?. Are we restricted in our speaking?

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 6:52-71.

There are at least four questions that we may ask in this passage:

- 1. Why does Jesus speak in this way, knowing that many would leave Him?** John 6 begins with the miracle or sign of the feeding of perhaps more than 10,000 people to satisfy their human need. Because they were satisfied, many of them began to follow the Lord and seek for Him because they had been blessed by Him. This is also our case. We like to follow the Lord because the Lord blesses us. But the question is whether we will continuously follow Him? Will we follow Him next year, in two years, in five years, in ten years etc.? Therefore the Lord left the crowd to perfect His disciples so they would know Him. He provided the proper environment (the wind and the waves), that is a difficult situation, and deliberately made as if to pass them by. This was a test or a perfecting, not only for the disciples, but also for the crowd that saw the disciples loving the Lord and following Him. The crowd, or the general disciples, were able to know that those who closely followed the Lord would be perfected. Thus, the perfecting was a testimony, not just for the close disciples, but for the general crowd of disciples. This progression is important because now, from verses 25-66, Jesus turns back to the crowd following Him, and all His speaking is addressed to them. Now, Jesus, having met the human need, wants to bring the crowd, and us, higher, so we can know Him as the resurrection life, the eternal life. He wants us to know His purpose, His need. He wants us to know Him, to believe in Him, and to hear Him. Why does the Lord speak in so seemingly a harsh way, insisting on the fact that unless we eat His flesh and drink His blood, we have no life (eternal life) in ourselves (v. 53)? Because of His purpose, which is to die for us (seen in the separation of flesh and blood) in order to build up the church. Indeed, He wants to meet our human needs, but He also wants us to meet His need. Therefore, the Lord progresses from the human need to revealing Himself as the “I am,” the bread of life, the living bread, and the One whose flesh and blood must be eaten and drunk. In v. 63, He further reveals that such an eating is not fleshly but a matter of receiving His words (the rhema or instant words) in spirit. We must be brought to the word of God that speaks to us so we can know and understand God. The Lord seems almost desperate to cut through all the layers of blessings that we are satisfied with, to bring us to realize Him as the source and the purpose, and to receive His instant speaking. Eventually, we need to come to the realization that our real human need is indeed God’s need, which is the real meaning of our human life.
- 2. Why did so many of His disciples leave?** (vv. 60-66). To follow the Lord is not easy. It is so difficult to understand God. It is so difficult for people to stay in the church life. For example, in Montreal, since 2011, every Lord’s day (Sunday morning), there has been an average of 6 different new people who have come. This is truly a blessing to the church. At the same time, it is a sober reminder to us of how challenging it is to stay. Why do people come? The main reason why we begin to come is that our human needs are met. We enjoy being with brothers and sisters. They may even help us to find a job or get married. We feel loved and cherished. We may even pray for a particular need, and it seems that the Lord answers our prayer almost immediately. Everything seems rosy. However, we may not understand what Christ needs. We may not understand the Bible. We hear sharing every week on the Bible, but we feel the Bible is too hard. Our human needs are met, which are endless and unlimited, but we have little realization of Christ’s needs. The longer we stay in the church life, the harder it seems to get. Now, when we pray, our prayers don’t seem to be answered right away. The prayers that received immediate fulfillment now seem to be ignored by the Lord. The Lord’s word seems far away, and nothing in the Bible seems to fit our needs. Unless we know Christ and have had a genuine speaking from Him through His word, there is no reason to stay. This is not to judge or condemn anyone, but to realize that without Christ, it is inevitable that we will depart from the Lord.
- 3. Why did the Lord ask His eleven disciples if they also would go away? Why did they end up staying?** (vv. 67-69). Actually, this question is asked to us. Peter’s answer (“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,” v. 68) is for us. In fact, this word was not

only hard to the other disciples, but it was hard to the twelve, and it is hard to us also. We are no different from the disciples. The difference is that this hard word attracted Peter. Did Peter understand? Yes, to a certain extent, but not fully. He followed Jesus, but later denied Him when another test came. Somehow, we are attracted to the word of life, but we don't understand that much, just like the disciples who left. The difference may be that even though we may not understand, we realize that Jesus has the words of eternal life, and that we can still come to Him. Our degree of understanding is relative. Therefore, by the Lord's mercy, we may continue to be in the church life. However, there is no guarantee that we will be here in ten years. Therefore, day by day, we need to come to the rhema word of God, individually and with saints, to hear the word of God through the servants of God, so we may be attracted to Him, even though our understanding may be very little.

- 4. Why did Judas still follow the Lord?** Ironically, if anyone should have left, it should have been Judas Iscariot! Referred to by Jesus as a devil, and the one who would eventually betray Him, Judas, of all people, continued to follow Jesus. Of course he must have been present in the feeding of the multitude, and he must have been in the boat during the storm with the other disciples. Now he is still around when Jesus speaks a hard word, and he continues to stay. He did not understand but He still followed Jesus as a great man, a great teacher or prophet, and because of a great environment. He never went hungry, and all his needs were met. He knew nothing else. He was satisfied with his group, but he did not believe in Jesus. We may also be like Judas. We may have grown comfortable in our "social" group. Judas even had the responsibility of serving in the finances. We also may be taking care of one or more services. We may feel useful and needed and recognized by others. If we leave the church life, in a sense, we may not know what to do. We will lose what we have gained. The world may not want us, and even another Christian group may not want us. This is perhaps the most miserable existence that we could have. Therefore, we may prefer to stay. That is why some Christians may stay in a group all their lives without ever knowing God or His word, but perfectly satisfied with their living. This may be our case. We should not criticize Judas or Peter too harshly. When we believe in the Lord, we may be like Peter, bold to follow the Lord, to walk on the water to come to Him, and to be the first to acknowledge Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God. But when we deny the Lord, we may be like Judas. This is a warning to us to struggle to know the Lord in every situation and environment that He gives us, and to always come to Him and His word.
- 5. The living bread and the bread of life becoming the flesh and blood of Jesus to be eaten as our enjoyment (v. 48, 51, 53).** The living bread and the bread of life are botanical in nature, and mentioned first by Jesus as something to be eaten in order to receive life. This is God's purpose, that we may have life. But how can sinners such as we receive the divine life? Eventually, this bread becomes the flesh and blood to be eaten and drunk by us. The flesh and blood in separation, typified by the symbols of the Lord's table, indicate death. Jesus died on the cross for our redemption, so we can have access to His divine life. We partake of His death by eating and drinking His word (v. 63), which leads us to experience His death. His word becomes our food as our enjoyment. However, this enjoyment is not merely something emotional that we may experience, for example when singing a song with the saints, or sharing the love feast with brothers and sisters, but it is based on the death of the Lord Jesus, through His word, causing us to decrease and Christ to increase. For example, talking to people to preach the gospel may be against our character or disposition, especially if we are shy or feel awkward in talking to people. However, when the word speaks to us, it may be a hard word, and we may not have much emotional enjoyment because it goes against our character. This is a test to us. What do we do with the word spoken to or read by us? Do we ignore it or do we carry it out right away? Neither response may be according to the Lord. Rather, this word must become a food to us that is good for us, decreasing us and increasing the degree of Christ in us. In a sense, the question is not so much whether we carry out the word or not, but first whether the word has nourished us and been enjoyed by us. The result is secondary, though still important.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 6:32-51.

- 1. Eating the heavenly food which is Jesus.** In the beginning of John chapter 6, the crowd was fed by Jesus with five loaves and two fish, and was satisfied. Jesus met their human needs. This was a sign but it was outward food, not food from heaven. Indeed, they needed to eat the outward food to sustain their human existence. However, in v.27, Jesus warns them not to labor for the food that perishes, referring to the loaves and the fish, the physical food. This warning sparks a reaction on the part of the crowd. In v.28, they ask Jesus what they should do to work the works of God. We must be very careful. We like to focus on the works that God does, and not on God Himself. For example, we may look at preaching the gospel as a work that needs to be done. God's way is rather that we would focus on eating Jesus. In v.32, the true bread from heaven is not manna, as some erroneously believe, but refers to Jesus Himself. Jesus points out in v.49 that the children of Israel ate the manna in the wilderness and died. The manna was indeed from heaven, but the result was death. This may mean that we may try and do a work for God out of our religious sense of duty, but the result will be death. An example of eating the heavenly food is the Lord's Table meeting. This is not a ritual but a feast where we eat the bread which is the Lord Himself as our portion and our enjoyment. This is not a work or a practice that we observe but rather an enjoyment of a person that gives us much joy and peace. One good indicator of whether we are eating Jesus or not is our attitude when we come to the Lord's Table meeting. Are we joyful and free to praise our Lord with many thanksgivings, or are we silent?
- 2. Coming to Jesus.** Coming to Jesus, in chapter 6, is very much related to the Father. There are three ways that are described in which we can come to Jesus:
 - a. Everyone who comes to Jesus has actually been already given to Jesus by the Father (v.37). Our coming to Jesus is not according to our own initiative or choosing. The Father has already given us to Jesus. Based on this, the Son receives us and will not cast us out.
 - b. Everyone who comes to Jesus has been drawn by the Father (v.44). This verse tells us that no one is able to come to Jesus unless the Father draws him or her.
 - c. Everyone who comes to Jesus has heard the word of God (the Bible) and been taught of the Father (received a revelation). Based on such a revelation, we should be filled with thanksgiving at the Lord's Table, and worship the Father for His choosing us in Christ and drawing us. The worship of the Father is not optional but necessary because it is He who is the originator of every desire that we may have towards the Lord, of every step that we take to love Him and follow Him. Again, the worship of the Father is not a ritual or something we do every Sunday, but an outflow of thanksgiving to Him for all He has planned, purposed and accomplished for us through His Son Jesus Christ.
- 3. Three positive results or blessings when we come to Jesus:**
 - a. We will never hunger again (v.35).
 - b. Jesus will never cast us out (v.37). Not one person who has been given Him by the Father will be lost.
 - c. Jesus will raise us up in the last day, at His return (v.44). Our mortal bodies will be resurrected and glorified or transfigured to

be like Jesus. Eventually, our entire being (our spirit, soul and body) will be enlivened and transformed by His divine, eternal life.

4. **The importance of believing or faith.** In vv.28-29, Jesus tells us that the work of God is to believe into Him (Jesus), who He is and what He has done for us. The Greek word for “believe” actually means “faith” or “trust.” In v.35, not being thirsty again is the result of believing. How can we not thirst again? By believing into Jesus. Believing is not just once for all, but a matter of exercising constantly to be in union with the Lord. We may use the example of the Lord’s Table again. By praising the Lord with an exercised spirit, we may enter into union with the Lord. The more we praise the Lord for His person and for what He has done, the more our faith is strengthened and grows.
5. **Jesus hungering and thirsting.** By coming to the Lord and believing into Him, we shall by no means hunger or thirst again (v.35). This is on our side. However, Jesus also hungered and thirsted. In John 4:7, Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink. He was thirsty for the sinners, typified by the woman, to come to Him. Then in v.34, Jesus told His disciples that He had food that they were not aware of. Actually His food was the believing of the Samaritan woman which was the result of her coming to Him. When we preach the gospel, and if we bring people to Jesus, He will not be thirsty. Even more, if people believe into Him, Jesus will not be hungry since that will be food to Him. This also applies to us. Maybe we believed in Jesus some years ago. How can we live today in the reality of believing into Jesus? How can we not hunger or thirst? We need to preach the gospel and bring people to Jesus. However, it is the Father who draws people and causes people to believe. Actually, based on v.36 and v.42, it is very difficult to believe. Therefore, when we go out to announce the gospel, we should just have joy and peace, regardless of whether people accept or reject what we tell them.
6. **The work of God is just to believe**(6:28-29). Signs are useful and used by God so we can know Him. However, we may still not know God, and we may merely look for signs and even follow God only because of signs. Therefore, Jesus warns us not to work for food which perishes, or even work the works of God. We may want to achieve something on our own, either physical or even spiritual. However, eternal life is not something we work for (v.28). Instead of working for it, we need to receive what God has provided for us. When we eat Jesus and take Him into us, we are satisfied with Him and we can rest in Him. We do not need to look for something other than Him.
- 7 **Hearing and understanding** (John 6:45). Hearing and understanding are so crucial. Hearing alone is not sufficient.. Many saw Jesus but did not believe (v.36). Therefore, in v.45, Jesus stresses the matter of hearing and understanding or being taught of the Father. This is a matter of revelation. The first stage is to hear (see 1 John 1:1 where hearing is mentioned first). However, hearing without understanding will not last long. Therefore, in John 6:60, many who heard did not walk with Jesus any longer. That is why many hear the word of God but leave the church life. We may see a consistent number of new people in the Lord’s day meeting every week, but surprisingly, the number of people overall may still remain the same, or even worse decrease! This means that while some hear and stay, others hear but leave. To follow the Lord is not at all easy and requires a constant exercise of hearing, understanding and coming to the Lord.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 6:16-31.

- 1. Do we seek the signs (or miracles) or do we seek the Lord Himself?** First the disciples are tested by the Lord. They were the ones who distributed the loaves and the fish, and gathered up the leftovers. Yet they did not “understand the loaves because their heart was hardened” (Mark 6:52). They did not know yet know Jesus as God, the Son of God, the One who was in control of everything. They had witnessed the miracle, but did not see the One who was over all their environment, the author of every provision, and the arranger of every circumstance. They knew the works that Jesus was accomplishing, according to the second kind of testimony of the Son of God (the second of four) in John 5:32-39. Therefore, they needed to be tested. Jesus sent them to the other side. Often, the Lord will speak to us to put us in a situation where there will be a storm or strong waves. At that moment, do we trust the Christ who lives in us, or do we try to depend on ourselves to row ourselves out of our environment (John 6:19)? The negative situations are useful and sovereignly used by the Lord, but we should never pray for them! They (the strong wind) will come if we love the Lord (John 6:18)! The more we love the Lord, the more the storms! The more we love the Lord, the more Satan will be roused to attack us. Satan (represented by the fallen angels) are in the air (Ephesians 6:12), and the demons are in the water (Matthew 12:43). The Lord desires to perfect us in order that we would turn to Him, that we would realize that He loves us, that He will protect us, even when we are afraid. Eventually, when the Lord revealed Himself to them, the disciples acknowledged and worshipped Him as the Son of God (Matthew 14:33).
- 2. We must see God behind the very signs that He created** (John 6:26). The crowd that was fed by Jesus came looking for Jesus. This is very healthy. Yet they were seeking Jesus not because of the signs but because they were filled with food. We should realize that the word “signs” is a very positive word here because the Lord contrast it with being filled with food. It does not just mean “miracles” though of course they were miracles. They refer to the act, but much more to the person behind the act. If we only look for the act and the result (our satisfaction), then we have missed the doer (the Lord Himself) and His purpose. We need to grow from seeking the material blessings of the Lord, to seeking the spiritual blessings of the Lord, to seeking the Lord Himself. Most of us are looking for the material blessings. For example, we may pray to the Lord for a safe flight before our plane takes off, or pray to the Lord before we take a test, asking Him to be with us and help us to get a good grade. This is a very sweet prayer, but we may be limited to such kinds of prayers. On a higher level, we may seek spiritual blessings. For example, we may serve children well, and we may even have a gift for singing or sharing the word with the children. However, this kind of blessing may replace the Lord Himself. We therefore need to pray to the Lord in the following way, “Lord, in my church life, I need to seek You to gain You only. Yes, I will be weak to seek your protection, and even to seek your spiritual blessings, but do grant me Your mercy to gain You a little bit more each day.”
- 3. What is our level of faith?** In Matthew 14:26-31, during the storm, Peter recognized Jesus and responded to Him, asking Him to command him to come to Him if it was indeed Him. According to the level of faith that he had, he ventured out on the water and began to walk. How many of us would do that? Often, we hear the Lord through the brothers and sisters and we recognize the Lord. Yet our faith is very small, and our constitution of Christ is so little. As soon as we look up and see the wind and the waves raging in our lives, we lose sight of the Lord. It is almost as if the Lord was never with us. This is an ongoing process of growth. We need to exercise every day to hear the word of God. The more we exercise, the more we will realize how little faith we actually have, and how much more we need to grow. This realization is very healthy. This will cause us to be more thirsty for the word of God. As soon as we think that we have attained, or that our faith is at an adequate level, we become complacent and lose the desire to grow. Therefore, a good prayer is, “Lord, may You be gracious to me to grant me a pure heart to try to trust You and know You a little bit more. I know that my faith is so small, but let me grow a little bit so You can increase my faith by that much.”

4. **The work of God is to believe the word of God in the Old Testament and the New Testament** (John 6:27-31). The word of God is the food in the Old Testament (according to verse 31 where it is the written word) that endures unto eternal life. The work of God is related to His word, which is just Himself (John 1:1). The work of God is not the services that we perform in the church life (e.g. arranging the chairs, the music, children's service, preparing the love feast) but rather the word. We need to believe into God's word, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament (the entire Bible). On the other hand, we may come to the word, but if we do not know the word, we will not know God. If we understand the word, we will believe into God. We will realize that He controls everything, even all the food that we eat and all the necessities of life. Even if we only believe one or two words of the Bible, we are truly doing the works of God.
5. **Do we take Jesus into our boat?** (John 6:21). This was another miracle! As soon as the disciples took Jesus into the boat, the boat was immediately transported to the land to which they were going. When we are troubled or in distress, we usually focus on the trouble at hand and become consumed by it, not knowing that the Lord is in control. When we take the Lord into our boat, we let go of our ability to solve our problems, and allow Him to rule. Isaiah 43:20 says that He will give water in the wilderness and rivers in the desert to His chosen people.
6. **Sometimes the Lord means to pass by us** (Mark 6:48). Mark, amongst the three gospel writers who record this story (the other two being Matthew and John) is the only gospel writer who records this small yet significant detail. Paradoxically, Jesus came to them, walking on the sea, but then meant to pass by them. How can He come to us yet intend to pass us by? Seemingly, Jesus deliberately intended to withdraw His presence from His disciples. This shows that the Lord wants to train us to truly recognize Him. When the disciples saw Him, they thought He was a ghost. When we trust in our own ability, for example, in finding a job or getting a promotion, we may think that the Lord has blessed us because of our intelligence or diligence. Indeed, the Lord has blessed us (a material blessing), but because we do not exalt Him as God, we do not know Him. At the most, He is like a ghost to us. We think we know Him but He is not the Son of God who is the author and the goal of this blessing. Therefore, the Lord will deliberately "distance" Himself from us until we arrive at the point where we are desperate and cry out to Him in fear and distress. At that time, He will reveal Himself to us as the great "I am" (Mark 6:50). It is in these kinds of situations that we are forced to grow (we may call this self-growth) in the sense that we are pushed to find the Lord for ourselves. For example, we may be faced with a challenge to preach the gospel to someone who we feel is not open and we know will reject us. At this point, all our natural ability and even knowledge of the Bible may not work. Nothing works. All our efforts and plans, that we thought were the Lord, are like ghosts, intangible and ephemeral, ready to disappear. The Lord, in a sense, has passed us by. We are then forced to cry out to the Lord and depend on Him. We may even tell the Lord, "Lord, nothing I can say will help this person. You must save Him, and You alone." At that moment, the Lord reveals Himself to us as the "I am," the Son of God who can meet every need.
7. **The seal of God may refer to the Bible** (John 6:27). Some Bible commentators interpret the latter part of this verse as the Father using the Bible (the written word of God) to testify that Jesus is indeed His beloved Son. Therefore, it is not just at Jesus' baptism that the Father testified concerning the Son, but the whole Bible is the Father's testimony of His Son. If the Bible is the seal of God, how much we need to pay attention to it. If the Bible, as the word of God, is the Son of God Himself, then how much we need to pay attention to the Son Himself and listen to Him (Hebrews 1:1-2). All of God's speaking in the Old Testament was through the prophets and centered on the Son, and all His speaking in the New Testament is in His Son. When we read the Bible, we come to the Son. When the Bible speaks to us today, it is actually the Son speaking to us. The Bible and the Son are one.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 6:1-15. However, it is helpful to read John's account in conjunction with the other three gospel writers' account (Matthew 14:14-23, Mark 6:34-44 and Luke 9:12-17). By putting the four accounts together (the same account with different variations), we may get a more complete and a richer picture with more burdens that may impact our church life and our living.

1. Alone with the Lord: Matthew 14:13. Jesus withdrew to a desert place (in John 6:3 He went to the mountain) to spend time alone with the Father, to be close to Him and fellowship with Him. We also need to spend time alone with the Lord. The majority of our time, we are by ourselves, and so we can use that time to talk to the Lord and listen to Him.

2. Compassion on people to meet human needs: Jesus had compassion (Matthew 14:14 and Mark 6:34). In the church life, there are many people with many human needs. Jesus taught the people and proclaimed the kingdom of God (Luke 9:11). However, He met the human needs in order to bring people to know Him and to know the kingdom of God (the church). In the same way, when we care for people, we must be sensitive to their human needs in order to bring them to the point where they can know Christ and give themselves to Him. The base is divine (Christ and the church), but the means is very human. But how does Jesus meet the human needs in this account, and how is this carried out in the church life?

3. Pillars must be raised up: Jesus spent time alone with the Father, but He also spent time alone with His disciples. Indeed, He fed the five thousand (not including women and children), but not directly. He fed them through the disciples. He had a team of serving ones who grew to know Him and to know His heart, and to know themselves, and who were willing to be perfected. There are several aspects related to this burden.

• Pillars have a close fellowship with older or more mature brothers and sisters. The apostles gathered together to Jesus to report to Him all that they had done and taught. There was a very good fellowship between the apostles, Jesus and one another. Pillars have many prayers and fellowship together. They are not independent.

• Pillars dive into the church life. This does not just mean serving or laboring a lot. It means knowing as many brothers and sisters as possible, individually, one by one. Do I know the individual needs of the saints? If I don't know the needs, how can I serve? It is not a question of just doing many things, and speaking many things, but knowing the saints. The less I know the saints, the less I should speak.

• Therefore, the pillars must contact many people. We can see this in Mark 6:33. Many people recognized, not just Jesus, but the disciples also. Do people recognize us, know us? If people do not recognize us, they will not come, in principle. Very few come only because they have seen Christ and Christ alone. In general, they will come because they know someone. People come because someone spent time with them and invited them. Often, we ask new ones who invited them. Invariably, they will say who invited them. Pillars must contact and know people.

• Pillars are tested and perfected. In each of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), Jesus tells His disciples to give the multitude something to eat. However, only in John's gospel, Jesus asks, not the disciples as a whole, but Philip, specifically, where to buy bread to feed the people. This is the same Philip whom Jesus found in John 1, and who in turn found Nathanael. This means that the Lord will test us the more we respond to Him, love Him and follow Him. The less we love Him, the less testing. The more we love Him, the greater the testing. Philip failed (and so do we). However, this gave the Lord an opportunity to perfect Philip, not directly, but through Andrew. Often, we are perfected by other brothers and sisters in the church life.

4. **We may not have, but we need to know who has:** The disciples did not have anything, but Andrew knew a lad (a little boy) who had five loaves and two fish. The Lord wants each individual believer to provide food. Even if we do not have, we may know a little boy (signifying a new believer with a pure heart) who has. Do I know someone who has something to offer to the Lord? We must know what new believers have from the Lord. Never assume the younger ones know nothing or have nothing. In fact, we need to wait for them to say something. This shows that it is impossible for us to meet every need. The older ones should never think they can meet every need. They need the younger ones and the newer ones to bless the church. Eventually, the little boy gave what he had to the disciples. This means that the newer ones also need the older ones. Both complement each other and together bless people.
5. **We offer who we are.** The little boy had five loaves and two fish. These loaves were made from barley grown in the ground. The fish were caught in the sea. Both loaves and fish represent a particular living that is made by people (in this case farmers and fishermen). This indicates that we offer to the Lord who we are, according to the environment the Lord has placed us in. For example, a student lives among students. His or her offering to the Lord is necessarily, and quite naturally, fellow students that are contacted, and brought to the Lord. Often, we think that our offering is our time or money. This is not incorrect, but here in John 6, the offering is the barley and the fish, that is the people around us to whom we are related (our friends, our neighbors, our relatives, our coworkers). This is an uphill battle. It is not easy for one person to know and love the Lord.
6. **The Lord will break who we are (Matthew 14:19, Mark 6:41 and Luke 9:16).** We may think that we have served well or spoken well or met a certain need. The Lord will break us to cause us to realize that we have nothing to boast about. Only the Lord can meet the needs. If I gave two hours of my time, or spent some money, or even contacted someone and brought him to the Lord, it was because the Lord told me to do it. I have no boast. Eventually, the Lord alone is the One who feeds and blesses.
7. **Actually, our service is, at the best of times, ineffective!** We see this in John 6:14-15. All the human needs were met by Jesus, yet, at the end, the people only recognized Him as a prophet and a human king. They did not acknowledge Him as the Son of God, nor as the Messiah. This shows that we may labor hard (and we must) to sow the seed and preach the gospel. Yet people still do not know Christ. How ineffective is my service! We must not think that the church life is so easy to meet this need and that need. Yes, people may be satisfied, but they still may not know Christ. This is a practical example of being broken. We have nothing to boast about, yet at the same time we have nothing to be discouraged about. Perhaps the Christ in me is very small. That only means I need to grow more. Christ is everything and does everything.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 5:30-47

- 1. The fourfold testimony of the Son (Jesus): v. 31-40.** Jesus gives us four ways to know Him. Each of these four ways is applicable to our living. Together, they can cause us to grow in our revelation of Jesus Christ.
 - a.** The testimony of John the Baptist who prepared the way for Jesus and introduced Him (chapter 1). If only Jesus had testified about Himself, His testimony would not have been true (v. 31). This is the testimony of someone other than Jesus, the testimony of a servant of God. Therefore, we need to listen to the servants of God (many brothers and sisters) to receive revelation concerning Jesus Christ. Such a testimony may burn (affect) us and shine (convict) us so we can be attracted to Christ. This was John the Baptist's main function, and the function of every servant of God.
 - b.** The testimony of the Son Himself (v. 36). This testimony is greater than John the Baptist. This testimony is His works or deeds or labor (according to the Greek word). These works are the works commissioned by the Father that the Son accomplished in His earthly ministry (healing, raising from the dead, feeding the 5000, casting out demons). These are also the works today that we may experience in our lives as He takes care of us humanly so that we may eventually believe in Him and be saved. Many brothers and sisters can testify that they came to salvation through a "miracle" or some event that occurred to cause them to believe.
 - c.** The testimony of the Father (v. 37-38). This was the Father's declaration at the baptism of the Son in Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22, and John 1:33. This testimony is even higher because the Father does not testify concerning the Son's works but concerning the Son Himself, and His sweet and intimate relationship with Him ("in whom I am well pleased"). The Father, in this third testimony, sends the Son so that we may believe in Him, not just in His works. This testimony may cause us to grow from merely hearing other brothers and sisters testify, to experiencing salvation through a miraculous work, to believing in and knowing Him through the Father's revelation through His word abiding in us (v. 38).
 - d.** The testimony of the scriptures (v. 39-40). Eventually, we grow to searching the scriptures or His word to know Him through the word, not just through others' testimonies, not just through His works in our lives, but through His word (logos in v. 38) becoming rhema (in v. 47). For this, when we come to the word, we must come to the Lord Himself (v. 40). We should never separate the Lord from the word.

- 2. Testifying:** We tend to emphasize prophesying in the church meetings (speaking for and speaking forth God). But we often speak without testifying or witnessing. We may like to become Bible teachers, explaining the Bible, but with no testimony. In the church meetings, the most important thing is to testify for the Lord. Acts 1:6 and 1:8 give us an example. In Acts 1:6, the disciples wanted to know when the Lord would restore the earthly kingdom of Israel. This shows that they had no idea of the Lord's purpose, just like Peter earlier who, because of his ignorance of the Lord's purpose, denied the Lord. In Acts 1:8, the Lord enlightens them by telling them that they will be His witnesses (or martyrs). This is His purpose. We need to become His witnesses, not just in word, but in our living, to live a crucified life, a life of a martyr.
- 3. How to testify:** We have a few guidelines in the New Testament. In Romans 1:9, Paul is one with God so God is his witness. In Philippians 1:8, God is again his witness. In 1 Thessalonians 2:5, God is once again his witness. Paul was one with God in his living. In our living, we must avoid false testimony. When we testify, are we one with the Lord? Are we one with Him in our living? John 5:41-44 is a warning to us. Many times, brothers and sisters encourage us to testify. Even the Lord, and the Bible, encourage us to testify (Deuteronomy 19:15). But we must realize that we are sinners. We like to receive glory from one another (especially if we serve well with some good results). We do not seek the glory that comes from God alone (v. 44). Yes, the Lord encourages us to testify, but not for our own glory. Therefore, whenever we testify, and whenever we hear a testimony, we must come to the Lord directly. We are surrounded with a great cloud of so many witnesses (in the Bible and throughout history, and today in the church life). Yet do we come to the Lord ourselves?

4. What to testify: We may testify how much we love the Lord, or how much the Lord means to us, yet never use a verse from the Bible. Our testimony needs substance. Otherwise what we are touched with may not stay with us but disappear when there is a trial or a test. Is there a verse in my testimony that I can point to and say that this particular word caused me to act in such and such a way? For example, Matthew 18:12 touched a certain brother and caused him to leave Montreal at a particular time when the Lord was blessing the church there (i.e. to leave the 99 sheep), and to go to another locality to seek the lost one on the mountain. There was a struggle. Should he go or not? Eventually, the logos word became rhema word to him to cause him to be clear to go, and even to give him the conviction to go the next time there is such an opportunity.

5. Reading the Old Testament in order to believe Jesus' words: v. 46-47. The Old Testament gives us concrete examples that cause us to understand or grasp many truths revealed in the New Testament. It is often helpful to read the New Testament in conjunction with the Old Testament. Without the Old Testament, part of the New Testament may be abstract or far away from us. When we read the Old Testament, we also need to find Christ, to see how Christ is revealed. If we believe the Old Testament, we will believe Jesus (v. 46). Eventually, we may see that much of Jesus's speaking can be realized in our living by concrete examples in the Old Testament.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 5:16-29

- 1. The two aspects of life:** In verse 8, Jesus tells the paralyzed man to take up his bed and walk. The paralyzed man gained life and was healed, but this was not eternal life but physical life. We may say that he was healed of his illness but perhaps not spiritually saved since he did not yet know Jesus and believe in Him. In verse 14, Jesus finds him in the temple and tells him that he is made whole and not to sin anymore. It is not clear if he was saved or not. However, in verse 24, Jesus refers to the person who hears His word, believes on Him who sent Him, and has eternal life, having passed from death into life. This life is the eternal life. Therefore, the Lord has power to give us eternal life and also power to heal us.
- 2. How do we testify?:** The paralyzed and restored man had a good heart to testify to the Jews that he had been healed. He had no bad intention. However, he did not know Jesus and had not yet believed in Him. Therefore his testimony was weak and had an opposite effect. Jesus, a few verses later (which we will consider next time) gives us a few indications of how to testify from v. 31-37. In v. 32, He says that another bears witness of Him. This means that in our testimony, we must be one with the Lord, and that the Lord must lead us. However, we need to be careful to say "The Lord led me" or "The Lord testifies for me." Are we sure it is the Lord or just ourselves? When we testify, we must testify in truthfulness. Otherwise we will have to account for any false witness that we give before the judgment seat of Christ.
- 3. The Father will show the Son greater works (v. 20):** What are the greater works that the Father will show the Son? Verses 21 and 22 give us the answer. The Son has the authority to resurrect people, to give them eternal life, and to exercise judgment. The first two works relate to the believers. The third work, that of judgment, relates to the unbelievers (at the great white throne mentioned in Revelation 20:11-12) in the second half of verse 29 upon the Lord's second coming, as well as to believers at the judgment seat of Christ.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 5:16-29

4. **The Father and the Son are working:** The Father and the Son work constantly. They do not rest in the sense of being idle. They are continually seeking the lost sinners, to resurrect them and to give them life. Are we one with the Father and the Son in such a way, to seek people, to be close to people, to accompany them, to attract them to the Lord? The Greek word for work here is toil or labor or commit. This means that it is not easy. No spiritual labor or toil is easy. It is not easy to be with one person. It is not easy to lead one person to the Lord. It involves diligence and exercise and hard toil.
5. **Honoring the Son:** Verse 22 says that the Father has given all judgment to the Son that all may honor the Son. The Greek word for honor is "to prize" or "fix a valuation on" or "revere." How much do we value the Son? How much do we value the Son in the brothers and sisters and in the servants of the Lord? How much are we willing to follow their example and take the way of the Son? This is a sober matter because we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. To the degree that I have judged Christ worthy of my time and living, He will judge me according to how much I have judged Him valuable and worthy.
6. **The Father loves the Son (v. 20):** The Greek word used for love is, interestingly, "phileo" and not "agape" which is the divine love. Here, the affection between the Father and the Son is brought out: an intimate relationship full of affection and personal attachment. The Son is privy to all the counsels, inner affections and operations of the Father. Nothing is hidden from Him.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 5:1-16.

- 1. The Lord is very merciful:** Bethesda, in Greek, means *house of mercy*. It was here, at the five porches or colonnades, that many people (a multitude) lay, besieged with ailments and infirmities that rendered them unable to function. God's mercy is so compelling and far-reaching that it can draw people in (typified by the porches) to gather together to be healed. For example, we may look for a job and God may provide a job. This is His mercy. Yet, we may not know Jesus. The infirm man did not know Jesus, even when Jesus healed him. This is God's mercy. Eventually, when Jesus came back to him and revealed Himself, the man knew Him and got saved. This is also God's mercy. Everything is according to His mercy.
- 2. Why did Jesus seek this man (and me)?:** The key is v. 14. The infirm man was in the temple when Jesus found him. This shows that he had a seeking heart. The Lord wants to lead us as sheep into the church life so we can be saved. We grow from lying by the pool (house of mercy), waiting for God's mercy to come to us in some miraculous way, to walking in the temple (the church life) where eventually we can come to know Jesus Himself. This shows us that on the one hand, we need a pure and a seeking heart. On the other hand, God chose us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). He seeks us because He chose us. Yet at the same time, we need a seeking heart so He can find us. We need to come to the church life, since God's mercy (Bethesda) is manifested in the church.
- 3. Jesus does not reveal Himself right away:** When Jesus tells the infirm man to pick up his mat and walk, He does not tell him who He is. Why? For example, in a somewhat similar account in the other three gospels, Jesus reveals Himself to the man carried by his friends on a mat as the Son of Man. However, in John 5, Jesus is strangely silent concerning His identity. This may show us His humanity, to take care of our human need first, before revealing Himself to us in order to save us. We also need such a humanity. Sometimes, we need to learn not to necessarily identify ourselves to others as being spiritual or having something of spiritual value to impart to them. Rather, we may simply be with them and take care of their practical needs with the humanity of Jesus. Eventually, they may be attracted to us to the point where they are ready to know Christ and to be saved.
- 4. A frightening realization:** In 5:14 Jesus tells the infirm man (now healed) to sin no more, lest something worse befall him. A similar story occurs in the other three gospels where a man lying on a mat is carried through the roof and brought to Jesus, who heals him. In all three accounts, the people who witness the miracle are astounded or amazed, and glorify God. Yet, amidst such rejoicing and celebration, only Luke (5:26) mentions that the people were filled with fear, that is in the throes of extreme terror. Why? If our sins are forgiven, should not that be a cause for joy and exultation? Why fear? The answer is found in John 5, where Jesus warns that if we continue to sin, we may

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 5:1-16.

fear worse things to happen to us. "Sin" here is not simply the physical or immoral thoughts or acts, but rather spiritual. In Greek, the denotation is to miss the mark, to misaim. We need to fear, for example, living a routine church life devoid of Christ. We need to fear not growing, remaining static. If I love the Lord this year (2018) the same as last year (2017), I sin (misaim), not physically but spiritually.

- 5. Our mat is what makes us comfortable, even the spiritual things that we like to do:** We need to pick up our mat and walk, not lie on it and let it carry us. Sometimes, we like to be weak and paralyzed. It is much easier. We can make excuses for ourselves (I am not that kind of person, I cannot change who I am). When it is time to come to the Lord's day morning meeting, we may find five excuses to paralyze us. That is why Jesus asked the man "Do you want to get well?" Do we? Not always! It is sometimes more convenient to remain paralyzed! The Lord must speak to us again and again.
- 6. Do we suffer persecution?:** Jesus was persecuted and His life was in danger (v. 16) because the healed man reported to the Jews. Do we suffer persecution because we follow the way that Jesus took? We do not look for persecution or try to live a suffering life. Rather, we seek to take the way of the cross. Jesus is living in us, and the Triune God is always working (v. 17). If we follow Him, the world will persecute us. For example, if we go out to preach the gospel, some will reject us or mock us. If we suffer no persecution, that is a sign that we are paralyzed, and that we are missing the mark (sinning).
- 7. Testify or preach the gospel wisely:** On the one hand, Jesus was persecuted because He was faithful to the Father to live according to the Father's working. On the other hand, in chapter 5, He was persecuted because the infirm man, unwisely perhaps, reported to the Jews what had happened. Therefore, we need to have discernment how to present Christ to our friends or relatives. Some testimonies may turn people away, other testimonies may draw people to Christ. We also need to pay attention to who we are. For example, we may preach the gospel to our parents, but if our grades are poor, that may be a poor testimony without much weight, and may alienate our parents from God.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 4:43-54

- 1. Growing from believing the testimony of brothers and sisters to believing the word of God:** the Samaritan woman believed because of a miracle (Jesus knew her history and exposed her past). This convicted her and because of this, she gave a very precious testimony to the people in her village. Eventually, when Jesus came to the village and stayed there for two days, the people believed not because of the woman's testimony but because they heard for themselves the word of Jesus (v. 42). The case of the royal official and his son is a continuation of this growth process. The royal official had no sign or wonder to believe that his son would be healed, other than the accounts of what Jesus had done in Galilee before, and also in Jerusalem. However, he believed in the word (in Greek, *logos* which is the constant or unchanging word). In our church life, we need to hear the word of God again and again, that we may believe in His word. The Lord does perform signs (in Greek it refers to a supernatural indication) and wonders in our environment. This is a process which we see in chapter 4. Eventually, all the signs must lead us to believe the word of the Lord Himself. Unfortunately, often, we may go elsewhere to see signs and wonders which may eventually lead us, not to God, but to idols. Even the Antichrist will perform signs and wonders and deceive many people (2 Thessalonians 2:9). The wonders and signs must lead us to believe in the Lord Himself.
- 2. The real purpose of signs is to confirm the word already spoken and believed:** The official believed the word of the Lord with a simple and pure heart. But he did not stop there. After he returned home and found his son alive, he inquired of his servants when the fever had broken (v. 52 and 53). He followed up his prayer to look for the Lord's operation, to see how the Lord had answered his prayer. Do we follow up our prayers to see how the Lord is responding to our prayers. It is good to write down what the Lord speaks to us, and also to write down our response. In this way, we may know the Lord and the saints more intimately and also know the needs of the church, and how to meet them.
- 3. Our prayers:** The royal official really cared for his son. He came to Jesus with a desperate request (prayer). He was alert and sober. He knew that Jesus had come, and no doubt he had heard what Jesus had done. He paid attention to Jesus. Whereas the Samaritan woman testified to her neighbors and people in her village, the royal official came to the Lord concerning a member of his own family. We also must be alert and sober to come to the Lord, to have many prayers for our own relatives. Is our heart alert? Do we treasure all the opportunities to hear the word of the Lord and to respond to Him through our prayers?
- 4. Our faith is limited:** In one sense, the royal official's faith was limited. He wanted Jesus to personally come to his home (v. 47). He did not ask Jesus to speak the word, as, for example, the centurion did in Matthew 8:8. This shows that however little of Christ we have, however small our faith is, we can still pray to the Lord. The official's heart was pure. The Lord knew him, and purposely went to Galilee to meet his need, just as He went to Samaria to meet the Samaritan woman's need. Even though his faith was little, the Lord answered his prayer.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 4:43-54

- 5. We need to come to the word again and again, even though we may not understand:** In John 2:22, the disciples remembered the word of the Lord spoken to them concerning the temple (of His body) much later, after He had died and resurrected. This means that we may not understand what we read or hear today, but one day we will understand. We will remember what we heard, and it will come home to us. We need to treasure the various opportunities for fellowship that we have (through Skype, for example). We need to treasure the written word of the Bible, as well as the word spoken through the brothers and sisters. Then we will remember one day what the Lord spoke to us. Thus, we may live (have life spiritually), and others around us may also live, even as the official lived by believing in the word of Jesus, and as a result his whole family lived because the father heard and believed the word of Jesus.
- 6. The Lord treasures household salvation:** The royal official believed along with his whole family. The Lord treasures our prayers for our household salvation. The salvation of the official's family was a real honoring of the Lord. This is in contrast with v. 44 where Jesus says that a prophet has no honor in his own country. In an environment where people in His hometown did not honor Him, Jesus finds a family that proves Him wrong (in a sense)! Capernaum is about 40 kilometers from Nazareth (the city where Jesus grew up), and Cana (where Jesus performed the first sign of changing water into wine) is about 10 kilometers away, so we may say that Jesus was not actually exercising His ministry in His hometown, but He was pretty close by.
- 7. Preach the gospel according to burden and not because people will receive:** In one sense, Jesus went against His own word referred to in v. 44. Why should He go back to Galilee when His own people did not really receive Him? This shows that He did not preach the gospel according to who would receive Him or not. He went according to burden and according to the Father's sending. He went to Samaria for the Samaritan woman, and He went to Capernaum for the sake of the royal official. Do we preach the gospel because people will receive us, and if they do not, we lose heart and do not preach any more? We go because the Lord sends us, because we are close to the Lord and we know His heart for people.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 4:28-42

- 1. Worshiping God in truth or truthfulness:** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). This is a verse that many of us are familiar with and quote often. But it is hard to understand and we often look at the whole Bible to try to understand what Jesus is saying. Actually, within chapter 4 itself, we have an example or model of someone who practices what Jesus says. The Samaritan woman's testimony to the people in her city was seemingly weak and even uncertain. In verse 29 she urges the people to see a man who told her everything she had ever done. She believed because of a miracle. Did she really know Christ? She knew that a man had read her past like a book. But then she says "Is not this the Christ?" On the one hand, she believes; on the other hand, she doubts. There was no pretense with her. This is an example of worshiping the Lord in truthfulness. Wherever we may be at, whatever revelation we may have, even a little bit, we can testify, however weak our testimony may be. We can be true to whatever Christ we may have.
- 2. Worshiping God in spirit:** We often say that we are in spirit or that we need to be in spirit. This may be somewhat abstract and hard to measure. What is the yardstick to know if we are in spirit or not? In the New Testament, the word and the spirit go together. Jesus says that the words that He speaks are spirit and life (John 6:63). An example of worship in spirit is the Samaritan people to whom the woman testified. When they heard her, they came to Jesus (v. 40). Then they entreated Him to stay or abide with them, to spend time with them. Then in v. 41, many more believed because of His word, not the word of the woman. Finally, in v. 42, they declare that they believe because they have heard for themselves, not because of her testimony. The true worship of God is through the word which, when heard, becomes spirit to us for us to experience. To worship in spirit is to abide with the Lord, not to let Him go, not to let His word go, and to know Him personally because of His direct word to us.
- 3. A growing process :** Therefore, we need to grow, from believing in Jesus because of the testimony of a brother or sister. We definitely need the speaking of the brothers and sisters. We should not stop there, however. We need to ask the Lord to abide with us, and we need to abide with Him. The growing process is related to dwelling and abiding with Him. Anytime the Lord speaks to us through the brothers and sisters, we need to personally go to the Lord and to the word to have a transaction with Him, to confirm and strengthen the word that we have heard. In that way, we may have the personal speaking of the Lord Himself, and not just a testimony from someone else. Thus we may be saved from merely quoting what someone else told us, to growing to the point where we can say, "The Bible says..."
- 4. Any believer can preach the gospel:** In John, chapter 1, John the Baptist preached the gospel, and many were brought to Jesus through him. In chapter 2, Mary told the servants to listen to Jesus and do whatever He said. In chapter 3, Jesus Himself preached the gospel to Nicodemus. In one sense, we may not be like John the Baptist, nor the mother of Jesus, let alone Jesus, and we can excuse ourselves by saying that we could never do what they did. But in chapter 4, Jesus found a low, sinful woman who believed in Him and testified. Jesus found us. Who are we? We are just like the woman, sinful, unsatisfied, and thirsty. But God chose us and predestinated us. Because of His salvation, of which He is the source, we can preach the gospel, whatever amount of Christ we may have. We have no excuse. The example of the Samaritan woman levels the ground, so to speak, for all believers to testify the Christ, both small and big (in their experience), that they have received.
- 5. This kind of gospel preaching is food for Jesus (v. 32).** It seems that in Jesus's view, the real food that He enjoyed was not His own preaching but the preaching of the woman. Every time someone like us can testify Christ, the Lord is fed. It is remarkable that this is the only case in the gospels where Jesus speaks of food that satisfies Him. Jesus did so many miracles, healed so many people, and spoke the word to crowds, as well as to His disciples. Yet it is only when a lowly, despised and sinful woman simply relates how a man was able to expose her past that Jesus refuses to eat physical food, declaring that He was already satisfied by food that His disciples did not know about.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 4:28-42

6. **The disciples did not preach the gospel and did not therefore know the food that satisfied Jesus.** Are we disciples? In other words, we may have followed Jesus for a long time, having attended many trainings, and we may think we know His will. We may be experienced. We may even know the word. Do we preach the gospel? Apparently, the disciples had not done so! Yet the poor, lowly, despised woman, who knew practically nothing about spiritual things, testified. Do we really know the will of the Lord? Are we willing to feed Him by going to people?
7. **Many people are ready to preach the gospel:** Verse 35 tells us that the fields are white to harvest. This verse is very interesting. We usually take it to mean that people are ready to receive the gospel and believe. But in the context, it can also mean that many people are ready to preach the gospel, beginning with the newly saved believer. We do not need to wait. Do not wait to be equipped with the word or to attend a training, or to read the Bible once through first and become a disciple. No, we are ready right away to testify the Christ that we have seen and experienced.
8. **We need to lift up our eyes** (v. 35). We need to lift up our eyes to the heavenly realm, and not look at the earthly realm. If we keep our eyes on the ground, all we will see will be our shortcomings, our inadequacies and our failures, and we will find one excuse after another not to preach the gospel. We need to look at people in our city, in our campuses etc. as being ready to be spoken to, and at ourselves as being ready and chosen (the Lord has already chosen us) to speak.
9. **The Lord is the source of the gospel and the One who leads people to Himself. We have nothing to boast about.** One sows and another reaps (v. 36-38). No one can claim that he alone sowed or he alone reaped. Both the one who sows and the one who reaps rejoice together (v. 36). Ultimately, we have no boast whatsoever. The Lord is the One who is the source of salvation. Sometimes, we preach the gospel and someone believes. But then that person says that His grandmother or relative had preached the gospel much earlier to him. Did he believe because of us or because of someone else? Often we reap where many others have labored, but no one can claim credit. All we can do is rejoice for the corporate labor that we enjoy of sowing and reaping.
10. **We preach the gospel not because we expect immediate results but to sow the seed.** Our gospel preaching is a sowing process. We should not base our preaching on the obtaining of results. Yes, we want people to get saved. But we must realize that another will reap. This realization will save us from preaching out of duty, to preaching out of joy. We are thereby delivered from a lot of pressure (e.g. the pressure of producing results). All our sowing is actually food to satisfy the Lord. This will lead us to be humble. If someone gets saved through us, someone else sowed or labored. We merely reaped without laboring (in a sense). If we sow (or labor) and nothing happens, but later someone reaps (the person we preached to gets saved), we rejoice (no pressure and no envy). God is the source of everything, and He is satisfied. Therefore, we need to labor to sow the seed.
11. **There are many ways to preach the gospel.** We can go out to people whom we do not know. This way is usually less frequent. For example, we may go out at special times, with other brothers and sisters, to preach the gospel. At these times, we are together so we have the support and companionship of others to strengthen us to speak to people. At other times, in our daily life (more frequent), we have opportunities to testify to those whom we know, like the Samaritan woman. She must have been well known in her village, probably for negative rather than positive reasons! When she testified, the people must have noticed a change in her life, not just through her words but through her person. Therefore, people can come to know Christ also through our living, of how Christ has spoken to us and changed us. Then when we speak, our words may reflect the way we live.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 4:1-27

- 1. Jesus had to pass through Samaria:** Both Jesus and John the Baptist were baptizing people in Judea (though Jesus actually did not baptize, but His disciples - 4:2). John the Baptist had testified in chapter 3 that he (John) must decrease, and that He (Christ) must increase. He was ready to lead all his disciples to Jesus. Surely, at this juncture, it would have been more profitable for Jesus to remain in Judea and enjoy the blessing that was being poured out. Why go to a despised city like Samaria? Jesus was sent by the Father. This sending was a sending on a mission, by order, not just to one city or one group of people, but to every city, for the sake of God's testimony. Jesus obeyed, and was compelled or obligated to go to Samaria to seek one lost sinner. Am I willing to do so? Or do I prefer to remain in the blessing that God is pouring out? For example, it is enjoyable to come to the meetings and see how many people are coming, week by week, and boast how God is blessing His church? But do I ever ask myself why God is blessing so much? Do I realize that there are brothers and sisters who are under the necessity of finding the lost ones, and inviting them to come and see? People don't often come randomly. If they do, they rarely stay, unless there is someone who **must** or is driven to care for them. These brothers and sisters have no choice. Whether they are in the mood or not, whether they are prevailing or not, they go to find and care for the lost, because they have to. Do I do so?
- 2. Why did Jesus have to save the Samaritan woman?:** By extension, why does the Lord have to talk with me and save me? Who are we? Are we any better than the woman? No. She had five husbands. I have many more husbands (things that attract and occupy me). Does the Lord save us because we deserve salvation or because we are special? No. He wanted to use this lowly woman to spread the gospel to the entire village of the Samaritans. The Lord saves us individually, one by one, but not just for our own sake. He saves us for His testimony, to preach the gospel in our own city, and to build up His church. John the Baptist referred to the bride in 3:29. All God's operation in us is for the sake of His church, not just for own personal profit. The salvation of the Samaritan woman also shows us that God is not a respecter of persons. He does not favor the high or the lowly. John the Baptist spoke the word and baptized people. He led two of his disciples to Jesus. One of them, Andrew, found his own brother Peter. Jesus found Philip. Philip found Nathanael. Jesus found the Samaritan woman. Eventually, the Samaritans as a race were reached, and consequently, a race other than the Jewish race was reached. We need to appreciate every brother and sister who can speak God's word to us. God is constantly working, but He needs coworkers who can spread His gospel in different cities and to different peoples throughout the world. This is the Lord's desire.
- 3. We need to grow in our knowing of Christ:** Jesus spent personal time with the woman to the point where she grew in her knowledge of Him. We see this through the way she addresses Him. First, she does not address Him using any title in v. 9. Then in v. 11 and 15, she calls Him "sir," a term that indicates "master," "lord" or one "in supreme authority." She then progresses in her revelation of Christ by realizing that He is a prophet (v. 19). Finally, in v. 29, she has a realization, still with some doubt, that He may be the Christ or the Messiah. This is a picture of our growth in knowing the Lord. Even when the Lord reveals Himself to us, we may still not be sure, and we may have questions. Yet, we can still testify Him, however weak our testimony (we will have more fellowship concerning this when we cover the later verses the next time we fellowship).

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 4:1-27

- 4. Jesus wanted the woman to give Him a drink :** Jesus asked the woman for a drink. Do we care for the needs of the saints, and for the gospel friends? We should never despise the care that needs to be rendered to people who need jobs, who need help with their studies, or with their family life. We must pay attention to the physical needs of the saints. Yet while caring for the needs of people, we must learn how to turn them from the material or even religious aspect of their needs to the Lord Himself, from the worldly water to Christ Himself. In taking care of people's needs, we need to lead them to go higher. For example, many people, like the Samaritan woman, may know the Bible. They may read the Bible. But do they know God? When we read the Bible, do we receive revelation?
- 5. Do we give Jesus a drink?:** The Lord is seeking satisfaction in His church, His testimony, which is His heart's desire. It is not just me, individually, that He is seeking, but His testimony in every city. When we contact and accompany people, we need to turn them from all the necessary things of life to Christ Himself.
- 6. The woman left her waterpot:** Do I? The waterpot signifies our own interests, what motivates and fills us and causes us to live our life a certain way. Do I leave my own interests? I may be very content with the kind of church life that I have. I may serve a little bit in some areas, and even talk to people on Sunday morning, or coordinate with brothers during the week for a particular service or need, and think that I am with people. Am I really with people? Do I practice what the woman did in 4:28 and 4:29? Do I leave my waterpot of comfort and go to invite people to "come and see?" We always have excuses: "I am too busy," "I am already serving on this and that," "I already did that when I was younger," or "Let the young people preach the gospel. They are more energetic and in any case they have more time!" Our waterpot grows bigger and bigger with every excuse that we can think of.
- 7. The Lord's life will multiply in the church only if it multiplies in me:** We should never fool ourselves that everything is okay, and that everything will be okay, and that the Lord's life will prevail. If I do not grow, the church will not grow. If I do not preach the gospel (in some kind of way), people will not come to know the Lord. If the Lord does not speak to me, He will not speak to others. If I do not leave my waterpot, how can others leave their waterpots? It is altogether too easy to dream that the church will be blessed. May the Lord speak to me and send me, that He may speak to and send others.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 3:22-36

1. John the Baptist's ministry: Jesus's speaking concerning the need to be born again (or born above) concludes in 3:21. Immediately after His speaking, there is a reaction: people begin to be baptized, both by Jesus (v. 22) and by John the Baptist (v. 23). John the Baptist continues to fulfill the ministry that was prophesied in the Old Testament, that he would come in the spirit and power of Elijah (cf Malachi 4:5-6, Luke 1:17), and Jesus Himself recognizes that John was indeed Elijah who had already come (Matthew 17:12). Therefore, John was ordained by the Triune God to be the forerunner of Jesus Christ, to fulfill his special portion. In fulfilling his ministry, John gained disciples, referred to as "his disciples." We may look at John's ministry as competing with Jesus's ministry, and wonder why John did not hand over all his disciples to Jesus and discontinue his work. Jesus, however, did not look at John's ministry as a rival ministry, but thoroughly honored him in keeping with God's ordination and calling. John, in turn, honored and exalted Jesus, acknowledging that he (John) was not Christ, but the friend of the bridegroom, and that he must decrease but Christ must increase. He confessed that his function was to hear the voice of the Bridegroom and rejoice (3:29), and that all his labor in baptizing people was to cause them to become the bride uniquely for the purpose and satisfaction of the Bridegroom. Earlier in chapter 1, he had again emphasized that he was not the Christ, but merely a voice of one crying in the wilderness. John was very pure in his serving. Are we pure in our serving? When we serve well and effectively, we will have disciples, in principle. Even Paul the apostle had disciples (Acts 9:25). People will look to us and depend on us, and even follow the Lord because of us. Eventually, are we willing to lead them to Christ alone, where they, in a sense, cease to be "our" disciples and become disciples of Christ? Whether we are there or not, they continue to follow Christ. They follow Christ not just because of us, but because they themselves have received a revelation and have come face to face with Christ. Are we willing to decrease, and for Christ's life to increase in us, and consequently in those that we accompany?

2. Being sent to speak the word (rhema) of God: John was sent to speak the words of God (3:34). The Greek word for "sent" has the meaning of being sent out on a mission, or ordered (as in the military). This is similar also to 3:17 where God sent the Son. The same Greek word is also used in Luke 10:1 when Jesus sent His seventy disciples two by two to preach the gospel. He whom God sent in John 3:34 may not only refer to John the Baptist but also to Jesus, the Son. Therefore, God sent John the Baptist, God sent His Son, and Jesus sent His disciples, and sends us now, on a mission, by order, to speak the rhema word of God, that is the word that we have experienced and that has gone through us, not just the black and white letter of knowledge, not just the Bible words, but the experience, especially as related to our church life and the testimony of the Lord. Jesus' speaking was actually mostly rhema, that is, the *logos* (constant word) that He had experienced and applied to the lives of the disciples. Whenever He quoted the Old Testament (the *logos*), He immediately followed up with rhema speaking (e.g. Matthew 4:4).

3. We need to be the "friend of the bridegroom": John the Baptist was the friend of the Bridegroom. The Greek word for friend has the thought of close associate or companion, with the notion of affection or fondness. He was intimate with Jesus, just like Moses was a friend of God, with whom God spoke face to face (see Exodus 33:11). We also need to be so close to the Lord, like Moses. We need to speak to Him, not just as the Lord, but also as a close friend, to tell Him everything, and to hold nothing back. As a friend, He must increase, and we must decrease.

4. We need to grow to become His bride: To be the friend of the bridegroom is not enough. We need to grow to become His bride. This means that the life of Christ must increase in us to the point where we become one with Christ, as a husband is one with his wife and vice-versa (see Ephesians 5:23-32). Thus, the friend of the Bridegroom becomes the bride of Christ by the eternal life of Christ increasing in us to become the eternal portion of the bride.

5. A deeper significance of baptism: Baptism in the Bible is often associated with repentance and the forgiveness of sins (see Acts 2:38). However, baptism, or being born of water (John 3:5), signifies much more than repentance. Why can we say this? Firstly, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. In a sense, Jesus had no need to be baptized because he had no sin. He was perfect and sinless. Even John recognized this and was shocked that Jesus should come to him to be baptized (Matthew 3:14). Why then was Jesus baptized? As a man, Jesus took on the flesh (John 1:14). In the Bible, "flesh" signifies the fallen world. Jesus was by no means fallen, but He was born of the "seed of David" (Romans 1:3), partaking of blood and flesh (Hebrews 2:14). That very nature, His sinless humanity, needed to go through the process of death and resurrection to be uplifted into divinity, not because of sin, but to bring humanity into divinity, to be fully one with God. This process is typified by Adam being put to sleep by God in order for Eve to be formed (Genesis 2:21), before sin had entered. Adam, a type of Christ here, before the fall, was put to sleep (symbolically put to death) and his side was opened so his counterpart (Eve) could be produced. In the same way, when Christ was crucified, His side was pierced and blood and water flowed out (John 19:34), in order to produce His bride, the church. Therefore, baptism is much more than our being terminated and having our sins dealt with. It also signifies our union with Christ in life and living, where we become His bride to match Him in every aspect. This realization of baptism may elevate our church life from merely living a "good" or "righteous" life to living a life full of revelation, purpose and operation, where we realize that we are living in resurrection with Christ, operating with Him and furthering His testimony.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 3:14-21

1. John 3:14-21 may be considered as the structure or framework of Jesus's speaking to Nicodemus in 3:1-13. It is an elaboration of how to be born again or born above, referred to in 3:3 and 3:5. What does it mean to be born of water and of the Spirit? Nicodemus, as a Pharisee well versed in the Old Testament scriptures, must have known the significance of water, used for purification by the Jews, and a symbol of death or termination. Therefore, when Jesus referred to Moses lifting up the bronze serpent in the wilderness (see Numbers 21:4-9), He used that account as an analogy of His own death on the cross to deal with the serpentine nature of man. When the children of Israel murmured against God and Moses, God sent "fiery" or "poisonous" (according to the Hebrew word) serpents to bite the people. God then told Moses to make a fiery serpent and put it on a pole. Whoever was bitten and looked or beheld the bronze serpent would live. In the same way Jesus, as the bronze serpent, in the "likeness of the flesh of sin" (Romans 8:3) but without the sin nature, was crucified on the cross in order to condemn sin in the flesh and nullify the poison of sin. Jesus was telling Nicodemus that anyone, no matter how humble, reputable or knowledgeable concerning the Bible and even God, needed to be born of water, that is to go through death in order to enter into the kingdom or realm of God. Therefore, to be born of water is related to the need for us to be terminated and to have no reliance on ourselves or our humility to enter the kingdom of God.
2. To be born of the Spirit is related to the matter of faith or believing, not only in God, but in the Son of man (3:15) and in the Son of God (3:16-18). We may believe in God, like Nicodemus, but not have faith or entrust ourselves to Jesus as the Son of man and as the only begotten Son of God. In John 14:1, Jesus tells His disciples that they believe in God, but that they also need to believe in Him. Is not Jesus God? Yes. Then what is the difference between believing in God and believing in the Son of God and the Son of man? To believe in God, like Nicodemus, may be outward. We may look for teaching or knowledge of the Bible, and we may even fear God. But we may not have a subjective knowledge or relationship with God where our lives change and we begin to live in a different realm. How can this happen? Through revelation. The Word became flesh. God is revealed through His Son (the Son of God in His divinity) and through the Son of man (His humanity). As the Son of man, He was able to die to deal with our sin and our sin nature. As the Son of God, He is able to impart His resurrection life into us so we can be born of His Spirit. It is only through believing (faith) into Him as the Son of God and man that we can know God subjectively.
3. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world (3:17). However, sin is already in our flesh. If we do not believe in Him, we are already condemned. God does not need to condemn us. Actually, the sin in us, manifested through our evil deeds and our love of darkness (3:19 and 3:21), automatically exposes us and condemns us. What is sin or evil? Not believing in the Son of God (3:18). Who we are in Adam is already condemned positionally, and merely confirmed when we act out our Adamic nature. We should never blame God for situations we may end up in. God never condemns us. Rather, it is our own deeds that expose and accuse us. Instead, we should come to the light (3:21) to be exposed and perfected. It is our choice to walk in darkness or light. We can never blame God for the path we eventually take. We know the truth, but we don't always practice it. The proof that we are born again is that we come to the light and walk in the light. When we practice the truth, we find that we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous (1 John 2:1). We can come back to Him. We are not afraid to come to the light. Our entire Christian journey is one of coming back to the Lord. The truth in us will not let us continue in darkness.
4. God so loved the world (3:16). The Greek word for "love" is *agapao*, a divine love, the deepest love. Paradoxically, the same Greek word is used for "love" in 3:19, referring to men loving darkness rather than light. This shows the contrast between God's love, the deepest and the highest, which caused Him to give or yield up, commit, deliver up, even to smite with the hand (according to the Greek word) for our sake, and the deepest love of men for a life in darkness apart from God. Such a contrast should cause our hearts to melt and motivate us to preach the gospel much more. Every sinner can come to Him. Whoever believes has eternal life.
5. In 3:17, God sent His Son into the world to save the world. The Greek word for "sent" has the meaning of being sent out on a mission, or ordered (as in the military). This is similar to 1:6 concerning John the Baptist who was sent by God. This shows us God's heart and purpose, that He would not spare His only begotten (unique) Son, but would give Him up for us, without reservation, and according to strict orders. Are we willing to respond in the same way to Him, to be sent or ordered by God to preach the gospel and be with people? The Greek word here is different from John 14:26, 15:26 and 16:5 and 16:7, where the thought is not just to send but also to accompany or go with. Perhaps this shows the two aspects of God's sending. On the one hand, He sends us, by order, to carry out His purpose and raise up His testimony. This aspect emphasizes obedience. On the other hand, we do not go alone, but He accompanies us, to carry out in us and through us what He desires. This aspect shows the union of the Father with the Son and His union with us in sending us.
6. We may compare Nicodemus with Philip and Nathanael. Both Philip and Nathanael knew the Scriptures. We know that Philip, Andrew and Peter were looking for the Messiah in the Old Testament Scriptures, and they had a revelation of Jesus (1:49-50). However, in John 3, there is no apparent record that Nicodemus believed. Are we interested in the teachings of Jesus or the Bible, or do we want to come to the Son of God? We may come to the Bible in order to try to understand it, but lack revelation, that is faith in the only begotten Son of God. In all fairness to Nicodemus, it appears that he did believe, as seen in his defense of Jesus before the Sanhedrin in 7:50-52, and later in his touching offering of myrrh and aloes and his collaboration with Joseph of Arimathaea to take the body of Jesus and bury it (20:38-40). With Nicodemus, it was a process of faith.
7. Do I believe Jesus is everything? Yes, I believe in the Son of man and the Son of God, but do I believe every moment, in every situation? Do I believe God's word? Do I touch God in every matter? Do I trust in God in my studies, my job, my family life, my decisions? If not, I am in darkness. My deeds are evil. We face what Nicodemus faced. If we don't believe in Jesus, the wrath of God abides on us (3:36).

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 3:1-13

1. The account of Nicodemus in John chapter 3 follows sequentially chapters 1 and 2, and there seems to be an order according to our experience. In chapter 1, the Word was with God and was God and became flesh, to dwell with us (1:1-2, 14). Eventually, Jesus began to attract His disciples, first through John the Baptist, as the Lamb of God, then through the disciples of John the Baptist. Andrew brought Peter his brother, Jesus found Philip and Philip found Nathanael. Then in chapter 2, with the wedding at Cana, we see a picture of Christ and the church. When we are attracted to follow the Lord, we realize that we need the divine life to match the Christ whom we follow. Our death needs to be changed to life, typified by the changing of water into wine. At the same time, we also realize that as we become the temple of God and begin to live in the church life, we need to be purified so we can become the dwelling place of God in spirit (Ephesians 2:22). However, chapter 3 takes us higher. We may be attracted by miracles and signs and even recognize that God is present (3:2). However, we need to realize that to follow the Lord, we need to pass through death and resurrection (termination of our old creation and germination of the new creation), typified by the water and the Spirit. Who we are needs to change, not because of a miracle (e.g. a good job, good grades, or a happy and sweet church life), but because of a new birth. John chapter 3 marks perhaps the first turning point, and acts as a bridge for the subsequent revelations of who Jesus Christ is.
2. John 3:5 is a continuation of John 1:33. John the Baptist baptized people with water, but said that He who was coming, and on whom the Spirit would descend, would baptize in the Holy Spirit. Water symbolizes death, the termination of our old creation. The Spirit signifies the germination of the divine life.
3. Jesus reinforced this truth by repeating to Nicodemus that he needed to be born from above (John 3:7). The first time, in 3:3, Jesus said he needed to be born again. Nicodemus did not understand "again," thinking that Jesus was referring to a second physical birth. The second time, in 3:7, Jesus said "born from above" (according to certain versions). "Above" refers to something heavenly, to be differentiated from "again." This is the principle of regeneration which originates and is executed from above, not from ourselves or from our self-efforts, as Nicodemus was, and we are, apt to believe.
4. In 2:11 and 2:23, many believed in Jesus because of the sign. However, in 2:23-25, Jesus did not commit or entrust Himself to them because He knew what was in their heart. Many knew about Jesus and had heard about Him. Nicodemus also knew that Jesus had come from God. But he needed to know that Jesus Himself was God. He needed a different nature that could only be given him by God Himself.
5. To enter into God's kingdom, which is the heavenly realm, we need a new birth. The kingdom is another realm, actually Jesus Christ Himself in us (Luke 17:21). How does the kingdom become real in our life? Through a spiritual birth, not a physical birth. The Lord does not force us to change. We need to come to Him through our prayers. An inward change will lead to a living that bears a certain testimony. We need to ask ourselves two questions: 1. Am I living in God's kingdom? 2. Have I surrendered myself to Him?
6. How do we have the assurance that the Spirit is in us? Experientially speaking, we must accept the word of the Lord, and have many prayers to the Lord, asking Him to cleanse us and bring us out of the flesh into the Spirit. Practically, this means that when the Lord speaks to us and we listen, we need to obey Him, to take one more step. Otherwise, we will fall back into living in our flesh (a routine life, without the Lord's fresh leading and speaking).
7. Nicodemus came to Jesus. Do we come? He was humble and honest. He admitted that he did not understand what Jesus was telling him. Jesus responded to him. Nicodemus responded back, and this dialogue led to much more revelation in chapter 3. This shows that we need to come to the Lord wherever we are, honestly and truthfully, and not pretend to know that we understand. Then the Lord may speak to us a little bit more. If we are self-satisfied or content with our Bible knowledge, the Lord will not speak to us anymore.
8. However, a humble heart is not enough. Even if we have a hungry heart, we may not have revelation. We need to abide in the church life, and to listen to the servants of the Lord, in order that we may receive some of the revelation that they have received (1 John 1:1-3). We need to also be very careful to give a testimony of how the Lord helped us or blessed us. The Greek word for both "testify" and "witness" is *martureo* which denotes martyrdom. These words are very high. Jesus as the Son (and possibly the Father and the Spirit) in 3:11 testified and witnessed what "We" (possibly referring to the Triune God) or They had seen (cf. 1 John 1:1) with revelation. Those of us who are older in the church life need to be very careful how we speak. It is very hard to receive revelation without being willing to be "martyred" or to live a crucified life.
9. Be very careful to say "I understand" (3:13). None of us has ascended up to heaven, in other words none of us can understand heavenly things. Even Enoch and Elijah, the only two in the Bible who were raptured, are not counted. Jesus is uniquely qualified because He went through the process of incarnation (descending from heaven), death and resurrection, thus being qualified to ascend. Heavenly things can only be understood if we are willing to live a life of death and resurrection.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 2:13-25 (Nov.16)

1. Jesus made a scourge of cords and drove out those in the temple who were selling oxen, sheep and doves, and poured out the changers' money and overthrew the money changers' tables (John 2:14-16). Why? In the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 14:24-26, there is a precedent for the selling and buying of animals. Those who lived too far from Jerusalem may have found it impractical to bring sheep or oxen or wine or oil or grain all the way. They were therefore allowed to convert their offering to money, come to Jerusalem, and then purchase what they wanted to offer from the sellers of these animals. If then God allowed this practice, why did Jesus take such drastic exception and exact severe punishment on the perpetrators?
2. Several reasons can be offered: one is that the the selling and buying were being carried out in the outer court of the temple, and actually should have been conducted outside the temple. That is why in the other accounts in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), each time, Jesus refers to His Father's house as a house of prayer, indicating that as soon as people entered into the temple, they immediately began a process of coming to God through the offerings they already had in their hand, having taken care of the obtaining of the animals beforehand. Hence Jesus' severe reaction.
3. Another reason that commentators offer is that the sellers were overcharging the worshipers and cheating them. This deduction may be supported by the explanation offered by Jesus in the synoptic gospels that they had made the temple into a house or den of thieves or robbers. In addition, the Gentiles were allowed to enter into the outer court of the temple to worship, borne out by Jesus' statement in Mark's gospel only that His house was a house of prayer for all nations. Therefore, the act of selling constituted a double offense: one of taking advantage of fellow brothers and sisters by overcharging, and one of shaming the testimony of God before the nations or Gentiles. Instead of being a testimony to the world and bringing Gentiles to God, they were robbing the Lord's house. See also Exodus 30:13-15. Any time we withhold an offering from the Lord, or offer something poor (when we have something better), we are cheating the Lord and the saints (see Malachi 1:6-14).
4. This is on the physical level. However, Jesus' action and His subsequent words are words of revelation to His disciples. The first two words in Greek that are used for "temple" in John 2:14-15) denote "a sacred place" or "sacred precincts," referring to the entire temple, whereas the words in Greek used in John 2:19 and 20 denote "dwell." Jesus, when referring to the temple in His rebuke to the sellers and money changers, does not use the word "temple" but rather the word "Father's house" and "My house" (in the other three Gospels). In Greek, the word for "house" means "dwelling."
5. To apply this, the Lord wants to transfer us from the physical temple to a spiritual dwelling, the body of Christ. We are the dwelling place of God in spirit (Ephesians 2:21-22). Our spirit and heart must be pure for the Lord. Is our heart really a holy temple or house for the Lord? For example, I may go to the Lord's day meeting. Do I go to satisfy some kind of religious requirement, to satisfy my conscience? Do I go just to meet some saints whom I know? Or do I go to worship the Lord? The fact that I go means that some percent of my being wants to worship the Lord. I have some desire, but may not be that pure. I have believed in the Lord (John 2:23), but can the Lord commit or entrust Himself to me (2:24)? The Lord does not like mixture. We are not that pure. We may be pure or in spirit when we praise the Lord, but not so pure, or in our flesh, otherwise.
6. Another application, somewhat on the physical level, is that we use the saints or the church for physical gain, for example, selling insurance or gaining some material profit at the expense of the saints. However, this is not limited to physical gain, but can extend to spiritual gain. For example, I may render some help to some saints, or some saints may appreciate some kind of sharing. Am I satisfied? Am I settled? Am I comfortable? This was the condition of the money changers and the sellers. They had set up shop and were immovable. We may be immovable in our self-satisfaction. The Lord needs to deal with us in a specific way. He will weave a cluster of small cords or rushes or weeds to make a scourge (a Roman form of punishment), to drive out, one by one, the impure motives and self-congratulatory assessment that we may have of our labor and exercise in the church life. Such a dealing may be painful and involve suffering, but it is a process by which the Lord cleanses and purifies us, working in us with our cooperation, our emptying and our denying of ourselves.
7. Such a scourging process is something done by the Lord to us, and not by us to others! We may look at other brothers and sisters and notice a lack or some kind of impurity. It is not up to us to weave a scourge to exact discipline! Here, we can learn a lesson from Jesus' reaction in another story in the Gospel of Mark. In Mark 3:5, Jesus, in response to the condemning religious people who were judging His healing of the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, looked at them with anger, but at the same time grieved at the hardness of their heart. It is very difficult for us to have both reactions. Often, we only have anger towards the saints. Can we learn to pray for the saints, grieving for them? Such an exercise may save us from an impetuous rebuke in an outbreak of unmitigated anger, into a prayerful covering of the saints in their weakness.
8. Jesus therefore is bringing His disciples from a physical to a spiritual plane. The word of revelation can only be understood in resurrection (John 2:22). We need to be in spirit and in the house of God, with the brothers and sisters, to remember the words that the Lord has spoken to us. Then we may receive a little bit of revelation to enable us to live a life that can be the dwelling place of God in spirit.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 2:1-12 (Oct. 26)

1. Jesus attended a wedding in Cana of Galilee (2:1). It was probably a large wedding with many guests. How can we deduce this? By the size of the six stone water jars which people used to wash their hands, each one holding 20-30 gallons. One gallon equals almost 4 liters (3.78 to be exact). It probably took each person one liter on average to wash his or her hands. Therefore, we can calculate that there may have been close to 700 people present. Jesus was invited and He went. He did not say anything. He did not make any comments. He simply went and supplied life (changed the water into wine). Water here signifies death (we may refer to the death waters of the flood and the waters of the Red Sea through which the children of Israel passed through). If we are in a certain situation, do we criticize or complain that something is worldly, or do we simply supply life to swallow up any death?
2. The mother of Jesus (2:3-4) represents the natural man with the natural ability. She wanted to dictate to the Lord what to do and when to do it. God cannot use this.
3. Jesus' answer was strict but very tender (2:4). He addressed her with a term of endearment (in Greek, the word for "woman" is actually a word that is used for "wife." Yet He was strict to let her know that His hour or time had not yet come. In other words, no one can dictate to Him. He has His timing and He will operate according to His timing.
4. Jesus' mother listened to Him, became submissive to Him and followed Him (2:5). She told the servants to do whatever He said. This is salvation. We can be saved from our natural thoughts and ability, to become someone who listens and submits to the Lord.
5. The servants listened to Jesus and filled the water pots with water (2:7). It is doubtful if they understood why they had to fill them. This means that when we hear the Lord's speaking to us, either through His word or through the brothers and sisters, we may not be clear why we need to do something or make a certain decision. At that time, we need to still go ahead and obey the Lord. When we obey, as the servants did, we will see the testimony of Jesus, who Jesus is and how He operates. We need a pure, simple and submissive heart. Then we will see the Lord's doing.
6. The servants filled the water pots with water in 2:7. Why did Jesus ask them to do so? The Bible does not give the answer, but the fact is that the servants first had to fill the pots with water (death) before they could draw out the wine (divine life). Life comes out of death. First there is death, then resurrection. Jesus was the pattern. He lived a crucified life, went to the cross and resurrected. We follow the same way. To be able to supply life, we must know who we are. We are persons of death. We are filled with death. It is then that we can experience life that swallows up our death and is able to swallow up the death in others and supply life to them.
7. The first miracle that Jesus performed was at a wedding. This may suggest to us that marriage is something very precious to God. Indeed, marriage, the union of a man and a woman, reflects the union of the Trinity, the intimate relationship enjoyed between the Father, Son and Spirit, and also the relationship between Christ and the church. The miracle performed in Cana shows us that Jesus wants to come into our life to give us enjoyment. Marriage is already a joyful occasion with mankind, whether among believers or unbelievers, but when Jesus comes into the marriage life, marriage becomes even more enjoyable.
8. In 2:11, Jesus manifested His glory through the performing of the miracle in Cana, and His disciples believed into Him. "Glory" can be abstract. But people believing into Jesus is concrete. The disciples saw His glory and believed into Him. We need to evaluate from time to time the effectiveness of our operation. We may preach the gospel and minister the word. Are people believing in Christ? Are people getting saved? Are people growing? Are they functioning? How are they functioning? It is good to ask these questions. It is sometimes easy to do what we think is right to do, or because we are used to doing it a certain way, or because we think we are good at it. The disciples believed because of the servants' service. Do people believe because of our service?
9. Again, in 2:11, the Greek word for "beginning" or "first" is "principle" or "rule." In other words, the principle of changing water (death) into wine (divine life) is to supply life (preach the gospel) so people can believe. This should be the principle or rule that governs our service.
10. In 2:10, the master of the feast marveled that they were drinking the good wine at the end of the feast, contrary to the common practice of beginning with good wine and ending up with inferior wine once the superior wine ran out. Is this the way we serve? We like to serve Christ to others, and we may start out well, with fresh revelations and experiences. But if we do not grow, we may run the risk of serving something old, the same Christ that we experienced last year and the year before. We need to grow in the church life so our service will be something fresh today (that is, good wine at the end of the wedding feast) and not something stale or old (poor wine).
11. In 2:12, Jesus spent time with His family (His mother and His flesh brothers), as well as His disciples. As we serve, we do need to take time to be with our family members.
12. In 2:1, we see that Jesus was invited to a wedding, as well as His disciples. Do we invite Jesus and His disciples (the brothers and sisters) into our marriage life, our family, our school life and our work life? We should not be independent of the church life. We should never depart from the church life. We must preach the gospel to our family and friends.

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 1:39-51 (Oct. 19)

1. When the disciples asked Jesus where He was staying, Jesus replied "Come and see" (John 1:39). When Nathanael was sceptical about anything good coming out of Nazareth, Philip's response to him was also to "come and see" (1:46). In both cases, the Greek word for "see" is *eido* which means a "subjective knowing." It is actually the same word for *know subjectively*. When we come to the Lord, we need to have a subjective vision of who the Lord is. How can we have such a vision? By abiding with the Lord (staying with Him) and by abiding in the church life.
2. Andrew followed Jesus (1:40). Philip also followed Jesus (1:43). The Greek word for follow is *akoloutheo* which does not just mean to follow behind or imitate, but to accompany, to go alongside as a disciple. To follow Jesus is to accompany Jesus and to accompany brothers and sisters who have Jesus Christ living inside of them. We can never get away from the matter of accompanying people. Many times we may say that we follow only Jesus. But if we never accompany people (believers and unbelievers), our following of Jesus may be from afar, or from behind, not as disciples. Jesus is the best example of someone who accompanied or followed people (eg. He found Philip (1:43)).
3. The word *find* or *found* is used several times in this passage. Andrew found Simon his brother (1:41), Jesus found Philip (1:43), and Philip found Nathanael (1:45). The Greek word is *heurisko* which means to get, to obtain, to perceive, to see. Barnabas hunted for Saul in Tarsus and found him (Acts 11:25-26). The same Greek word is used there. To "find" someone is not easy. We may think that it was easy for Andrew to find his brother Simon. After all, were they not close to each other? Actually, it is the hardest thing to find someone. It requires labor, diligence, perseverance and submission to God's speaking. Do we go to find the lost ones? Are we able to connect with them? How do we reach them? Philip introduced Jesus to Nathanael. Nathanael's reaction must have been a damper to Philip's enthusiasm in announcing the Jesus whom they had read about in the law and the prophets (1:45-46). Often, we come across the same reaction. However, Philip did not argue with Nathanael or try to persuade him. He simply said, "Come and see." That is a very good response. We do not need to try to explain or expound this or that. We simply need to introduce people to Christ, and let Christ speak to them and touch them.
4. Andrew's first reaction was to tell his flesh brother Simon (later Peter). The first gospel that we preach should be to those who are closest to us, in most cases our own family.
5. In fact, all the following and beholding of the Lamb of God, and abiding with Him, must be realized and experienced by the preaching of the gospel. If we do not preach the gospel, everything will remain theory and doctrine. We may say that we have faith in the Lord and in His word. However, it is only when we reach out to others that our faith begins to grow and become real.
6. Did Jesus find Philip, or did Philip find Jesus? This is a very interesting question. Upon first reading of the verses, it seems that Jesus found Philip (1:43). Upon a more careful examination of the text, we learn that Philip knew the Old Testament quite well (1:43). He knew the prophecies and he was looking for the Messiah. Therefore, we may say that he was looking for Jesus. Indeed, he found Jesus first. Then Jesus found him! This means that if we have a heart to seek and follow the Lord, the Lord will respond to us by finding us. Here, we take the initiative to find Him, and He will respond by finding us.
7. Nathanael knew the Bible (the Old Testament at the time) (1:49). In fact, he was the first to realize that Jesus was the Son of God. He, like Philip, was already seeking and knew God somewhat before Philip brought him to Jesus. When we preach the gospel to people, many of them have already been looking for God before we find them. This shows us that it is not a matter of how well we can preach the gospel. We have nothing to boast about.
8. Jesus changed Peter's name to *Cephas* or *stone* (1:42). The Greek word for stone here is *petros* which means a loose stone, or a piece of rock. The same word *petros* is used in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus identifies Peter as *petros*. However, Peter is not, as many claim, the *rock* on which Jesus is building His church. The Greek word for *rock* is *petra* (the feminine form of *petros*) which means a mass of rock, a cliff, a precipice, in other words, a solid, immovable and unshakable rock. The same word *petra* is used in 1 Corinthians 10:4 to refer to the rock, Christ, which followed the children of Israel during their journey in the wilderness. Therefore, Peter could never have been the first "pope" or first "head" of the church, as some absurdly claim. Rather, he, like all of us, was a loose stone because he was given the revelation of Christ (the *petras*), and it is this revelation of Christ that would transform him and perfect him and shape him to become a *petros* fit for God's building, the church or the body of Christ. When we have a revelation of Christ, God will test us through many dealings, experiences and sufferings so we can know the crucified Christ in our living. Is our life and our living founded on the revelation of who Christ is? We will be tested again and again. It is through this process that we become living stones (1 Peter 2:4-5).
9. Ironically, Peter in John 1 was not following Jesus when Jesus changed his name! The Lord spoke to him, but apparently elicited no reaction from him. Why? Perhaps because it was his brother who brought him to Jesus! Many times, the Lord speaks to us but we continue to live our life as if nothing had happened. The Lord has to speak to us again and again, often through many brothers and sisters, and even in our environment, until we respond to Him. In John, chapter 1, we have four positive reactions (the apostle John, Andrew, Philip and Nathanael) and one negative, or at least neutral, reaction (Peter).

A summary of the English speaking Skype fellowship tonight concerning John 1:29-39 (Oct.12)

1. John the Baptist testified, and it was through His testimony that people came to Jesus. Many times, we declare that we only listen to God's speaking in the Bible, and not to man's speaking. But we need the servants of God to give us the revelations that they have received from God.
2. John the Baptist did not know Jesus (John 1:31, 33) even though he grew up with Jesus (they were cousins), and he knew Jesus in the flesh. However, in Greek the word for "know" here is *eido* which is a subjective knowing, that is to know the Lord subjectively. The same word *eido* is also used for the word "see" in 1:33. This shows that even though John the Baptist was used by God to announce Jesus Christ, he was humble and confessed that he did not know Him. Often, we like to explain the meaning of verses of which we have no idea, or no experience. In those cases, it is better to say that we do not know or that we have no experience.
3. All our speaking should be based on three principles: do we have subjective experience, can we give an example in our life to back up what we are fellowshiping, and do we know our audience, or do we know the brothers and sisters to whom we are speaking? Often, it is easy to claim that we have the first one ("I have the Lord's speaking or burden" or "the Lord spoke to me." It is not so easy to have the second and third. Do I know the needs of the saints? Am I with them, do I accompany them, do I understand them? Did the Lord speak to me in my daily life in a specific way? If I do not have the second and third principle, I should speak less. The Lord's speaking to us is always related to His church, to His people, to His flock (sheep). Yes, the Lord wants me to grow in my Christian life. But why? For the sake of His church, His testimony. When Andrew followed Jesus, right away he preached the gospel to his brother Simon (Peter). The Lord's speaking to me is eventually for His church.
4. Why does John the Baptist refer to Jesus as the "Lamb of God?" Isaiah 53:7 gives us a key. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so He did not open His mouth. The Lord submitted to God and to the environment He was in, without complaining. He did not defend Himself. Are we like lambs, submitting to God and to His hand?
5. Two disciples of John the Baptist followed Jesus when John spoke. When we speak, do people follow Jesus?
6. John's first declaration is to behold the Lamb of God who is the one who takes away the sin of the world. This is to meet our need. His second declaration is to behold the Lamb of God. This is higher, no longer just meeting our need, but coming to the person of Christ, not just to meet our need, but to enjoy His person. The "Lamb of God" implies not just His sacrifice on the cross for our sins but also who He is as typified by all the offerings in the Old Testament (His consecration, His absoluteness, His suffering, living a crucified life, His divinity expressed through His perfect human virtues).
7. When we enjoy His person as the Lamb of God, the Lord will challenge us and ask us what we are seeking or looking for (1:38). The disciples answered: "Lord, where are you abiding or staying?" The Greek word for "abide" is *meno* which is also in 1:33 to refer to the Spirit descending as a dove on Jesus, and also in John 15:4, 5 and 7. When our sin is carried away, we come to the person of Jesus, to behold Him. As we behold Him, we want to abide or remain with Him, to know where He is and who He is.
8. John often uses the expression "the next day" (1:29, 35, 43), and in subsequent chapters also. On each day, the Lord speaks and there is a response. This brings in the next day with a fresh speaking and a fresh response. In my life, is there a next day, or am I satisfied with the Lord's speaking today?

A summary of the Skype fellowship tonight (Oct.5)

1. John the Baptist testified, not that he was Elijah or the prophet, or the Christ. Instead he testified that he was the voice of one crying out in the wilderness (John 1:23). Do we have a testimony of who the Lord is to us, and how He has spoken to us, and how we have responded to him? John the Baptist responded to the Lord's speaking to him by crying out (preaching the gospel) to those in the wilderness.
2. John's speaking was based on what the Lord spoke to him, not on his status as a prophet, even though he had been prophesied as someone who would come as Elijah (Malachi 4:5), and even though Jesus would refer to him in the same way (Matthew 11:9, 14). The religious people tried to pin down John the Baptist, to force him to reveal who he was. May our speaking not be based on status or reputation or what we think we are (prophet, teacher etc.), but on what the Lord has spoken to us, and what our response is. It is not for us to say who we are, but all our speaking must be before God, unto God, and for God, to satisfy Him and be faithful to what He has given us.
3. John cried out as a voice in the wilderness. To cry out indicates desperation, not just to preach a message. There is a burden, something pressing that needs to be released. Is my preaching of the gospel a mere message, a duty to be fulfilled by saying something, or a crying out, a release of a burden deep within?
4. The wilderness can indicate a place that is set apart, apart from the religious environment, where one can spend time with the Lord alone. It also indicates a dry and barren place. Am I willing to cry out (preach the gospel) in the wilderness, that is, to go to people who are dry (lost, in the world), to people who may not receive or feel the need to receive?
5. John the Baptist answered the religious people's questions, the last one concerning why he baptized people if he was neither Christ nor Elijah nor the prophet (v. 25-26), by bringing them to Christ. He did not directly answer their question. We need to have discernment when we are asked questions. The main purpose in answering questions concerning the Bible is not just to answer the question and explain verses, but to impart revelation, to bring people to know the Christ that they do not know yet (v. 26).
6. When we ask questions, do we ask them to gain more knowledge (v. 22, 24), or to know who Christ is? Some questions may damage us instead of helping us. That is why it is always good to be able to first testify (even a little bit) concerning how the Lord has touched us, and then ask questions. This may save us from merely seeking to gain vain knowledge which will not cause us to grow very much in life.