

Four Views of Christ (Part 6)

John

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We're going to continue the series of sermons I started some weeks ago. In fact, this is sermon number six in this series on the Four Views of Christ. You'll recall that the first view happened to be of Matthew, and the emphasis in Matthew's writing was on the King, the kingdom, law and righteousness. The next one had to do with what Mark wrote, and in Mark we saw the King serving. In the book of Luke, a somewhat different approach was taken, and there we saw the Son of Man as our Savior, we saw Him drawing us by the cords of a man, that is, with a gentle approach. We saw Him as the Savior rejected by the people.

Today we're going to be talking about the book of John, and if you want a title for the book of John, I think it has to be, *Behold Your God*. We're going to begin in Proverbs 30:18 — you remember where the four symbols came from? They came from the cherubim which the Apostle John saw in heaven in Revelation 4. This time we are talking about the eagle.

Proverbs 30:18-19 There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the air.

We'll go no further, because that's all we need at this time.

Reflecting on the book of John, John is by far and away the clearest, the most easily seen of the four as to what the central thrust of his message is. He is presenting Jesus Christ as God, as divinity.

This is where the eagle comes in. You'll notice that the other three, the other animals (if we can include man as an animal), each one of them is confined to the earth. So in Matthew, Mark and Luke we saw things pertaining to Jesus Christ's humanity.

In the book of John, although some of His humanity is certainly seen, the thrust is divinity. He is God. He is otherworldly. He SOARS INTO THE HEAVENS. He is up above men. He is out of the reach, you might say, and the concentration has to be on that He has everything under control, He knows what He is doing, He's leading His people, He is protecting His people, He is untouchable, almost as it were. We'll begin to see how John shows us all of these things.

An eagle soars into the heavens, apparently with nothing to hold it up and no road or path to guide it.

In the book of Job we see another reference to an eagle. In Job 39, here the metaphor shifts just a bit.

Job 39:27-30 Does the eagle mount up at your command [this is God speaking to Job and He is explaining to Job how much greater He is

than man], and make its nest on high? On the rock it dwells and resides, on the crag of the rock and the stronghold. From there it spies out the prey; its eyes observe from afar. Its young ones suck up blood; and where the slain are, there it is.

Again we see reference to the eagle's soaring ability. Its aerie, meaning its nest, is high in the crags, elevated far above men. Its phenomenal eyesight is mentioned. You'll see that this has something to do with Christ's insight into people's hearts. He knows men. Nothing is hidden from His scrutiny. He can read our minds. He has tremendous insight.

Exodus 19:4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.

In Deuteronomy 32 there is a little bit more of this same symbolism.

Deuteronomy 32:10-12 He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him .

. .

The subject is Israel; the speaker is God as it were. Moses is writing, but he is describing as if Israel was someone lost, stuck and abandoned out in the wilderness and God found him and kept him as the apple of His eye.

. . . He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the LORD alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him.

In the last two verses, Exodus 19:4 and Deuteronomy 32:10-12, the figure shifts to one of carrying and concern in an inhospitable environment. This is also very necessary for our understanding of Christ, that He is able to care for His people, protect His people; that even as He is not of the world, neither are His people of the world. They inhabit an inhospitable environment and they need to be taken care of. He is able to do it. You begin to see why John portrays the eagle and how the characteristics of an eagle fit perfectly (in symbolism) the divinity of Jesus Christ.

John is a book that takes us into many mysteries of the knowledge of God that the others just barely begin to touch. This in no way lessens the importance of Matthew, Mark and Luke, because their focus is on the humanity of Christ. But this book takes us into another dimension. Those books are practical in their way. John is practical in his way. God has chosen to show facets of Christ, emphasizing one in one book, another in another book, another in a third book, and finally in the fourth book we get to His divinity. It is here we are taken into an element that the others just barely touch on.

John's approach to Jesus is not of this world. *Behold your God*—so that we might be able to see this perspective of Him and ourselves as well, that we are not of this world. This gives us an insight into how deeply the image of Christ had sunk into John. Remember, this John was His cousin. The other John was His cousin as well. We're looking at a family relationship here, and undoubtedly this John, who was the author of this book, had spent a great deal of time with Jesus, even as the other John may have as well.

What we have here is a book that a person can really sink his teeth into. It is almost mystical in its approach. To begin to grasp it, one has to understand the metaphors that John uses. This is not shallow water. Remember Ezekiel's river? First it was up to the ankles, then it was up to the knees, then it was up to the loins, then it was up to his shoulders, and finally it was over his head and it was water to swim in. That's what we're dealing with here. We are in deep water when we get into the book of John. It is not simple stuff.

To make it more understandable, it is important to understand the symbolism he uses. There are a number of words that are associated with the book of John, words that he uses over and over again that the others may also use, but nowhere near to the extent that he does.

He uses the word life. He uses the word light. He uses the word true, truth, truly, verily, verily—which is translated in some Bibles, "*Truly, truly I say unto you.*" In fact, he is the only one that uses that one. Nobody else uses it. It is a form of emphasis, sometimes translated, "*Amen, amen, I say unto you, I say unto you.*" It's doubled over as a form of emphasis.

John uses the term Father almost twice as much as all the others combined. Remember, Jesus came to reveal the Father. So we see the family relationship in the book of John emphasized to a far greater extent than we do in the other books. We'll be touching on some of these words as we go along, especially the ones that are most important to his message.

Let's go back to the book of John in chapter 1 and read about the first four or five verses.

John 1:1-5 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

There's some more—darkness; the light of men.

The beginning of the book of John sets the tone immediately. There is no birth, no genealogy, but what an awesome, wondrous announcement that is given here. "*In the beginning the Word, God, Creator, Life, Light is made flesh and He dwells among us.*" Instead of a King, as in Matthew, we have the life and the light of men. Instead of a Servant, as we see in the book of Mark, we see the One who made everything. Instead of the Son of Man born of woman in the book of Luke, we see the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, and who is revealing Him and who is communicating life among those He is with. It's a STUPENDOUS, BREATH-taking opening.

I once read of a poll that was taken of American literary critics, journalists, novelists, college

teachers of journalism and composition as to what they felt was the best opening that they ever read in any book. The first eighteen verses of the book of John won hands down. It was not even close. It was almost unanimous.

The opening of this book is so stupendous in the questions that it stirs in a person's mind, in the interest that it grabs, that no other writing of man even begins to compare to it. It's awesome.

It's even more awesome in its significance than Genesis, the 1st chapter, because here we are introduced to the Author of what happened in Genesis, the 1st chapter. We are introduced to His life and character and they are about to be described on the pages that follow. Here He is being introduced as coping with life on the terms of a man.

These are staggering assertions. John is talking about somebody that he viewed with his own eyes who was the Maker of everything man knows that was made. The Creator of life—and he saw Him! He spoke with Him! He touched Him! He was impressed in a way that others were not. We see some of that coming out in his writing.

It leaves us (if we are thinking about this) with something that is almost too difficult to grasp. It almost leaves us with an indefinite and vague sense that we are dealing with something that is very big, and yet it's real but it's almost indescribable. I think that was John's purpose. He wants to expand our conception of this One who was Jesus of Nazareth.

In verse 4 it says, "*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.*" This is a major theme in the book of John and it needs to be, because all our lives we live in fear, we're held in bondage to the fear of death. Life is the opposite of death. "*In Him was life.*" Life is everything that is the opposite of what is represented by death. We are talking here about destruction and condemnation. That's what death represents because that's the way those things end, in death.

You might remember that the book of Genesis begins with man being placed in the Garden of Eden to dress and to keep. The idea was to embellish life. The idea was to maintain life, but man sinned and he brought upon himself condemnation, destruction and death.

What we're beginning to look at here is the unraveling of condemnation, of destruction, and death. Christ conquered those things, but I want you to understand what it was that conquered them. It was *life*! We're going to see how *life* can conquer destruction, condemnation, and death! That is what the book is about. It was a life lived! This is important! The life lived is what is the light of men. It was how He lived it. It was the kind of life that He lived that gives us direction and enables us to see.

Christ came and He did what man was supposed to do but didn't. Christ shows us in broad strokes how to do that. For us that includes accepting Him as our Savior and believing His word. The life He is concerned with is eternal life. This is what we are going to get an insight into. We're not going to plumb its depths deeply. We're only going to skim across the surface of it, because that's all we have time for here.

The life John is concerned about is eternal life and eternal life is *life as God lives it*. Please get that point. Eternal life does not mean only endless life. It is a way that life is lived that is also endless life, because life that is endless without living it the way God lives it would not be happy, it would not be enjoyable, and it would not be good! Life, in order for it to be good and

lived endlessly, has to be lived the way God lives it. Christ came to show us how to live God's way.

So what we're going to see is the unraveling of condemnation, destruction, and death. It's going to involve repentance. It's going to involve faith. It's going to involve those things that are essential for salvation.

Eternal life is a quality of life and that's what we have got to turn to. If we're going to be prepared for the kingdom of God, it's going to be because we are striving, we are overcoming, and we are living to the extent that God is satisfied it's the way He lives.

John's approach to John the Baptist is very significant and fits right in with the theme of his book. If you'll recall that in the book of Matthew, John came preaching a certain kingdom. In Mark and Luke, he came preaching repentance. In John, look at verse 7:

John 1:7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light.

John's presentation of John the Baptist is that he bears witness to the Light.

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

We see John's approach to John the Baptist then, that John the Baptist bears witness to the Light and that he bears witness that Jesus is the Lamb of God. Now light is that quality which reveals the true form and qualities of our environment so one is able to negotiate one's self through it and make the best use of it.

Did you get that? Light is that quality which reveals the true form and qualities of our environment so that one is able to negotiate one's self through it and make the best use of it. In other words, if it's totally dark, you're immobilized. You cannot move. You cannot make any use of your environment because you're afraid if you move in any direction at all you are going to go into destruction. You don't know what's going to happen.

But once light comes, depending on how bright it is, you begin to see what your environment is like and you can begin to negotiate your way through it. The brighter the light, the more one sees. The brighter the light, the more one is able to safely negotiate the environment. The environment is the world.

Without the light Jesus Christ gives us we DON'T KNOW HOW TO NEGOTIATE OUR WAY THROUGH IT without going to destruction and death. We are going to condemn ourselves to a great deal of pain—bodily or psychologically—it matters not. We are going to suffer a great deal if we don't know how to negotiate through the environment.

John the Baptist came giving witness to the fact that the Lamb of God is the Light of the world and if you want to know the way to live you copy what He did! That way, you can safely negotiate your way through the wilderness of this world and into the Promised Land.

Do you get the picture? Once you begin to understand the metaphors, the book of John comes

alive.

Notice Jesus' comment about John the Baptist. In chapter 5 verses 33 and 35 (and this is very revealing for us), Jesus is being asked about bearing witness.

John 5:33 "You have sent to John [meaning Baptist], and he has borne witness to the truth.

John preached repentance. John preached that there was One coming after him who was greater than he. John preached that this one was the Light of God. He was the Lamb of God as well.

John 5:33, 35 "You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. . . He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light."

Very interesting. From the witness of Jesus Christ, John was also a light to the world. John is a burning lamp. What this does is reveal their relationship (John the Baptist's relationship to Jesus Christ) and with it He also reveals our relationship to Jesus Christ.

Remember that John the Baptist gave witness of Christ and that is also our responsibility. We are to bear witness of Jesus Christ as well. Jesus is the Light. It's very interesting because in the sense that light refers to Jesus Christ, it indicates a self-generated stream and endless source of heavenly light.

But John, you see, is a burning lamp indicating a light giving device, but one that had to be started from some external source and could go out if it was not tended. What we are talking about here is something akin to a torch or the kind of lights or lamps that they used in those days which oil and a wick were used. The oil and the wick do not light themselves. They are not self-generating. Someone, from an external source, had to light the wick in order to get the light to begin to reveal things.

That's the relationship. Christ's life was self-generated because He was God. He was on a much higher level. He was on a much higher plane because He *was* God in the flesh. John the Baptist witnessed to that Light, but in order for John to do it, the light in John had to be lit. It was not self-generated. If John weren't careful, his lamp would go out.

The light in John had to be kept going by that external source. That external source was God's Holy Spirit that was flowing from God through John the Baptist, enabling him to witness to the real and true Light, Jesus Christ. Do you get the picture? That's the way it is with us as well.

We have to be called. We have to be chosen. We have to be led to repentance. We have to repent. We have to put our faith in Jesus Christ. We have to then be baptized. We have to receive God's Holy Spirit. *The light is lit!* Then our responsibility comes to be that we have to do our part to keep the light, to keep the lamp lit, to keep the Holy Spirit flowing from God through us and out into the world and back to God. In that way, our light, our witness of Jesus Christ, will then be able to be done.

What we see here then is a subtle, but clear arranging of the relationship between Jesus Christ and us. It's put into its true perspective. On the one hand we are witnessing a Being who is awesome—an otherworldly figure; a person of soaring and gigantic personality and power; and yet here we are witnessing Him coping with life on a man's terms.

If we can see this, we can then compare ourselves against Him. That is very sobering, if we have a good picture. As long as we live, we will never be anything more than a mere shadow of what He was. But yet, He loves us, He's willing to work in us and if we understand it, our very existence as a son of God is dependent upon this reality.

We see, even this early in the book, a subtle distinguishing of the different natures of God and man. God has light. God has life inherent within Himself and we don't. It's so important to understand this. One reason why it is important is in a circumstance, in a context that, in a sense, has nothing at all to do with this, but is something that is becoming (I think) clearer and clearer to me. Did you ever notice in II Thessalonians 2 where the man of sin is talked about; where it talks about the reason people fall away and are deceived is because they didn't receive the love of the truth? Did you notice that it says there that the people who fall away (apostatize) are going to believe the lie? Not a lie, THE lie.

Did you ever wonder what THE lie is? I'll give you my opinion, my guess. It's the one Satan told Adam and Eve at the very beginning. It is one that is so important that you understand at this end-time and this day and age of the new-age religions. THE lie was: You shall not surely die; that you have immortality dwelling within you. WE DON'T! OUR LIFE IS DEPENDENT UPON GOD! Our spiritual life is dependent upon Him and early in the book of John this relationship is being arranged in its proper order. This dependence is so important to our continued living, because if we are going to live eternally, if we are going to have the eternal life of God, it's going to be because we are making the efforts to constantly go back to the Source to have it regenerated within us!!! (I'm talking about through prayer.) We will make every effort to emulate that Life in our lives and keep that Spirit flowing through us. Don't fall victim to the deception that somehow we have life inherent within ourselves because we don't. That life is going to come by the grace of God and we better understand that and keep going back to Him in humble submission for it.

Let's go back to John 1 again, in verses 23-27. John the Baptist was asked, "Who are you?"

John 1:23-27 He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: make straight the way of the LORD,'" as the prophet Isaiah said." Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."

John said, "*I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.*" I will tell you right here again, this is

another arranging of the relationship. This has (maybe) special meaning if we understand that by Jesus Christ's own witness there was nobody that ever lived that was any greater than John the Baptist. Maybe there were some on the same plane, but at least He says nobody was greater.

If there was nobody greater than John the Baptist, it's good to understand the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, because our relationship to Christ can't help but be somewhat lower. Maybe the same as, but certainly at a lower stage than John the Baptist.

John said he was the voice and he was witnessing for God. But Jesus was introduced in the book as the Word. Now which one comes first, the voice or the word? If you're looking at it from man's point of view, the word is preceded by the voice. The voice seems to be there first, but let's think that through. There cannot be a voice unless there is first a sense—in other words what I am saying is there cannot be a voice unless first the word is inside the man who is speaking. In other words, the word has to be in first. Do you remember what Jesus said? "*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*" The mouth cannot speak what it does not already have inside.

So which comes first, the word or the voice? It's John's somewhat mystical way of again arranging the relationship. We're looking at God here. God came before John the Baptist. God implanted the word in John the Baptist even before he began preaching about the Word. All those years of preparation that John the Baptist went through, I am sure, sitting out in the wilderness somewhere, studying the Old Testament, but by a miracle God was putting the word, the sense, in John, and now here was John witnessing to the Word in the flesh.

Remember this: the word abides forever, but the voice passes away. John died, but the word went right on and now that word is in you and it will go on. It is pretty much up to us the use we will make of it. If we use the word aright, then it is all well and good for us.

Each of the evangelists—Matthew, Mark and Luke—emphasized Jesus in some way, but John puts it the way he did in order to emphasize (again) Jesus' divinity, His otherworldliness. This has practical importance to us because we have been made partakers of the divine nature. Now this message begins to have very great importance to you and me.

Remember the verse we used a few sermons ago? We spent a bit of time on it at the beginning of one sermon. I John 4: 17, where it says, "*As He is so are we in the world.*" We have been made partakers of the divine nature, and it is because the life of Christ (which is the light of men) has very practical application and importance to you and me.

There's another interesting insight into Christ's divine nature in the contrast between the way Matthew and John approach John the Baptist, which at first appears to be a contradiction.

Matthew 3:14 And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

John 1:32-34 And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him . . .

This is the apparent contradiction. It is very obvious from Matthew 3 that John knew who He was and here in John 1 he says, "*I didn't know Him.*"

. . . but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testify that this is the Son of God."

John's approach to this is actually on a much higher level than Matthew's is. It's almost like comparing Abraham and David to the Eternal Word. Jesus indeed is a Son of Abraham and David, but yet He's their Lord. He's infinitely higher than they are.

Whether you realize it or not, our approach to Jesus is very similar to what we see expressed here between Matthew and John. There's no contradiction there at all.

What we first see of Christ, prior to baptism—what is it you recognize about Him first? You might recognize Him as King of a kingdom, Heir of the world. You might recognize Him as being the Savior, and so you accept His sacrifice in your stead and you go on to be baptized. That's what you see of Him.

What John the Baptist is saying here—he's not saying he didn't understand these things. Yes he DID understand them, but once he began to become acquainted with Christ, then more and more of Christ's awesome character and mind and dignity and divinity began to flood into John's mind and he began to say, "*I didn't even know Him when I saw Him.*" That's what happens to us. IF YOU ARE IN THE CHURCH FOR QUITE A PERIOD OF TIME and YOU ARE GROWING, YOU SEE SO MUCH MORE OF CHRIST now than you did then! There is no comparison. Like John you can say, "*When I baptized Him I didn't even know Him.*"

I know that's the way it is with me. The older I get in the faith, the more I know about Him, the more I see of myself and the less I like myself. That's what John was talking about here. "*When I first met Him, I didn't even know Him.*" Isn't it that way with us when we meet somebody for the first time? Then the second time, we recognize them, but we really don't know them. But the more frequently we spend time with them, the more we come to know them. That's it in a nutshell.

The more we come to know Him, the more we can compare ourselves to Him and we begin, gradually, to see the immensity of purity of nature that none of us have ever known or even conceived of before. It can become overwhelming so that we even wonder whether we were converted when we were baptized.

It's no wonder about this. In Colossians 2, verses 8-10, Paul says:

Colossians 2:8-10 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

I wonder how many of us know we are complete in Him, that we don't need anything else for eternal life? Are we aware of that? I dare say we are not because there's an awful lot of the world we still want yet. There are a lot of things out there we find attractive. There are a lot of thoughts we have that are not in harmony with Christ. There are many things that we say that we shouldn't be saying and we're saying, in effect, *I don't need you*. But God says through Paul we are complete in Him. Everything that we need for life (this life that John is talking about) is in Him and we don't need to go anywhere else.

Let's go back to John again, chapter 2.

John 2:10 And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!"

This is a spiritual lesson. Every man and every institution of man's—even at their best—is only going to bring forth failure. That's represented by the old wine. Do you remember the parable Jesus told in the other books about pouring the new wine in old bottles? What does the wine represent? It represents the old teaching; it represents the old way of life. Christ is saying you cannot mix the two of them together.

So He goes to this wedding and He changes the water into wine. This lesson is connected to that. He is showing us that nothing in the old way is really going to lead to life! It's going to be consigned to failure. It's been tried in the fire, as it were. It has been tested through almost six thousand years of man's history. EVERYTHING MAN HAS DONE, every way of life, every institution, every religion, every government, every educational system, every way of life has failed! God is saving His wine until the last—saved for the few that He is calling out in this age.

John 2:23-25 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

Remember the eagle again (the great eyesight)—that he can view things from afar? Well here we see Jesus with insight into the hearts of men. He knew men. What did He know in this situation? He would not commit Himself to those who profess belief on the basis only of His miracles (the signs) because it is superficial. He says an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign.

He told them later, "*You're only following me because you ate, because I supplied you with food.*" That's not what Christ is looking to. He's looking to people of faith; people who believe Him because of His word—what He says, what comes out of His heart.

We see then that Jesus Himself would not commit Himself to those who had only a superficial faith. But there's a message here for you and me, that He will commit His power, His strength

and His loyalty to those who have the faith. He will respond to them.

Let's go to chapter 3. This is really an interesting chapter because John begins to investigate (or to teach us) of the necessity of the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. Here is where it is first broached so that we can begin to see how God, imparting to us the divine nature, will overcome the failure of man.

A preparation in the womb is what gives us the equipment for adjustment into this world. In principle, in the analogy, it is the same with God's kingdom. We must be prepared by a spiritual transformation so that we can enter into ANOTHER world, so that a second birth can occur.

He is saying here, in John 3, that without a transformation from above a person is NOT EQUIPPED FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD! That transformation is a process at the end of which (just like the process of birth from the womb) is a second birth into the kingdom of God. But we have to go through the preparatory stages in order to make that birth.

The transformation, in verse 5, has its basis in repentance, in baptism and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Once that takes place, then the transformation into the image of God really begins to get underway.

The key element here—for this section of the book of John—is the beginning broaching of the subject of the necessity of the Holy Spirit to make this transformation possible.

In chapter 4 we find the woman at the well of Samaria and that her reaction was very similar to Nicodemus' in chapter 3. Both of them missed Jesus' meaning because they related what He said to physical circumstances. We find here, beginning in verse 10:

John 4:10-11, 14 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."
[Remember Jesus said we have to be born of the water and the spirit.]
The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with . . . [Just like Nicodemus she missed His point entirely.] "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

If we already had life, then we wouldn't need the spirit to give us everlasting life. Maybe (I don't know, this is just an opinion) the key word in the whole book of John is *life*. The teaching seems to revolve around that.

So we have two examples: Nicodemus in chapter 3 and the Samaritan woman in chapter 4. They are, in effect, telling us in a clear statement that natural birth may bring us into the world, but it is not sufficient to make us sons of God. In order to have eternal life and to be in the kingdom of God we must have God's Spirit and be born again.

It's kind of interesting because Nicodemus begins with a very self-sufficient statement, "*We know that you are a teacher come from God.*" But then by verses 4 and 9 he begins to admit

that he doesn't know anything at all. Do you see what I mean? [During] the first contacts with Christ—even though it may lead to repentance—we don't really know Him. The more we are with Him the more we see Him and the more we know Him.

It's interesting about the woman—how she began wary and defensive and ended up proclaiming Him a prophet and asking the question as to whether He was the Christ. It almost seems as though a process was beginning to take place.

One of the points, in both chapters 3 and 4, is it took more than a teacher to reveal this. The Spirit of God was already beginning to lead these people. The Spirit leads us into truth. Jesus (around chapter 14) said, *"I have been with you, but if I don't go then the Spirit will not come; the Spirit of truth and it will lead you into all truth."*

So as long as Christ was here, His Holy Spirit did not have to be here. But once He left, the Holy Spirit was given. We had more than a teacher. We had God in the flesh leading these two people.

We find then that man is pretty self-sufficient, in regard to things of the flesh, but this kind of teaching required communication of another sort of life. The Son of Man was doing that.

Let's go back to John 3 again. Here we have a thought of John the Baptist.

John 3:30-36 "He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides in him."

This thought actually ties together chapters 3 and 4. We are dealing here with a teacher of extraordinary quality and this theme is repeated very, very frequently—the theme that John the Baptist says in those five or six verses. It's done in different ways from somewhat different angles, but what John is getting across here is this: We are dealing with God who came to earth and only He is truly qualified to speak of the things of which He is speaking.

He speaks of things that He has seen, witnessed with His own eyes, heard with His own ears; things that took place in heaven. All of us who are men—we can't do anywhere near the job He did because we've never been there. We've never seen it. We've never experienced the things that He has experienced.

So Jesus came from heaven and He spoke with higher authority. He spoke from His own observation, not theory. He spoke the words of God, and that the love of God and the Father's love had caused Him to endow the Son with complete authority to execute His purpose.

Again, John the writer is elevating Jesus to His proper place in our minds so that we always are looking at Him and so that we understand that (though we are dealing with a man) we are also dealing with God *Behold your God*.

In practical application, what Jesus' words do is that they lead to life *IF* we follow them. We're going to explore this word [life] a little. Turn to John 5: 26.

John 5:26, 29, 40; 6:33, 35, 48, 51, 53 "For as the Father has *life* in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have *life* in Himself . . . And come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of *life* . . . But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have *life* . . . For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives *life* to the world . . . And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life" . . . "I am the bread of *life*" . . . "I am the *living* bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will *live* forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the *life* of the world" . . . Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no *life* in you.

I'm going to skip a great number of them and we're going to jump all the way to John 17: 2.

John 17:2 "As you have given Him authority [this is Jesus' prayer] over all flesh, that He should *give eternal life* to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

Do you want to know where eternal life resides? It resides in knowing Christ. It resides in having an intimate relationship with Him, one that is so intimate that we are literally following in His steps with our life—life as it is lived, not life as it is thought about.

Compare this to Jeremiah 17 in verses 5-8. This is that famous chapter that has the "heart is deceitful above all things." We're going to look at a few verses that are just before that.

Jeremiah 17:5-8 Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert [stunted, not growing, withered, hardened, brittle, not pliable at all], and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, [Compare this to the tree that is planted by rivers of water in Psalm 1.] in a salt land which is not inhabited. Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in

the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.

Do you see that? Life is in the Son. Life is in emulating what the Son does in terms of the way that He lives.

So in Matthew the theme is righteousness, law, King, and kingdom. John's approach is simply a different expression of the same reality. Whereas Matthew sees righteousness in relation to a kingdom, John sees life in relation to that same kingdom.

What this means is we have got to be living that life if we are going to be in that kingdom. We've got to be living it to the [point] where God is satisfied that if He gives us a life that never ends (which is easy for Him to do), we will continue to live the same kind of life, the same quality of life, that He is now living.

The greatest curse that could be given to a man is to be given endless life still living in the way men are living on this earth—trusting one another, trusting in the wisdom of men, trusting in the institutions of men, trusting in the histories of men, trusting in the educational systems of men, trusting in the religious systems of men.

All of those things produce a life of condemnation, destruction and death. Only eternal life, the life exhibited and manifested by Jesus Christ, is going to produce the kind of life that is going to be lived endlessly.

In John 5 through 7, a very interesting theme begins to develop. In a major sense one of the things that John is doing here is continuing the same theme, but what he is showing is there is a major piece of understanding in each one.

In chapter 5, one of the central issues around which the teaching takes place is the Sabbath. In chapter 6 the central issue of the teaching is Passover. Are you beginning to see something develop? In chapter 7 the major teaching involves the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. It's a very interesting arrangement—Sabbath, Passover and the Holy Days. That series of teachings ends with Jesus saying (referring to the Last Great Day), "In that day rivers of living water will flow out from people's bellies" (their inmost being). He concludes it with teaching once again on the need, the necessity for the Holy Spirit to convert people—eventually all of mankind.

What we are seeing here is teaching regarding the position of law. Remember what Paul said in Romans 7, that Christ is the end of the law? He didn't mean the diminishing of it in the sense of end or destruction of. He meant He is the goal or purpose of the law. The law leads to Him. Christ is the fulfillment of law, its end, its goal.

So the Sabbath, the Passover, the Holy Days are all to be kept, but we have got to understand they are still just forms. They are means to an end. They are not the reality. Life and how it is lived—THAT is the reality!

Do you understand that? You can know ALL about the Sabbath and you can keep it like the Pharisees did. You can know ALL about the Passover and keep it like the Pharisees did. You can know all about the Holy Days and keep them like the Pharisees did. YOU ARE NOT ARRIVING AT THE TRUTH EVEN though you understand them, at least to some limited degree.

The purpose of the Sabbath, the Passover and the Holy Days, the purpose of all of God's law IS TO LEAD US INTO A WAY OF LIFE! It is a means; it is not the end in itself! They are guides. They describe love, if I can reduce it to one word. They describe the way life is to be lived. The forms—they do glorify God, but it's the life that glorifies Him more.

It's good to hook Matthew 23 to this. Remember those people? They knew all about tithing. They were tithing of mint, anise and cumin, and they missed the way to live. God wants people to tithe accurately, but He wants justice, mercy, faithfulness and loyalty even more. Those qualities were missing. The forms were not teaching them the right way. We needed a higher teacher and that higher, greater Teacher was Christ.

In chapter 8, the theme undergoes a shift. There we meet the adulterous and the Pharisees. She (the adulterous) confesses and stands then in the light. Verse 12 says that. But the righteous Pharisees, though they are convicted (remember they all hung their heads and went out) they didn't repent, so they're in darkness. From this point on the word truth begins to become very important in the book of John. You will find in chapter 8 alone, the word truth appears ten times.

In chapter 9 we have the man who was blind from birth. Already you can begin to see something begin to be elucidated. He's blind, he's totally in darkness and the light comes into his life. He opens his eyes. The result of that—he saw Christ. It wasn't just a matter of seeing Him with his eyes. He began to believe and he witnessed then of the light before the Pharisees. He didn't know everything, but nonetheless, a true reception of the word began to result in the right kind of a witness being made.

In chapter 10 we begin to see life once again. In chapter 11 we have the resurrection of Lazarus to life. Then Christ begins His preparations for the crucifixion, but again even here, light and life are part of the picture. You're going to see a great deal of it as you read through there.

In the story of the crucifixion is probably the clearest divergence between Matthew, Mark and Luke and the book of John. Every one of them goes into pretty good detail about the crucifixion. Matthew, Mark and Luke are very concerned about Jesus' concern about facing the crucifixion. I'll give you some scriptures: Luke 18: 31-33 is an example of it. But in the book of John, he doesn't pay [hardly] any attention at all to Jesus being concerned about His crucifixion. It would not fit, "*Behold your God.*" God has everything under control, doesn't He?

When you look at the book of John, you're not going to see any angel coming to minister to Christ. You're not going to see any prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane where He sweat blood. You're not going to see any agony He was going through. He is not longing for sympathy or companionship.

Instead, what do we see in the book of John? What we see is Pilate's troops coming to get Jesus. We see Jesus being questioned, "*Are you Jesus of Nazareth?*" He speaks and what happens? THEY ALL FALL BACKWARDS! They crumble before the POWER of His voice! And then what does He do? He commands those Roman soldiers—and it's interesting to look at how many were there. I think the Bible says that a cohort came. Do you know how many that is? A cohort is six hundred men. It wasn't just a small handful of people who came. A whole Roman cohort

came after Him.

Here He is facing this whole cohort of men and He tells them, "*Let these fellows go. They're not involved. You don't want them, you want Me.*" And they let them go so all of His disciples are able to escape.

Jesus goes before Pilate. Jesus has everything under control! He's calm before Pilate. He answers his questions lucidly, without fear. He's the One who is actually running his show.

In the book of John they don't take His life. In the book of John He voluntarily lays it down because no man can do that to Him unless He permits it. In the book of Matthew, Mark and Luke we find this: In Matthew He cries with a loud voice. In Mark, the Servant cries. In Luke, the Son of Man cries. In John, He doesn't need to commend Himself. He says to God, "*It's finished,*" and He dies. Totally in control, giving His life right at the end.

What we need to get out of this is the emphasis on life, a kind of life, a way that life was lived and all that that encompasses; the witness to mankind of the kind of life that lives to abundance and to eternity. Always in the book of John, the divine nature is what shines through. "*As He is so are we in this world.*"

You might check out II Corinthians 13:5, where Paul said that unless Christ is in us we are reprobate. We have nothing to recommend us before God. "*We don't qualify,*" is a more accurate, literal translation of that verse. Unless Christ is in us we don't meet the test, we don't qualify to be given life.

He tells us that if we follow Him, then we will not be in darkness. This life is not the light of genius, but it is a kind or way of life lived. It's a life that will make itself felt by its goodness even though others don't like it.

We just heard a radio recording of Mr. Armstrong's in which he talked about this. People liked Christ. He was a wonderful personality. He was warm and outgoing and a lot of fun to be around. People learned a great deal from Him and they LOVED His personality, but they didn't like His message. They didn't like the way that He lived. It's going to be thus with us as well.

We have to turn our attention to living that way. How are we going to do it? Let's conclude by going to Isaiah 40 where we can get back to the eagle metaphor.

Isaiah 40:28-31 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. [This is the One who is in us! He says He will come and make His abode with us. He doesn't faint. He doesn't get tired.] His understanding is unsearchable. [We can draw into that. We can tap into that.] He gives POWER to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles . . .

Do you want to SOAR? Do you want to soar into the heavens—I mean into the spiritual realm

where few ever go to understand the mind of God, the life of God, the way of God, the truth of God, the purity of God? All those things are possible if He is in us by means of His Spirit.

Isaiah 40:31 . . . they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Do you want to have the strength to soar in flights of enthusiasm and zeal, almost as if our spirit catches fire from time to time with the insights that give us comfort and joy and replenish our minds with rock solid evidence that we're on the right track—things that make us feel nearer to God and ready to take on anything that comes? If He's living in us, that is possible!

How about the strength to run? It's as if He's saying that there is power waiting for the great crises of life which may call for special, and hopefully, brief bursts of hard and even frightening exertion. There's going to be times when trial is going to hit us with unexpected strength, but with God in us those crises can be mastered as well and we can run through those spurts.

The hardest thing of all is the last thing listed—to walk; to walk the weary, monotonous day-by-day routines. This requires persistent, steadfast, persevering endurance if one is not going to lose heart if only for the sheer commonness of the routines. At times, maybe for long periods of time, we live a life that has little or no excitement. We're simply caught up in the rat race. But God says there's strength for that too, for those who are in Him and He in them.

So He says in Hebrews 12 that if we're to run the race it's to be with patience looking unto Jesus, the life, which is the Light of men. Brethren, He is with us, He is in us and because of that we cannot fail because He has told us that He has overcome the world. He knows how to do it and He can give us the strength to do it because He is in us.