

JESUS AND NAMED PEOPLE

Part II

HIS HALF-BROTHERS

Read John 7:2-8.

When Matt. 1:25 says Joseph knew not Mary till she had brought forth her firstborn son (Jesus), everything suggests that together they had later sons, which they did—James, Joses, Simon, and Judas (Matt. 13:55). These, of course, would be half-brothers to Jesus.

It appears that after Jesus' confrontation with Jerusalem Jews over healing the lame man at the pool on a sabbath and then claiming to be the Son of God (John 5:16-18) that Jesus purposely absented Himself from Jerusalem for the next 18 months—until it was a Feast of Tabernacle time.

We might wonder why His brothers would speak to Him as they did in our reading until the author John tells us they did not believe in Jesus. Now that raises an even greater occasion of wondering on our part: why didn't Jesus' own brothers believe in Him? We are not told, but there might be some very plausible reasons. First, their mother had probably not told them of His divine begetting because she hadn't even told her husband about it (Matt. 1:18-20). Second, since Jesus was a sinless child both in actions and attitude while they were normal children with occasional misconduct, several times Joseph and Mary may have said to them in some of their childhood misbehaviors and attitudes, "Why can't you be like Jesus?" or, "I wish you boys would be like Jesus." If so, just guess their resulting attitude. It would be like school boys' attitude toward a boy who always gets his lessons and always behaves and who gets called "Teacher's Pet". Another factor in their unbelieving attitude toward Jesus might be the result of the day they and their mother went to see Jesus but couldn't get into the house where He was teaching because of the crowd. When told that His mother and brothers

were without seeking Him, He said, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" And He said of His listeners, "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. 12:48-50). He may not have been disowning them, as His brothers may have taken it, but was using the occasion to point out that we have two families: our spiritual family as well as our physical family.

Not only would Jesus have a special desire for His brothers' salvation, but He no doubt realized the necessity of their getting straightened out before Pentecost, or they would be a stumbling block to others' believing. Well, before Pentecost notice what Acts 1:13,14 records: "And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with HIS BRETHREN." When did this important change take place in His brothers, and what brought it about?

This change had not yet taken place at the time of the crucifixion, for it would have been natural for them to have taken care of their mother instead of Jesus' committing her to the care of the apostle John (John 19:25-27). It seems their unbelief and ridicule of Jesus may have caused a rift between Mary and them.

There is a lone Biblical statement that sheds light on the matter. When listing some of the witnesses of the resurrected Christ, Paul said, "After that, he was seen of James" (I Cor. 15:7). Which "James"? Since it was necessary for an apostle to have seen Jesus after His resurrection (Acts 1:21,22; I Cor. 15:8; I Cor. 9:1), and since Jesus' brother James was a later addition to the apostles (Gal. 1:18,19)—even a leading apostle (Acts 15:13-22)—the I Cor. 15:7 appearance to James must have been the convincing time to him. Since Paul in I Cor. 15 was merely listing some of the resurrection witnesses, the brief account does not include the details which we would naturally like to know.

Evidently James went on to convince his three brothers about Jesus.

It is interesting that most Bible scholars consider the New Testament books of James and Jude to have been written by Jesus' brothers James and Jude.

MARY, MARTHA, AND LAZARUS

Read John 11:1-50 and John 12:9-16.

Our introduction to Mary and Martha is not in the book of John but in Luke 10:38-42 when Jesus was a guest in their home. John first mentions Lazarus in chapter 11 when he was critically ill. When the sisters sent word to Jesus, "He whom thou lovest is sick," it recognizes Jesus' previous friendship with Lazarus.

In the final weeks before Jesus' death He realized the need for an outstanding miracle for the ultimate faith of His apostles. Not to go to Bethany while Lazarus was so ill but to wait until he had died gave Him the opportunity to resurrect him rather than merely heal him. This possibly explains Jesus' statement to the apostles before going to Bethany to raise Lazarus, "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad FOR YOUR SAKES that I was not there, to the intent you may believe." When Jesus decided not to go to his sick friend in order to let him die, He knew that was going to result in a terrible grief for Mary and Martha.

When Jesus spoke to His disciples about going to Bethany, they reminded Him of the danger of returning to Judea after they had gotten out of there some time ago for safety reasons. When it became evident Jesus was returning, Thomas demonstrated some of the same cynical spirit for which is best noted as "doubting Thomas" when he said, "Let us go, that we may die with him."

Upon Jesus' arrival at Bethany both sisters individually said to Him, "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," obviously showing they were both critical of Jesus' delay in coming and that they had voiced their criticism of Jesus to one another before He arrived.

When Martha said, "But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee," you would think she was expecting Jesus to resurrect her brother now that He had arrived. But when she responded to Jesus' saying, "Thy brother shall rise again," by saying, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day," it seems she was not expecting an immediate resurrection. How do you account for this seeming contradiction? By the confused mind resulting from the emotional stress she had been under, causing her one moment to "hope" and another moment to "doubt".

The statement about Jesus' being the resurrection and the life has been considered in an earlier study.

"Jesus wept" is the shortest verse in the English Bible. But why did He weep? Was it because He was groaning in His spirit over their manifest unbelief (see both vs. 37,38 and v. 33)? Was it weeping with those who weep like we are taught to do in Rom. 12:15? Or was it because of the sorrow brought to them because of His decision to let Lazarus die so He could resurrect him instead of heal him? It may be either of them or a combination of all of them.

The resurrection of Lazarus presents a good lesson that God does not do for us what we can do for ourselves, reserving those things that He does for what we cannot do. They could roll the stone back, so He did not do that miraculously but said, "Take ye away the stone." But they could not raise Lazarus, so He said, "Lazarus, come forth," and he did. They could remove his graveclothes, so He did not do that miraculously but said, "Loose him, and let him go." In the same way, in prayer we should realize we are asking God's help for those things beyond us to accomplish and for which we will praise Him for doing.

This was the third recorded resurrection performed by Jesus, and they were all progressive in nature: Jairus's daughter had just died (Luke 8:41,42,49,54,55); the widow of Nain's son was being carried out for burial (Luke 7:11-15); Lazarus had been dead four days.

The raising of Lazarus was such an impressive miracle that it gained Jesus many additional followers so that the Jewish leaders decided that not only Jesus should be put to death (vs. 46-50) but Lazarus also (John 12:9-11).

Read John 12:1-8.

In a few days before the Passover when Jesus would be killed, a special meal was given for Him at Bethany (Mary, Martha, and Lazarus's town) in the home of a man called "Simon the Leper" (Matt. 26:6)—likely one who had been a leper but had been healed by Jesus. Lazarus is mentioned as being there, and Martha was helping serve, but the account's focus is on Mary and her anointing of Jesus.

Mary had prepared for the occasion by bringing a flask of very expensive ointment to anoint Jesus. John's account talks of anointing His "feet" while Matt. 26:7 talks of anointing His "head". No wonder Jesus called it anointing His "body" for its burial (Matt. 26:12).

John's account tells of Judas Iscariot's criticizing the woman for "this waste", noting how much it could have been sold for, with the money going to the poor. Our author John throws in why Judas raised this criticism—not because he was thinking of the poor but because he carried the group's bag and at times helped himself to what was in it. How expensive was this ointment? A day's wages for a common worker in those times was a "penny" (Greek: "denarius") (Matt. 20:2). Mary's ointment was valued at "300 pence" (Greek: "denarii")—equal to a common worker's wages for a whole year, triggering Judas's criticism and causing the apostles to join in his criticism (Matt. 26:8). The apostles were sincere in their criticism, but Judas wasn't, showing that good people can sometimes be drawn into bad people's plots. The expensiveness of this ointment suggests that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were not poor. If they were rich, then Jesus had friends among the rich as well as among the poor.

QUESTIONS

1. What were the names of Jesus' four half-brothers?
2. What surprising attitude did they have about Jesus?
3. How do we know they later had a different attitude?
4. What recorded event may have accounted for the change in them?
5. Why did the apostles think it unwise to return to Judea about the Lazarus situation?
6. What was the attitude toward Jesus by Martha and Mary upon His arrival at Bethany?
7. What is the shortest verse in the English Bible?
8. What two earlier resurrections had Jesus performed?
9. Which of Lazarus's sisters anointed Jesus in the house of Simon the leper?
10. Why did Judas lead out in criticizing her for this?

GREAT DISCOURSES AND DISPUTATIONS

Jesus was indeed a teacher come from God as Nicodemus said (John 3:2), and He did bring the words of eternal life as Peter said (John 6:68). This made Him the great teacher He was, and at the same time it brought Him into direct conflict with certain leaders who did not accept Him.

READ JOHN 5:1-47

Jesus' healing the man on the sabbath brought the oft-expressed criticism, "He broke the sabbath." His reply that He worked just as His Father worked all days of the week (probably meaning God keeps the universe operating, listens to and works to answer prayers, takes account of the deeds of people in view of the Judgment Day, etc.) brought the more serious objection: "You make yourself equal to God!" The rest of the chapter presents Jesus' most extended recorded defense of His deity! He called various witnesses to "testify" concerning Him. But first He gave His own testimony.

From v. 19 through v. 30, over and over He did two things: (1) He made many statements in which God was the "Father", and He was the Father's "Son"; and (2) He affirmed statements reflecting His close connection with the Father in which the Son does what He sees the Father doing; because the Father loves the Son, He shows Him all things He does; the Father has committed all things to the Son; all who honor the Father should also honor the Son; the Son has life in Himself even as the Father has in Him; the Son will raise both the spiritually and physically dead; and the Son is obedient to the will of the Father.

But after the above self-testimony Jesus began summoning other witnesses. He first called on John the Baptist. They were aware that John had testified concerning Jesus.

He next called on the miracles God had empowered Him to do—just as Peter would preach on Pentecost (Acts 2:22). In referring to the Father’s testimony, Jesus could have been referring to His miracles performed by the power of God, or He could have been referring to God’s testimony at His baptism.

Jesus next referred to the testimony of their Old Testament Scriptures in which they erroneously thought they had eternal life. But Jesus affirmed that those Scriptures testified of Him who came to bring that eternal life. We know that both Old Testament types and Old Testament prophecies pointed to Jesus for their fulfilment as Paul wrote, “Christ is the end of the law” (Rom. 10:4). Jesus came to fulfill the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17). No wonder on this occasion Jesus said, “Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.”

READ JOHN 8:21-59

According to v. 20 Jesus was in the temple. He told His critics He was going away, and where He was going they could not go. Puzzled, they wondered if maybe He was going to kill Himself. He went on to tell them He was from above and they from beneath, and that He was not of this world but they were. He also told them that since they did not believe on Him, they would die in their sins. On hearing this they asked, “Who art thou?”

Jesus spoke in veiled language of His coming crucifixion (“When ye have lifted up the Son of man...”). See John 12: 32, 33 for similar language and its meaning. As He continued speaking, “many believed on him”—probably not His critics. Those who believed on Him, He urged to continue in His teaching, promising that they would be His disciples indeed and would know the truth that would make them free.

Why they said they had never been in bondage to any man, it is hard to tell, for even though they were Abraham’s offspring they were then under Rome, at one time the nation had been in Babylonian Captivity, and before the Exodus had been slaves in Egypt.

But the freedom Jesus was talking about was freedom from sin, explaining that whoever commits sin (which they all had) was in slavery to sin. He explained that a servant might not always belong to his existing household (he could be sold), but that the son was permanent to the household. If Jesus (the Son) set them free, they would indeed be free!

From what He said beginning in v. 37 it would seem He went back to talking to His critics. With that verse He initiated one of the hottest word-exchanges in the Bible when He spoke of His Father and of their father. When they retorted that Abraham was their father, He showed they were not acting like Abraham in seeking to kill Him. They further claimed God to be their Father, they not being idolatrous (figurative language: "fornication"). Jesus cast further doubt on God being their Father and then finally came right out and told them, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of our father ye will do." Their father was a "murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth...He is a liar, and the father of it." This and later accusations against them caused them to accuse Jesus of being a "Samaritan" and possessing a "demon" (about the lowest names they could call Him).

When Jesus went on to say that if a person kept His saying, he would never die (eternal death), they took it as physical death and argued against His statement in view of Abraham and the prophets having died. When Jesus said Abraham rejoiced to see His day, this called for another denial on their part. Finally they took up stones to kill Jesus, but again He delivered Himself from them.

READ JOHN 10:22-39

At the last Feast of Dedication in Jesus' life a group of Jews gathered around Him in the temple demanding that if He was the Christ to come out and say so. He had said (like John 5:19-26), but they could use a direct statement, "I am the Christ," better against Him. Jesus contrasted them with His true followers who not only hear Him and follow Him and to whom He will give

eternal life. People who believe in “once saved always saved” try to use what Jesus said about no one being able to snatch them out of His hand to prove their concept. Any follower of Jesus determined to be His is safe in the Divine hand, but if one himself leaves that hand, He is no longer safe and divinely preserved. Yes, we can depart from the living God (Heb. 3:12). But in refuting the false, let us not overlook this precious promise concerning those who are devoted followers of Jesus. Since Jesus had just spoken of the safety of those in His hand and in the Father’s hand, it presented the opportunity to say, “I and my Father are one.” So infuriated were they at that statement that they were ready to stone Him when He presented a matter that stumped them: if Psa. 82:1 called Israel’s judges “gods”, why was Jesus guilty of blasphemy because He said He was the Son of God? When they could not answer Him, again they sought to take Him and again were unsuccessful in the attempt.

READ JOHN 7:10-39

At the Feast of Tabernacles there was much discussion concerning Jesus, some saying He was a good man and some that He was a deceiver. When He arrived about the middle of the feast, He went to the temple and taught. When some wondered how He could teach, having not been taught in their rabbinical schools, He told them His teaching came from God who sent Him, and that they should know whether His teaching was of God or of His own making.

It appears Jesus had not been in Jerusalem since they tried to stone Him eighteen months earlier at the Passover for healing the man at the Pool of Bethesda and claiming to be the Son of God. When He charged them with not keeping the law of Moses for going about to kill him, they didn’t realize He was referring to that incident a year and a half before and said He had a demon to make such a statement.

Referring to that healing on the sabbath, He showed that what He had done was no more a violation of the law than when a child

is circumcised on the eighth day when that day fell on the sabbath. He called on them to judge righteous judgment.

Then some did recall that the rulers had sought to kill Jesus and wondered why nobody was taking Him now. They said surely the rulers have not come to believe on Him because it was known where Jesus was from, but their concept was that when the Messiah came, nobody would know where He came from.

Those who did believe on Jesus asked a good question, "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" On hearing things like this the Jewish leaders sent officers to arrest Jesus. Later when the soldiers came back without Jesus, the leaders asked them, "Why have ye not brought him?" (v. 45). They answered, "Never man spake like this man" (v. 46). Among other things the soldiers heard was, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water," referring to the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit that in the Christian dispensation would be given those who accepted Jesus.

QUESTIONS

1. What heavier accusation than healing the man at pool on the sabbath did Jesus' critics bring against Him?
2. How did Jesus answer their heavier criticism?
3. What did Jesus mean by "when ye have lifted up the Son of man"?
4. What did Jesus tell His believers would make them free?
5. Who did Jesus say His critics' father was?
6. What did Jesus say about their father?
7. What did Jesus say about the security of those in His and the Father's hand?
8. Why did the soldiers who were sent to arrest Jesus come back without Him?

PROMINENT WORDS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Some words stand out in various Bible books because of their frequent use in them. That is true of the Gospel of John. Let us notice several of them.

BELIEF

Historically Jews believed in God. Jesus came with the idea of being believed on just as they believed in God: "Ye believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1). Jews likewise believed in Moses' writings. Jesus wanted them to believe on Him, because Moses "wrote of me" He said (John 5:46).

John was an eye witness and a fellow-companion of Jesus, and he wrote so that we might believe (John 20:30,31). We who live today believe on Jesus because of the word of John and the other apostles (John 17:20,21), and we are specially blessed for it (John 20:29).

As we follow the account of Jesus and His ministerial labors, we observe He was really pleased when people believed on Him. To blind Bartimaeus He said, "Thy faith hath made thee whole" (Mark 10:52). He said the same to the woman who touched His garment in order to be healed (Matt. 9:22). To the woman with the demonized daughter He said, "O woman, great is thy faith" (Matt. 15:28). Concerning the Capernaum centurion Jesus said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matt. 8:10). Since He is the unchanging Christ (Heb. 13:8), He still notices faith and is pleased with it.

Faith in Jesus is not only a good thing but a necessary thing (John 8:24; Mark 16:16). Unbelief of the Divine has always been serious with God, and you can see why. Notice, for instance, in Num. 13:1,2,15-28, 31:14:2-11,26-35 God's reaction to unbelief.

By way of contrast, notice what the Gospel of John says about those who do believe (John 1:12; 3:16,18,36; 5:24). Jesus is the

Savior of the world in whom we are to believe and by whom we enjoy a saved relationship with God now and in the world to come, so let us have a strong faith in Him.

The four gospel accounts cover the earthly life of Jesus, but it is for the book of Acts that follows them to show how believers express their faith in Jesus in order to be added by Him. In Acts 2:37,38 we see what convicted believers were told to do to be saved. Salvation was possible to them by responding to the Lord's requirements (Acts 2:40,41). Most translations other than the King James bring out the Greek in John 3:36 when they show that obedience is involved in Biblical faith.

LOVE

Love is another great word in John's writings, both in his gospel account and in his epistles.

John tells us that it was God's love that caused Him to give His only begotten Son for our salvation (John 3:16), that He sent Him into the world to save the world (John 3:17). Several times in John it also speaks of the love of the Father for His Son (10:17; 15:9), which made it difficult for Him to have Jesus die on the cross for us.

Then John 13:1 speaks of Jesus' love for His disciples, and He demonstrated the greatest love possible when He gave His life for us (John 15:13). In turn He wants us to love one another as He loved us (John 13:34; 15:12,17). Such love for one another is an indication to the world that we are indeed Jesus' disciples (John 13:35).

It is one thing to profess to love Jesus and another thing to show it. The real indication that we love Him is shown in our keeping His commandments (John 14:15,21,23).

Finally John 15:9,10 speaks of the Father loving Jesus, of Jesus loving us, and that we abide in Christ's love by keeping His commandments. And John 16:27 tells us that the Father loves us because we love His Son Jesus.

Actually, as you may have noticed, the statements about love in the gospel of John are for the most part very simple statements, but they contain a world of meaning. As Christians, God's commandment to us in I John 3:23 is that "we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another."

TRUTH

The dictionary defines "truth" as "agreement with fact, actuality." It is the opposite of "false, falsehood, unreal".

In a study of the Gospel of John it appears that the "truth" it talks about is the specialized truth of the Gospel. Keep this in mind as we proceed.

Jesus said to those who then believed on Him that if they would continue in His word, they would know the truth, and that that truth would make them free—free from sin (John 8:31-36). Obviously Jesus was not talking about truth in just any field but the truth of the Gospel, for it alone would bring salvation (Rom. 1:16). Now we can see why Jesus spoke of that truth as then being future when He said, "Ye SHALL know the truth," and, "the truth SHALL make you free."

We see this further brought out in the contrast stated in John 1:17: "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Jesus was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), and it is from His fulness that we have all received grace upon grace (John 1:16).

Jesus was telling the truth, even though Pilate did not understand what He was talking about, when He said, "For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth" (John 18:37). All of Jesus' ministerial teachings had in some way to do with man's need, God's coming provision, and what would be expected of His followers. In the then coming dispensation Jesus would be "the way" to God, "the truth" that would set people free, and "the life" they would receive through Him (John 14:6).

The Holy Spirit who would come and during the gospel age reveal this truth through Christ's apostles and their helpers (the New Testament prophets) was repeatedly called the "Spirit of truth" by Jesus (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). Jesus said that when He would come, He would guide them into "all truth" (John 16:13).

We Christians now worship the Father "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24), and we are being sanctified "through the truth", God's Word (John 17:17).

LIFE

Life is another prominent word in the book of John.

One of Jesus' own statements as to why He came into the world was "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). That life would consist of spiritual life while we are here and eternal life in the future! Our faith in Christ will lead to the life through Him (John 20:31).

Several of Jesus' "I AM's" connect Him with "life": "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35); "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12); "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25,26); "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

Jesus promised that those who drank of the water He would give them would have in themselves a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14). Many other passages in John speak of eternal life being through Christ (John 3:16,36; 5:24; 6:27,33,40,47; 6:33,40,47,51; 10:29). In fact, Jesus said that eternal life is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom God sent (John 17:3).

It is a sad fact that many expect to gain eternal life through other sources than Jesus. For instance, the Jews of His time thought that in the Old Testament system they had eternal life (John 5:39), and for that reason they did not accept Jesus that

they might really have life (v. 40). Jesus stated it like this: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (John 6:53).

In I John 5:11,12 John also wrote, "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

These four words (belief, love, truth, and life) are not the only prominent words in the Gospel of John, but they are very important, and they are all doctrinally related.

QUESTIONS

1. Why, according to John 20:31, did John write his gospel account?
2. Cite instances where people's faith really pleased Jesus?
3. What does John 3:16 say about God's love for humanity?
4. How does the world know we are Christ's disciples?
5. What specialized truth does John have in mind by "truth"?
6. What great blessing did Jesus say would come from knowing this truth?
7. What word does the gospel of John closely ally with truth? Fill in the blanks: "_____ and truth came by Jesus Christ;" Jesus was full of _____ and truth."
8. Acceptable worship must be in _____ as well as in truth?
9. Jesus came that we might have _____ and have it more _____.
10. In whom does John say life is to be found?

FOUR RESURRECTION APPEARANCES IN JOHN

After Jesus arose from the dead, He spent forty more days on earth before returning to heaven (Acts 1:3). During this period He made around a dozen recorded appearances, "not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God" (Acts 10:41). There may have been some appearances not recorded, but here are eleven of them found in various New Testament books:

1. Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; John 20:1-18) in the garden the first day of the week.

2. The other women (Matt. 28:2-10) on their way to break the good news to the apostles the day of the resurrection.

3. Peter (I Cor. 15:5) the day of the resurrection.

4. Two men going to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-15) the day of the resurrection.

5. The apostles in the upper room with Thomas absent (John 20:19-24) the day of the resurrection.

6. Five hundred (I Cor. 15:6) before the next Sunday.

7. James (I Cor. 15:7) before the next Sunday.

8. The apostles with Thomas present (John 20:26-28) a week after the resurrection.

9. The apostles at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23) sometime later.

10. The apostles on a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20) sometime later.

11. The apostles the day of the ascension (Luke 24:50,51).

Four of the above appearances are recorded by John—all at Jerusalem except the seaside appearance. Let us look at John's four.

TO MARY MAGDALENE **(Read John 20:1-18)**

From a study of all the gospel accounts it appears that Mary Magdalene (so-called because she was from Magdala to distinguish her from the other Marys) was only one of the women who went to the tomb with spices early that first day of the week. They were no doubt stunned to find the stone rolled back from the door of the tomb. It further appears that Mary immediately left the tomb and the other women to run to tell Peter and John about it. In haste Peter and John leave the upper room and race to the tomb, John arriving first and waiting for Peter before entering the empty tomb. After seeing the grave clothes they departed not knowing what had happened. After running to tell Peter and John no doubt she couldn't keep up with their foot race and so got back to the tomb after they had left.

When she got back to the tomb and was alone, she cried because of what she thought had happened to the body of Jesus. When she looked into the open tomb and saw two angels, one at where Jesus' head been and the other where His feet had been, she had to be stunned. This was different than she had expected. When they asked her why she was weeping, she said, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." When she turned, she saw Jesus but did not recognize Him, maybe because of her tears but more probably because, like the two men going to Emmaus, His identity was momentarily withheld from her. Jesus also asked her why she was weeping. This time her answer reflected that she thought Him to be the gardener who had probably removed the body to another place. Her offer to take the body off his hands and entomb it elsewhere implies she would purchase a sepulcher, reflecting her great devotion to Jesus. At that moment Jesus called her name, and she immediately recognized Him. She was actually the first person to see the resurrected Christ (Mark 16:9)!

Since Jesus in later appearances invited the doubting Thomas to touch His wound (John 20:27), and the Galilean women did

touch Him (Matt. 28:9), to conclude from the words, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father," to mean He could not be touched before His ascension is not correct. Since He told her instead of remaining with Him to go report His resurrection to the apostles offers an explanation for her not to touch Him at that time.

She did leave and did report to the apostles, but they did not believe her report (Mark 16:10,11).

TO THE APOSTLES (Read John 20:19-25)

Jesus' appearance to the two men of Emmaus, reported in detail in Luke 24:13-31, had taken place, and they had returned to the upper room in Jerusalem to tell the apostles about it (Luke 24:32-35), who didn't believe them either (Mark 16:12,13). It was actually when those two men were making their report that Jesus made this appearance (Luke 24:36). What a moment for Jesus to make His first appearance to the apostles—when again they were expressing their disbelief!

John's account of His appearance is more gracious to the apostles than Mark's account (Mark 16:10-14). In John Jesus pronounced, "Peace," to them, and they were "glad". Interspersed but not reported in John is what is reported in Luke 24:37-43. After His second pronouncement of "Peace", He began speaking to them about their coming role: "As the Father hath sent me, so send I you...Whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." V. 21 coincides with the double work of Jesus and His messengers in II Cor. 5:19,20: God was IN CHRIST reconciling the world unto Himself, and God beseeches the lost BY HIS MESSENGERS.

Since the apostles were to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high (Luke 24:49), and the Holy Spirit came upon them on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), the statement in John ("receive ye the Holy Spirit") has spawned several possible explanations. Your writer's conclusion is that the

remitting and retaining sins would not be based on their judgment but on their being inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Don't overlook the importance of the inspired apostles' place in our forgiveness. Forgiveness of sin is not based on how we feel, not on the conflicting teachings of denominations and cults, but on the New Testament teachings of the apostles! Be sure, therefore, that your claim to be forgiven rests solidly on their teaching. Be convinced as Christians that much of your personal work will be with religious people whose hope of salvation is not a Bible-based hope.

We do not know how it happened that Thomas was absent on this momentous occasion. His singular absence robbed him of what took place—like people who miss whatever is said or done when they miss a church service. Don't ever miss!

Thomas must have first-hand proof of Jesus' resurrection just like the others. On one hand we should regret they were so hard-hearted while on the other hand we should be glad they had to have real proof since our belief in Jesus is based on their testimony (John 17:20).

TO THOMAS WITH THE APOSTLES **(Read John 20:26-29)**

A week after the above appearance Jesus checked back with the apostles. Again He entered through closed doors. Some teach that even before He ascended He had a glorified body that permitted Him to pass through closed doors. But did He have a celestial body when he ate fish and honeycomb (Luke 24:41-43), when He invited Thomas to feel His wounds, and when He spoke of having flesh and bones (Luke 24:39)? Passing through closed doors was a miracle which He was always capable of doing whenever He chose.

Jesus' superhuman knowledge manifested itself again as He spoke first, saying to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." The account never says

whether Thomas carried out his avowed statement, but whether he did or didn't, he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!"

Yes, it would be great to have seen Jesus, to have beheld His miracles, to have heard Him teach, and even to have seen Him after He arose, but Jesus did not leave us out when He said to Thomas, "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Like us, many to whom Peter wrote I Pet. had not seen Jesus, and notice what he wrote them: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (I Pet. 1:8).

TO SEVEN APOSTLES AT THE SEA OF GALILEE (Read John 21:1-24)

From the beginning Jesus had planned to appear to the apostles in Galilee (Matt. 28:7). So far, though, His appearances to them had been in Jerusalem. He had evidently sent them to Galilee, and while they were waiting, seven of them went night fishing on the Sea of Galilee. No, the veteran fisherman Peter and the others with him were not giving up following Jesus to return to the fishing business—they needed food and money.

Their night of fishing had produced no positive results. The stage was set thereby for Jesus to make an early morning appearance. Again He was not immediately recognized. Why would they cast their net at the direction of a total "stranger"? Because "the movements of large bodies of fish in the waters of Galilee are frequently visible to one standing on the shore. Supposing that the stranger thus saw fish upon the right side of the boat, the disciples readily obeyed his command without suspecting who it was that gave it" (Fourfold Gospel, page 754). Their cast netted 153 large fish by count. John, ("the disciple whom Jesus loved") sensed it was Jesus and said so. Immediately Peter swam to shore, and when the others moored to shore, he helped them drag the full net in. Jesus had a fire going and fish

frying and invited them to bring some of their fish for a breakfast meal.

Peter having earlier denied Jesus three times, Jesus three times questioned him concerning his love for Him. Each time Peter affirmed his love, and each time Jesus assigned him a job—to feed His sheep and lambs. Jesus then foretold the ultimate death Peter would die for Him (Peter never forgot it—II Pet. 1:13,14). Christian tradition said he did die a martyr's death.

Seldom was Peter left with nothing to say. When Jesus told him what he was to do, he wanted to know what John was to do. In contrast, when we know what we are to do, we should do it regardless of what others are to do or not do. Jesus said as much: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me." The other apostles thought Jesus had said John would never die, which the gospel writer notes was not true. But when John outlived all the others, they probably felt their conclusion had been correct.

In conclusion, just why at the prompting of the Spirit these specific appearances and not any of the others are recorded in the Gospel of John, is left to our wonderment.

QUESTIONS

1. Name the four resurrection appearances recorded by John.
2. On what day of the week and where did Jesus appear to the first person who saw Him after He arose?
3. Why did Jesus' statement, "Touch me not," not indicate that He had an untouchable body?
4. What was the apostles' reaction to the reports that others had seen Jesus?
5. Why did Jesus give special attention to Thomas in His second appearance to the apostles?
6. Which apostle came into the spotlight at the breakfast along the Sea of Galilee?