

Open Heart, Open Bible

Exodus and John's Gospel

Linking Theme: Redemption

Passage for weekly reading (week 23):

John ch. 's 9 – 12

I AM the light of the world (9 v.5)

I AM the gate (10 v. 7) I AM the good shepherd (10 v. 11)

I AM the Resurrection and the Life (11 v.25)

The outstanding aspect of this passage is the power over death which Jesus now displays, but before we see that power in action, the account of the man born blind in ch.9 gives us a dramatic illustration of our Lord as the light of life, coming out of the teaching of ch.8. Various “remedies “ and prayer rituals were used by the religious leaders for those whose sight was defective, but no-one had ever heard of sight being given to a person born blind (v.32). The stereotypical way of thinking for people born with this disability was that it was a consequence of sin in the generational line or, worse still, a punishment for such sin. Jesus repeats that He is the light of the world (v.5), and the wonderful healing of the man authenticates that assertion.

The Pharisees, when they hear about the miracle, again nit-pick about Sabbath healing, the thing that Jesus called elsewhere “straining out a gnat but swallowing a camel” (Matthew 23 v.24). Like the Samaritan woman at the well, the man who had been healed recognised that Jesus was a “prophet” (v.17). His boldness in the face of the leaders’ hostile questioning makes for good reading! What comes through is their pride and blatant hardness of heart. The miracle, however, produces saving faith in the man healed (v.38). So it should!

The theme shifts now to Jesus as the **Good Shepherd**. All those who follow Him as the light will need to stick closely to Him as their guide in order to avoid life’s pitfalls. Firstly, Jesus uses the metaphor of the **Gate** (v.’s 7&9). The sheep have to come into the pen before they can be led out to other pastures. Jesus is both the way in (as the Gate), and the way out (as the Shepherd – v.’s 11&14). Note the repetitions for emphasis. The gateway is the entrance to salvation (v.9) and, having been saved, we must follow the Shepherd, for we now “know” Him and can discern His voice. We hear myriads of voices during the span of our earthly lives, but the only voice that it is essential to hear and respond to is the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. His credential of trustworthiness is that He lays down His life for the sheep (v.11), only to “take it up again” in resurrection victory (v.’s 17&18). Hallelujah! What a Saviour! What a Shepherd! It is this that makes Jesus unique amongst other world religious leaders. Response, as ever, is divided.

At the next Feast, described as being “in winter”, the frustration of many of the Jewish people becomes yet more apparent, and Jesus knows that the root cause is lack of faith, stemming from their historic pride. He speaks again of His oneness with God, Who He never hesitates to describe as His “Father”. He fully realises how this will provoke them! It does! They could do nothing to harm him before His time, however. Away from Jerusalem, the going is easier (v.’s 40-42).

Of the seven “signs” that John recounts to us, the raising of Lazarus is probably the best known. Like the others, it was done to reveal the glory of God, which is reflected so brightly in Jesus. Here, our Lord pronounces the fifth “I Am”, that He is “**the resurrection and the life**”, and the miracle of the physical resurrection of Lazarus proves the point! The physical miracle authenticates the spiritual truth. The natural came into being as a consequence of spiritual desire and energy (Genesis 1), so it should not surprise us that the spiritual has dominion over the natural when God wants to reveal His glory.

The Son of God weeps when He feels the hopelessness of the Jews’ bereavement. Twice, in the N.I.V., we are told that Jesus was “deeply moved” (v.’s 33&38), a response of His spirit. The A.V. uses the word “groaned”. There is a sense of anger and indignation in the meaning of the word used here, as well as a heartcry on behalf of those who could have no faith, and no understanding that He stood before them as God Himself. Perhaps He felt here the loneliness of His own situation, and the sadness of His fellow human beings who grieved as those without hope. It would not be like that after His resurrection! (1 Thess. 4 v.13). The word Paul uses in Romans 8 v.’s 23, 26 is similar but not identical to the word here. Paul links the word with intercession in the Holy Spirit, when intelligible words fail us. It was like that for Jesus in this situation.

At the word of command, Lazarus is raised. The Sanhedrin is thrown into turmoil as the Lord’s renown grows and yet more people believe in Him. The prophecy of Caiaphas, and the insight he is given, is remarkable. It justified the religious leaders in seeking Jesus’ execution, for that would avert any possible reprisals from Rome and eliminate the threat to their own traditions. At the same time, it revealed the truth that the Lord’s death would unite the people of God from whichever nation they were drawn. Only the Spirit of God could have revealed this to the High Priest.

Again, Jesus finds some temporary relief away from Jerusalem, first at the village known as Ephraim, and then at Bethany, at the home of Lazarus. Here, we see a little more into Judas’ character with the expensive anointing of the Master by Mary. Once the Lord’s whereabouts become known, He moves towards Jerusalem for the last time. John’s account of the triumphal entry into the City on the occasion we celebrate as Palm Sunday brings out the increasing popularity of the

Saviour and the increasing anger of the Jewish leaders. Jesus now knows that “**the hour has come**” (v.23). His teaching in v.’s 23-26 is central to anyone who would move on in the Christian life. Only by dying to ourselves (“hating” our lives – v.25) can we allow God to work His purposes through us. If we do not, we frustrate those purposes and our own wellbeing. Jesus has demonstrated spiritual realities by the miracles He has worked thus far in the lives of others. He is now going to demonstrate this ultimate spiritual reality in the ultimate way – by His own death. Immeasurable fruitfulness will come from it (v.32). He counsels His listeners to trust Him, again using the analogy of light and darkness. Many still cannot believe, however, and in this the prophecies of Isaiah find their fulfilment, as they have done ever since. Even in those cases where those amongst the leaders had believed, their fear of man proved to be a snare (Prov. 29 v.25). Jesus cries out in anguish at their timidity. The words He speaks are spoken only in obedience to his Father. He is indeed the Word made flesh.

Food for thought / discussion / prayer

1(a) The healing of the man born blind in ch.9 clearly gives a physical outworking of Jesus’ revelation of Himself as the light of the world. The healings authenticated the teaching, which was often the case in the gospels. Can you think of other examples?

1(b) In ch.10, Jesus says that He gives to His sheep eternal life (v.28). He obviously has power over death if He can give such a gift. That resurrection power is then demonstrated in the raising of Lazarus. Again, this is a case of a sign illustrating a spiritual truth. Is it on the Father’s heart that the Church of Jesus today should be able to authenticate the gospel with comparable signs? (There would surely be no problem with church growth if that were happening! Spiritual warfare and general flack would of course increase exponentially if it did. The devil is not at all concerned about inertia in the church.) Let’s pray that we be alive to all that God wants.

2) The anointing of Jesus by Mary is an incident foreshadowing the imminence of our Lord’s death (12 v.7). After the triumphal entry into the City, He teaches those who come to Him about the significance of death in the spiritual realm, that spiritual fruitfulness cannot occur in any other way. Death must precede life. Someone has to die (to himself), in order that spiritual life be produced in others (“**death is at work in us, but life is at work in you**” – 2 Cor. 4 v.12). Is death at work in us, so that life may be at work in others?

N.B. Fear is the main impediment to this dying process, as the chapter points out in a specific way in v.42. Pride is the flip side of the coin of fear, as in v.43. Can we renounce both fear and pride as part of our praying this week? It will revolutionise us if we do!

Next week’s passage: John ch.’s 13 -16

