

Overcoming the World

Its Ruler, Its Love and Its Pressures

David Gooding

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



MYRTLEFIELD
HOUSE
www.myrtlefieldhouse.com

Contents

| | | |
|---|--|----|
| 1 | Overcoming the Ruler of this World | 3 |
| 2 | Overcoming the Love of the World | 15 |
| 3 | Overcoming the Pressures of the World | 29 |
| | Appendix 1: Three Creation Stories | 44 |
| | Appendix 2: Outline of First Epistle of John | 46 |
| | About the Author | 47 |

David Gooding has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

Copyright © The Myrtlefield Trust, 2019

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV ® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. May not copy or download more than 500 consecutive verses of the ESV Bible or more than one half of any book of the ESV Bible. Quotations marked KJV are from The Authorized (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press. Scripture quotations marked NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version® Anglicized, NIV ® Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Other quotations are Dr Gooding's own translations or paraphrases.

This text has been edited from a transcript of three talks given by David Gooding at Corinda High School, Brisbane, Australia, 31 March to 3 April 1992.

All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce this document in its entirety, or in unaltered excerpts, for personal and church use only as long as you do not charge a fee. You must not reproduce it on any Internet site. Permission must be obtained if you wish to reproduce it in any other context, translate it, or publish it in any format.

Published by The Myrtlefield Trust

PO Box 2216

Belfast, N Ireland

BT1 9YR

w: www.myrtlefieldhouse.com

e: info@myrtlefieldhouse.com

Myrtlefield catalogue no: chl.018/bh

Overcoming the Ruler of this World

We can begin our study this evening by reading two passages from Scripture, one from the Old Testament and one from the New. The Old Testament passage is to be found in the book of Exodus, chapter 3.

Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you."' God also said to Moses, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, 'I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'" (vv. 13–17)

So much for our Old Testament reading, and now for our New Testament counterpart in the Gospel by John, beginning in chapter 16.

'I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.' His disciples said, 'Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.' Jesus answered them, 'Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.' When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me

to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.' (16:25–17:6)

I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them. (17:26)

It is impossible to read the Gospel of John, and particularly its closing chapters, without becoming aware of a great and vigorous warfare in which our blessed Lord Jesus Christ himself was involved when he was here on earth, and a warfare to which we, as Christian people, are called in our day and generation.

Everywhere throughout John's writings it is true that the talk is of triumph and of victory. From our Lord's own triumphant statement: 'In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world' (John 16:33), to the assured statement and claim of John the apostle in his epistle: 'For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith' (1 John 5:4), and finally to the gracious promises of our Lord frequently given in John's final writing, the book of the Revelation: 'The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne' (3:21). Complete triumph, then, is the note that John sounds out. But the very talk of triumph presupposes battle and warfare, and we cannot avoid that.

Stalking through the end chapters of John's Gospel, is this shadowy and sinister figure whom our blessed Lord called a ruler: 'for the ruler of this world is coming', he says. 'He has no claim on me' (John 14:30). He is 'the ruler of this world,' and he most certainly is not a figure of fun. The Scriptures tell us he has status enough to dare to approach the Son of God incarnate when he was here upon earth, and even tempt him. They also seriously inform us that this great ruler has access into the presence of God, and has been known to mock God in the council of the high principalities and powers.

His accusations against the people of God

He did not hesitate to mock God with regard to God's own trust in his servant, Job (see Job 1:6–11).

Said God, 'Satan, have you considered my servant, Job, that there's none like him?'

'Ha,' said Satan, 'if that is what you think, the reality is different. He makes out that he trusts you. Of course he does; you have given him everything a man could possibly desire. He doesn't mind singing a few hymns and choruses in your praise, but should you allow me to touch him—his goods, possessions, his skin—he'd curse you to your face. It's nothing but cupboard love, and I can prove it to you.'

In a similar vein, he doesn't hesitate, day and night, to accuse the brethren, the brothers and sisters, in the presence of God (Rev 12:10). And it's no answer to his accusations to say, 'Who are you to accuse anybody else?', for Satan's accusations are based on morality, hence their power. He accuses God of being immoral in his programme of redemption and salvation, because God is proposing to bring to glory men and women who are equally sinners as Satan

himself. Since the accusations are based on moral grounds, the answer has to be given on those same moral grounds, and you know well that it has cost God the blood of his own dear Son.

This great ruler's influence is not largely or particularly that he tempts people to degrading vice. I've no doubt he has his hand in those operations, but we learn from the New Testament that Satan is far more concerned with people's thinking processes and their mental and heart attitudes. 'The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God' (2 Cor 4:4).

Paul warns us that Satan is busy also in attempting to corrupt the intellectual loyalty of Christian people to their sovereign Lord Jesus Christ. 'I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ' (2 Cor 11:2-3).

His power-base

We learn from the Gospel by John that the power base of this great ruler is *the world*. 'For the ruler of this world is coming,' says Jesus Christ. 'He has no claim on me' (John 14:30). And in further describing his triumph, our blessed Lord says, 'I have overcome the world' (16:33).

There is no difficulty in recognizing and identifying who the enemy is, but we shall give some thought, perhaps, trying to decide in our minds what his power base is. What is meant by the term *world* when we talk of the ruler of this world? And when the Bible talks of *overcoming the world*, what does it mean?

It surely isn't this lovely world that God himself has made, with all its colour, music and work; so what is it? Past generations, in their attempt to define what worldliness is and to avoid it at all costs, sometimes concentrated perhaps unduly on outward clothing. As dignified members of the household of God it is our Christian duty to see that we represent the Lord Jesus well, even in the matter of clothes. But by simply concentrating on outward things, we could miss the heart of the matter.

I remember in my boyhood, when it was thought that ladies' stockings that were different from brown or black were evidence of high worldliness of heart. But these went out of fashion, as you know. And so it went on for some years until in my faraway town there came to our home church a bright young lady from the capital city of London. All the others were wearing their modern fawn-coloured stockings, but fashion had changed again and she came with black stockings. There was a minor uproar in the church and I remember it well! But, of course, to concentrate on the colour of stockings goes nowhere near the heart of the matter.

Worldliness

What then is worldliness? What is this world that we have to overcome? And what part does the great ruler of this world play in warring against us and trying to overcome us by the world?

Old Testament allusions

Throughout John's Gospel, you will have noticed that John frequently makes reference to some Old Testament story or other. For instance, in chapter 6 he tells of our Lord likening himself to the manna that Moses gave to the Israelites in the wilderness.

Jesus then said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' (6:32–33)

Careful readers will notice that, not only does John refer to the Old Testament explicitly from time to time, but very frequently he refers to it implicitly, without actually telling you what he is doing. If you know the Old Testament you will have no difficulty in following some of John's allusions to the very famous story in the book of Exodus. Allow me first, to remind you of some of its leading features, and then I shall quote its counterparts in the Gospel by John.

The story in the book of Exodus

Israel were slaves in the country of Egypt, busy building storehouses and treasure cities for the Egyptians. They were ruled by a cruel prince by the name of Pharaoh, who did his best to keep them in subjection. He lashed their backs, as an earlier one had thrown their infants to the crocodiles of the Nile. When Israel found themselves in this grievous slavery, they cried to God, and *God sent Moses*. I ask you to notice the verb: 'Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt' (3:10).

While God was commissioning him, Moses thought of the difficulties that might arise. The first was, 'Whom shall I say has sent me — *what is your name?*'

Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you."' God also said to Moses, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.' (vv. 13–15)

Moses thought of another difficulty.

Then Moses answered, 'But behold, *they will not believe me* or listen to my voice, for they will say, "The LORD did not appear to you."' (4:1)

God said, '*I'll give you some signs*, so that by taking me at my word, they may find courage to walk out of Egypt' (see vv. 2–9, 19–20). So Moses preached to Israel *and they believed*, for the time being at least. They followed Moses as he conducted the Passover and led them through the Red Sea out into the wilderness. As they journeyed to their inheritance, they built a tabernacle in which to serve God.

So much for the bare bones of a story that you probably know and love very well.

The parallels in the Gospel by John

It is not Israel now in servitude in Egypt, but God's people in the world and having to be taken out of it. In the words of our Lord Jesus, 'you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world' (15:19). Just as in Egypt, Israel were ruled by that sadistic prince, Pharaoh himself, this world is ruled by an exceedingly sinister prince, the ruler of this world. How does God propose to deliver people from his grip?

The answer comes in the words of our Lord Jesus, '*The Father has sent me.*' He said to the Pharisees, 'do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming", because I said, "I am the Son of God"?' (10:36). In the fourth Gospel, *the sent one* is a typical title of our Lord.

And then comes an interesting observation, the significance of which we shall see later. It was a key element in Moses' delivery of Israel that he should be able to *declare the name of God* to them. It is more than interesting then, that, when he was describing his own tactics for delivering the people of God from the ruler of this world, our Lord Jesus twice over says to his Father, 'I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known' (17:26).

Then, the final parallel for the moment. When Moses said, 'they will not *believe* me,' God said, 'I'll give you some *signs* to convince them.' The fourth Gospel is written with these words summing up its purpose,

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (20:30-31)

Our blessed Lord was the sent one from God to declare the Father's name, and to do signs to provoke his people's faith.

Of course, there are explicit allusions. Our Lord, as I said, is the one who gives the manna that is far superior to the manna that Moses gave (John 6:32-33; Exod 16), and in the crucifixion story, it's he who is the great Passover Lamb, a bone of whom was not broken (John 19:36; Exod 12:46).

The nature of the similarities

So much then for the similarities that lie on the surface between these two books, and these two famous stories. Now we must ask if they are just like a little decoration upon a birthday cake that is largely irrelevant to the contents of the cake, or are they more significant than that?

Prototypes

The first explanation of them is that they are a kind of prototype, the one of the other. Satan has been at work in our planet almost from the very beginning. He's a past master and has ages of experience behind his tactics. Behind Pharaoh's hardness of heart, his sadistic cruelty, and his attempted genocide of the people of Israel, lay a deeper and more sinister mind, attempting to blot out the purposes of God in history before they were well and truly started.

God's great battle against Satan didn't begin when Jesus Christ our Lord was born, nor when Satan tempted our Lord in the wilderness. Way back in the garden of Eden God began his counter attack against Satan's machinations to destroy the human race. The war has been going on for many long centuries, and the events that clustered around the Exodus were but a prototype of the coming great battle.

You say, 'What do you mean by a prototype?'

Let me use a little analogy. When we were at school as children, if an aeroplane passed over we ran out to see it. Very comical things they were, biplanes generally, held together with brown paper, wood, elastic bands and a little spit! Nevertheless, they went—most of the time. More often than not these very primitive machines crashed, but they did manage to fly now and again.

If you look now at the great jumbo jets that speed over your head at 35,000 feet, you'll scarcely see the similarity between them and the old-fashioned biplanes. And yet there is a similarity, because the principles of aeronautics that were expressed in the biplane are nowadays expressed at a far higher level in the jumbo jet.

It is no accident that the main features of Israel's deliverance from bondage bear a certain similarity with the great work that God has done through Jesus Christ our Lord to deliver mankind from the bondage to Satan. It's the same war, only it was conducted at an infinitely higher level.

Thought models

Those ancient stories become for us what I like to call a thought model. It is a common thing in much scientific thinking to use models to think with. A physicist who is examining the insides of an atom uses mathematics so abstruse that the physicist himself can scarcely imagine or visualize the reality to which his sophisticated mathematics point. So he makes a model of the thing. I'm quite aware that the model isn't exactly the same as the reality. Many times in the course of nuclear physics investigations a physicist has examined the model and said to himself, 'Now, according to the model, there ought to be a particle here in this position, inside the atom.' He's gone with that supposition to his machine, the cyclotron, and bombarded some thousands of atoms to see whether there really is something that corresponds to the thought model.

In these Old Testament stories, God has given us prototypes and thought models to analyse our spiritual situation, and to see what the New Testament terms mean. Among them, of course, is *worldliness*. If we would be earnest in our battle against the ruler of this world and the worldliness with which he tries to enslave us, then we shall find the book of Exodus a very helpful tool.

Israel's situation in Egypt

So, in that spirit, let us think now of the situation in which Israel found themselves in that far-off day. They hadn't always been slaves, of course. By the time they came into Egypt they'd already had a past, with a family tradition that God had appeared to their ancestor, Abraham. They were given to understand that their stay in Egypt was never intended to be permanent, but it would be long—some four hundred years. When the time was up there was a future for

them. Egypt was not the end, nor was it their goal. It was but a stepping stone to a glorious future that lay over the horizon. They had a God-given inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey. Believing in the purposes of God, then, they came into Egypt *pro tem*.

They had been warned, however, that attempts would be made to oppress them, and they were to be ready for it when it happened. There were pharaohs who didn't know Joseph, and they set them to hard work under task masters to build treasure cities. In the end, listening to the cries of his people, God sent Moses to deliver them.

Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'" But Pharaoh said, 'Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.' (Exod 5:1-2)

Pharaoh had no respect for their past, nor a belief in any future for them as a nation. Life would be what it always had been: work, eat, sleep; sleep, eat, work. He had no belief in God, nor in a land flowing with milk and honey.

That is a classic expression of one aspect of what the Bible means by 'the world'. The ruler of this world has succeeded in his deception, and there are many people who hold the same philosophy even to the present day. They would tell us that our belief in God's promises to Abraham are nonsense—they don't even believe there was such an historical figure as Abraham. And, more serious than that, they deny that there's a God at all and a future for us beyond this world. According to the philosophies of multitudes of modern men and women, this world is all there is. You eat, sleep, work, play a bit, have a family and grow up, be successful or otherwise in business, then you die. *That is worldliness.*

You would wonder sometimes why the notion has become so popular, but from one point of view you can understand it. For multitudes of men and women, getting rid of the idea of a God out there is striking a blow for freedom, and now they can live as they like.

The world of the atheist and the humanist

Is it true that there's no God behind the physical universe, and all that we have and are comes as a result of blind forces working on mindless matter? Was there never any plan or purpose, or just energy and matter producing us by chance? If that is so, there is no purpose in the future, is there? We like to think of having a purpose; we plan for improving our world. But the scientists warn us that our world is doomed, so it doesn't particularly matter which theory you embrace. You may hold that the sun up in the sky will one day collapse in upon itself and explode, and become a great red giant. If it does, in that very split second earth will evaporate and be no more, and all human advance and progress will disappear into meaninglessness. Or you may hold that it will come to an end some other way; but it makes no logical difference, because if there is no God there never was any purpose, and ultimately there's no point in the whole thing.

Not to be too dramatic, but it isn't only the world itself that is doomed to perish, is it? One day a little virus may enter your body and your bodily strength, your mental energy, your aesthetic sense will be destroyed. You will have the intelligence to see what it is doing, but you will not have the power to stop it. If there is no God, then there is no purpose, no plan,

no future. Human progress is a mockery, and in the end human rationality will be defeated by mindless forces.

Here's a young mother of thirty-three. She has two children and she's just been diagnosed with terminal cancer. I say to my atheist friend, 'Let's talk to her, shall we?'

I say to her, 'I'm exceedingly sorry to hear the news. The doctors say there's no physical hope, but there is hope. You're not an accidental machine; you were made in the image of God. Like the rest of us you are fallen, but your creator loves you still. There is salvation for you; you may know God and be reconciled to him. There is hope for you, for there will be a resurrection and one day you shall be conformed to the image of Christ and share in the governing of the universe.'

What will the atheist tell her? If he's honest, he'll say, 'I'm sorry, but there's no hope. You will die and that's the end.'

That's worldliness. It's the creation in people's minds that somehow freedom is getting rid of God and being left with a world that's just the here and now.

How did God deliver his people?

First of all, he sent Moses with some signs to do. The first signs were for Israel, and then there were signs for Pharaoh.

The signs for Israel

These signs were to impress upon them that the God who was now proposing to redeem them was actually the God of nature. He was no fairy story, no oddment of a legend that had survived. He was the God of nature, and had nature under his control.

So he said to Moses, 'What is that in your hand?' (Exod 4:2).

'A staff,' said Moses.

'Throw it on the ground.'

It became a serpent, and Moses was going to run from it.

God said, 'Put out your hand and catch it by the tail.'

So he caught it, and it became a staff again (v. 4).

Isn't that an interesting story? Did I hear you say that you're too much of a modern person to believe it? Wouldn't you agree with me that nature can be lethal? This little pen in my pocket is made of atoms, and it would only require two or three of them to be split to blow you into pieces. What keeps the whole thing together? The Bible's answer is that it is not the laws of physics—the laws of physics keep nothing together. They are the description of what we see going on. The Bible says that it is the Son of God: 'In him all things hold together' (Col 1:17). He keeps the atoms in their place, and their nuclei that make life possible.

Yes, this world has in part become unhinged; the Bible doesn't deny it. Man is a fallen creature and with him the world has been subjected to futility (see Rom 8:20). But the sign to Israel says that God can restore this world and all its potentially lethal qualities. The staff that was turned into a serpent can be turned back into a staff and become a perfectly harmless thing.

So it was with the next sign: 'Put your hand inside your cloak,' said God. So Moses put his hand inside his cloak and it came out leprous like snow (see Exod 4:6–7).

We've learned enough about biology to know how finely balanced the cells of the human body are. Even within one cell there are things called lysosomes, whose job it is when the time comes to destroy the cell. Biology doesn't keep anything together — biology is but a description of how it keeps together. God holds all things together, says the Bible.

It is not that he originally made the universe and has gone away and left it to its own devices. In Christ the whole thing was made; in him it stands together, and he keeps it together. Nature has been allowed to decay. Ever since man fell, it has been subjected to frustration. Death and disease have come in and sooner or later our bodies show the results of nature being allowed by God to go to decay. It won't last forever. God is saying to Moses, 'I am the God of creation, and I am the God who can restore it.' When Moses brought his hand back out of his cloak, it was clean.

This is a wonderful gospel, and we need to preach it. Our gospel is not some little fairy story made up to comfort children when they go to bed in the dark. The God of redemption is the God of creation, and he is the one who keeps the mighty universe and our very bodies together. Since the fall, nature has been allowed to go to decay, but listen to the good news of the New Testament. There is coming a time of the restoration of all that the prophets have ever spoken about, and the resurrection of our blessed Lord Jesus is the firstfruits. Nature and this very planet have a future: 'Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Rom 8:21).

If men and women will not believe God, the end is death. 'If they won't believe the two signs,' said God to Moses, 'then take up some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water will become blood' (see Exod 4:9). Nature is blighted and dying. Israel believed (v. 31), which is more than Pharaoh did when Moses and Aaron went in to him.

The signs for Pharaoh

When Aaron threw down his staff and it became a serpent, Pharaoh called in his wise men and magicians.

'Moses thinks he's done a miracle. Just show him that we can do it too.' And each man threw down his staff, and they became serpents.

Isn't it interesting that Aaron's staff gobbled up the other staffs? If you're in the business of destroying nature, I warn you that God is better at it than Pharaoh's magicians. But Pharaoh's heart was hardened: 'You'll have to do better than that, Moses, to convince me of a God who can do miracles' (see 7:8–13).

Moses and Aaron did a number of signs and the magicians did them also. They made the river turn to blood (vv. 15–25); they produced a plague of frogs (8:1–15). So what's clever about that? Modern science has taught us the awesome balance of nature. We've learned that we can pollute the rivers and produce plagues of one kind or another. We can kill off one breed by allowing their predators to multiply. We can do things to destroy nature, but does it prove that there's no God? I can destroy a computer with my axe, but it wouldn't prove that nobody made the computer in the first place, would it?

There came a point when even Pharaoh's magicians couldn't do what Moses did (8:18–19). The plagues multiplied until life on earth became almost impossible for Pharaoh. But he had hardened his heart, and in the end God destroyed him.

This is not only history, but it is prophecy and prototype. The last book of the New Testament warns us that God will do again on earth what he did in Pharaoh's day. God didn't judge Pharaoh by slaying his firstborn at once; he began to put his finger into nature as a warning to Pharaoh, and as an appeal to him to repent. The book of the Revelation mirrors the plagues that came on Egypt, but one thousand times worse than them all. One day, at God's final appeal that there is a God in heaven, the blessed Lord Jesus shall take the scroll and open its seals, and thereby unleash forces of men and nature that will begin to destroy earth (Rev 6).

For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations . . . (Hag 2:6–7)

God is demonstrating in nature that he is the God of our planet and the world is still his, so that men and women might be brought to acknowledge their creator, repent, and be saved.

But there was more to the deliverance than that, wasn't there?

The declaration of the name of God

He is the God of our past

'Go to my people,' says God, 'and if they ask you my name, say . . .'

'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' (Exod 3:15)

We apply the lesson to ourselves. When the Lord Jesus came to declare the name of God, he said to his disciples, 'Do you know who I am? I came from the Father and I have come into this world from a world beyond, and now I am leaving this world and going to the Father' (see John 16:28). This world is not a self-contained flat where men and women may lock the door and feel they are secure against almighty God. The Lord Jesus has come in, and he's gone out again.

More than that, he said to his Father before he left, 'Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed' (John 17:5). There is a past behind our planet. It is a moderately young concern, you know, and so is human life on it; but there has been an 'eternal past'. The Bible says that he chose every true believer in him before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). You're not a mere accident of nature; you came into this world with an eternity of planning behind you. You were made to be a creature for a little while on planet earth to have a chance of meeting God's eternal incarnate Son, and, on receiving him, to be joined to him.

The God of our future

'Go and tell my people,' says God, 'that I have come down to bring them out of Egypt, and to lead them to a land flowing with milk and honey' (see Exod 3:7–8). God had a future for them.

We can apply the analogy to ourselves. Marvellous, isn't it? Chosen in Christ before the very foundation of the world, long before you came here God had his eyes on the remote future.

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. (1 Pet 1:3-4)

The God of our present

That is God's gospel. 'Go and tell them,' says God, 'that I'm not merely the God of their past, and the God of their future, I am the God of the eternal present. *I am* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.'

That is a very significant statement. As our Lord pointed out, God doesn't describe himself in terms of people who once were, and have ceased to be. If you ask Queen Elizabeth who she is, she wouldn't say, '*I am* the Empress of India,' because she isn't that any more. She would have to say, '*I was* the Empress of India.'

When God said, '*I am* the God of Abraham,' it implied that Abraham still existed.

You see, if you came to me and said, 'You're English?', I'd say, 'Yes.'

'Tell me, do you know Winston Churchill?'

I'd say, 'No, of course I don't know Winston Churchill. He's been dead for many years, and I didn't even know him when he was alive.'

But if you went to God and said, '*Did you know Abraham?*', God would rebuke you, and say, 'What do you mean, *did* I know Abraham? *I know him now*, he's there. Look, there's Abraham. He lives as far as I'm concerned.'

'Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him' (Luke 20:38). The marvellous thing is this, that if you come to know God, he knows you. He's your God, and because he knows you, and God is eternal, you are eternal. Because he's your God and he knows you, he will never let you go.

He is the God of my past: I was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4); He is the God of my future: I shall reign with Christ when this planet has long ceased to be (2 Tim 2:12); He is the God of my 'eternal present': He is Abraham's God and he is my God (Ps 31:14).

That is the truth about this world. To those who believe, it breaks the lie of the ruler of this world and sets us free.

So, those who believed Moses kept the Passover, fastened their belts, took their staffs in their hands, put their shoes on their feet, and walked out free to journey to their great inheritance.

And Peter says likewise to us,

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. (1 Pet 1:13-21 KJV)

Those who have discovered God, or rather have been discovered by God, celebrate the great Passover Lamb by whom they were redeemed. And then, girding up the loins of their minds, taking their spiritual staffs into their hands and putting their shoes on their feet, their whole philosophy of life is revolutionized. Life doesn't become an end in itself; this world becomes a stepping stone to that great destiny that lies beyond.

So may the Lord draw near again and tell us of his love, the truth about us, the truth about our world, and what lies beyond it, and set us on our way more resolutely, rejoicing that we have been delivered from the ruler of this world, translated into the kingdom of his Son, and by his grace we are on our road towards heaven, our eternal home and destiny.

Overcoming the Love of the World

In our studies on the topic of overcoming the world, we thought last night about overcoming the ruler of this world, and tonight we shall consider overcoming the love of the world.

Two short Scriptures will be enough for the moment to launch us upon our study. The first of them is to be found in the First Epistle by John.

I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides for ever. (2:14–17)

And the second portion for our reading is in the book of Exodus, chapter 33.

Moses said to the LORD, ‘See, you say to me, “Bring up this people”, but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, “I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight.” Now therefore, if I have found favour in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.’ And he said, ‘My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’ And he said to him, ‘If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?’ And the LORD said to Moses, ‘This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.’ Moses said, ‘Please show me your glory.’ And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name “The LORD”. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.’ And the LORD said, ‘Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.’ (vv. 12–23)

The Lord give us good understanding of his holy word.

‘Do not love the world’, says John, ‘or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him’ (1 John 2:15). And once more we have a question: what exactly does John mean when he says, ‘Do not love *the world*’? This time he begins to define the term for us. He says, ‘all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world’ (v. 16).

Perhaps immediately we want to make a small protest to John. ‘Didn’t God make this world, and hasn’t he filled it himself with the lovely and beautiful things that our flesh desires? What about potatoes, apples and pomegranates, grapefruits and oranges? Are they not God’s own handiwork, and are we forbidden to desire them? How come that we’re not to love the world of beautiful things that God himself has made? When you say that these desires are not from the Father, how can that possibly be? Didn’t God make daffodils and roses and rhododendrons, and all the lovely blossoms that delight our eyes? Should we not desire to see these beauties and the wonders of them? But if we love them, you say that the love of the Father is not in us.’

Perhaps John will leave us to answer our own question. Does the word really mean the desire for evil and vicious things, to indulge the basest of our carnal appetites? In other words, ought we to translate it as ‘the *lusts* of the flesh’, not ‘the *desires* of the flesh’, meaning all those abominable things that you would be ashamed to mention in public? Is John saying, ‘Keep away from those things, because if you love them the love of the Father is not in you’? When it comes to the desires of the eyes, does he mean looking at things that are disgraceful and shameful—pornography, violence, and such things—and that we ought to guard our eyes from even wanting to look at them? He’s not thinking of all the nice things, so should it be translated as, ‘For all that is in the world—the *lusts* of the eyes, the desire to see evil things’?

It would be very tempting to translate it and understand it that way. Far from being the right interpretation, it would be fraught with peril. Ladies and gentlemen, there will be more people lost eternally because they have loved nice things and good things, than those who have lusted after evil things. If that sounds strange to your ears, let me begin to justify it by quoting you an Old Testament passage. If time allows, I want to take two Old Testament stories to help us understand John’s exhortation not to love the world.

Three creation stories in Genesis

The first passage I want to quote to you comes from the second creation story in the book of Genesis, and the question may arise in your mind, ‘why does our preacher tonight call it the *second* creation story?’

In the book of Genesis there are three creation stories. They do not contradict each other, of course. They are like the four Gospels, which do not contradict each other but look at the life of our Lord Jesus from different points of view, bringing out his multiple glories in different ways. So the three records of creation in the book of Genesis do not contradict each other; they look at creation from three distinctive points of view.¹

The first creation story (1:1–2:3). This is the most famous of them. It is the account that tells us that God made heaven and earth in six days, and rested on the seventh day.

¹ See [Appendix 1](#).

The second creation story (2:4–4:26). One of the leading themes that brackets these three chapters together is the theme of the ground.

The third creation story (5:1–9:29). This tells us of the development of the human race from Adam and the new beginning with Noah after the flood.

The theme of ‘the ground’

So, let’s look at chapter 2.

When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (vv. 5–7)

And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. (v. 9)

Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field. (v. 19)

So, in this creation story the first of its three parts tells us of man’s creation and emphasizes the fact that man was made out of the ground and made to till the ground.

Chapter 3 follows the story of creation with the story of the fall and the curse that came upon man.

And to Adam he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, “You shall not eat of it”, cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life’. (v. 17)

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (v. 19)

Therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. (v. 23)

So, like the first third, the second third of this creation story concentrates our attention on the ground. Man was made out of the ground; he was made to till the ground; and when he fell, God cursed the ground for his sake, and promised that one day he would return to the ground.

Many people end the story there, but chapter 4 is an integral part of the second creation story. This is God talking to Cain after Cain had murdered Abel. Notice how it continues the theme.

And the LORD said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.’ Cain said to the LORD, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear.’ (vv. 10–13)

Three stories clustering together in this second record of creation, and its basic theme is the ground. Man was formed out of the ground and worked the ground; when Adam sinned, the ground was cursed; and when Cain sinned, he was cursed from the ground.

You'll wonder for a while why I said all that, but we shall come back to it later.

The theme of 'life'

Life is one of the major themes of this second creation story. It's going to tell us of God's solemn warning to Adam and Eve that, whilst they might eat of every tree in the garden, they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — 'for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die' (2:17).

We're going to read of death, therefore. You can't have death until there's been life, so to understand death you must first understand life. This part of Genesis is going to talk to us about human life, and raise the great question, *what is life?* What constitutes human life? What does it mean to be alive? In other words, what exactly are human beings? So, from 2:4 onwards the historian gives us a number of the characteristic features of what human life is.

What is man?²

1. Man is more than just stuff

The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground. (v. 7)

You ask, 'What is man?' and the answer comes back, 'Man is so much stuff.'

He is made of the dust of the ground, and the chemistry of the human body is the same as the earth; the whole universe, in fact. But man is more than stuff, otherwise he wouldn't be alive at all in any sensible fashion.

2. Man is animate

God . . . breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (v. 7)

Man is physically alive: he can reproduce, he is a living creature (soul, KJV). It is sometimes held that that distinguishes man from animal, but, according to a later chapter of Genesis, that is not quite the fact of the case, for Genesis uses the same term of animals. It means that man is *physically* alive. But is that all life is, to be physically alive? Well, no, of course it isn't.

² The Hebrew word for *man* (*adam*) is the generic term for mankind and becomes the proper name *Adam* (ESV footnote).

3. Man has aesthetic sense

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. (v. 8–9)

Notice the order in which God mentions those things. Every tree that is: 1. good to look at; 2. good for food. The trees that are pleasant to the sight remind us that colour, form and beauty are an essential part of human life. Just imagine a baby being born in a windowless, dark cell, and living all its life there in complete darkness. You'd hardly call that a truly human life, would you?

Part of human life is what we call the *aesthetic* sense, the ability to appreciate, admire and enjoy the marvellous beauties that God has put around us. Praise God for those beautiful things. He could have made our world a utility place, with black or white paint all over it, or something like that. I suppose we should still have been alive, but what a very limited life it would be. Just imagine the wonder of the mind of God to invent such a variety of colour.

One of the lovely things I have enjoyed in coming to Australia is the way that God has favoured you with trees galore and blossoms with all the marvellous colour. Why he likes Australians more than Irishmen and Englishmen, I haven't yet found the answer, but he seems to. If you ask me to choose between colour and carrots, or birds, flowers, plants, paintings, and potatoes, I should try hard to choose the colour. There have been some Christians who have thought that food for your stomach is more worthy and a more Christian thing than art, for instance, and painting, and things like that, which they tend to regard as a bit frivolous, and perhaps not too spiritual.

But surely that is false? If you had a friend in hospital hesitating on the borders of life, you wouldn't take him a bag of potatoes. You might take him a bunch of roses, and looking at the roses in all their beauty might be just that little thing required to hold his interest in life, bring him through his crisis and back to health. Colour, song, beauty, these things are necessary for our psychological and mental health, and the loving God has provided them profusely. Not forgetting, of course, the trees that are good for food; and potatoes and runner beans come in useful at times, do they not?

So, man is so much stuff: he's made from the dust of the ground. But he's more than that: he is animate; he's physically alive. And now we perceive that part of his life is the aesthetic sense, the ability to appreciate beauty.

4. Man is made to be able to work

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (v. 15)

Of course, there's another side to life, and that's work. God planted a garden in Eden, where he put man, which shows that the rest of the world wasn't garden. As Francis Bacon said, it gave Adam an idea of what he could do; and what a charming exercise it was in those days as he went about his daily work. Work is an essential part of our human wellbeing.

Allow me to point out, ladies and gentlemen, that God works. He doesn't have to work for a living.

You say, 'Why does he work?'

I was going to say, for the sheer fun of working. Why do you suppose he's got the galaxies up aloft? Not to earn himself a living, but because God enjoys working.

'My Father is working until now,' said the blessed Lord Jesus, 'and I am working' (John 5:17).

It is a central part of our human makeup. We may feel genuinely sorry for men and women whose work is dreadfully dull, but almost any work is better than none to keep us mentally alive.

I hope you agree with me on my view of heaven. Some people seem to look upon it as an old people's home where beloved saints may retire and put their feet up on the heavenly footrest and never do a stroke of work again. How mistaken can you get? Heaven will be heaven because of the work there is to do. Our Lord advised us that if you work hard for him here and use your ten talents to gain another ten talents, watch out when you get to heaven for you'll be given ten cities to look after (Luke 19:17). Don't work for the Lord now if you don't like working, because you'll be rewarded with an enormous amount of work in heaven. God had the idea that work is a part of humans being alive, and to be condemned to do no work would disintegrate our personalities and make us feel useless.

5. Man needs fellowship

Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.' (Gen 2:18)

Not only work, but fellowship is also a big part of life. And thus God created the highest and most beautiful kind of human fellowship known to man—or at least so my friends who are expert in these matters tell me; I happen to be a bachelor. What would life be if we were but Robinson Crusoes deserted on an island with no faithful friend like Friday in sight?

6. Man has the faculty of language

And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. (v. 19)

Isn't God magnificent? He's given us language too, and what a thing language is. You'll notice the context in which we are told this. God said that it wasn't good for the man to be alone, so out of the ground God made all the beasts of the field and brought them to Adam. With the genius God had given to humankind, Adam named all the animals. Humans use an arbitrary sound to indicate an object. I once worked under a professor of Latin who used to point to this verse as the origin of language. Tempted as I am, we cannot go into that any more. The animals don't have it, or only in a rudimentary fashion.

God said that it was not good for man to be alone, so he made all the animals and brought them before Adam to see what he would call them. But amongst all the animals, there was not found a helper for him, so God made a woman for Adam, and he called her Eve (v. 20). Now,

as you know, when the lion tries to tell his lioness how beautiful she is, he is sorely limited in what he can say. An odd grunt or two, biting her ear, and that's the sum total. How limited they are. But when you gentlemen try to tell your wives how beautiful they are, and how wonderful, what heights of rhetoric you possess. What a lovely thing language is.

Never say, 'But that's only words,' as though there were something bad about words. Words are the most marvellous things. The soldier at the front, who receives a package from home with a tin of cocoa and a love letter from his wife, will die, I fancy, with the love letter in his pocket rather than the tin of cocoa. Words ultimately mean the most when the ability of language opens to us the possibility of having discourse with him who is called *the Word* (John 1:1).

When all the work is done and all the deeds are over, what shall we do but delight in an eternity in fellowship with God's Son, and the wonder is that we can talk to him. Because of that, some have called mankind the high priest of creation. Amongst all the creatures from God's hand, only humans have the wonderful facility of being able to tell God what it is like to be who we are.

One of my friends used to say what marvellous conversations there were between God and Adam in those far-off days. Imagine the day that Adam discovered strawberries. When God came down in the cool of the day, Adam was all full of his strawberries. Some of my more severe friends said, 'Oh, that's an unworthy thing to say, talking to God about strawberries.' But they were forgetting that when they have a dish of strawberries at dinner, they first bow their heads at the table and thank God for strawberries.

What a wonderful thing it is that God has given language to us men and women.

7. Man can have fellowship with God

You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. (vv. 16–17)

But when we have considered all these forms of life, and what it means to be really human, really alive, then we must consider the highest dimension of human life, and that, according to this chapter, is fellowship with God himself. It is a relationship with God marked out by moral considerations—God's moral authority, with his right as a creator to lay down the terms upon which mankind is related to him. And if you think of that for a moment, you will perceive another magnificent thing about God. When God determined man's relationship to him, he did not decide to make man as a machine that had no choice. You see, the very fact that God had to say to Adam, 'You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil', implied that Adam had the ability to eat it, if he chose to.

So two things are simultaneously true. God forbade man to eat of the tree of knowledge; but God himself had given him the ability to stretch up his hand and eat it.

Ponder the implication of that relationship with God, for he could have made us as machines. We should have done his will unwaveringly, but if we'd been mere machines our relationship to him would have been very different. To start with, it couldn't have been one of love.

Imagine coming home tonight and sitting in your lounge, and in walks a modern robot, equipped with human voice. It puts its robotic arms around your neck and pecks your cheek, and says, 'I love you, dear.' What would you do? You'd kick it out of the way. Its words are meaningless because it can't help saying them.

And it is a staggeringly wonderful thing about God that he gave us the ability to choose: to choose him, to obey him and to love him; or to choose to disobey him and go from him. God gave man the warning, 'Don't eat of that tree, for in the day you eat of it, you shall most surely die.'

Delightful as all these various characteristics and departments of life are in themselves, their crowning joy is to enjoy them in fellowship with God.

Adam and Eve's disobedience

And then came the devil. Getting Eve by herself, he started up the conversation with a deliberate exaggeration.

'I hear that you mustn't eat of any of the trees in this garden.'

'No,' said Eve, 'that's not correct. We may eat of the whole lot except one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.'

'That's typically God, you know. He loves tantalizing you. He puts beautiful things in front of your nose and works up all your desire. You want some beautiful thing, and then he tells you that you can't have it.'

'No,' said Eve, 'God has said we mustn't eat of that tree, for in the day we eat of it we'll surely die.'

'Of course you won't die. You'll live. Look at the tree.'

So Eve looked at it, and the tree was good for food. She looked again and saw that the tree was good to look at and, looking further, it was desirable to make you wise.

'That's life—take it.'

Physical satisfaction, good for food; aesthetic satisfaction, good to look at; intellectual satisfaction, desirable to make you wise.

'Of course you won't die,' said Satan. 'That's God deceiving you. In the day you eat of it, he knows that you'll be as God himself, knowing good and evil. You'll be independent of God, able to choose your own pleasures, knowing what's good for you, and what isn't.'

Fooled by that kind of language, Eve took of the tree and gave it to Adam, and they died. Not in all the departments of life at once, of course, but the highest thing had gone dead, and eventually all the other areas of life would die as well.

The cleverness of the temptation

And now I urge upon you to notice the satanic cunning, the devilish cleverness of the temptation. It wasn't desire for evil things, was it? The first sin was not that Eve poisoned Adam to get rid of him. It was a desire for things that in themselves were good. The tree was good for food and beautiful in appearance, aesthetically lovely. It was a tree desirable to make you wise, and there's nothing wrong with intellectual satisfaction.

We are beginning to come to where we can answer our question about John, are we not? It was desire for things that were good in themselves that ruined Eve and ruined Adam, because they were tempted to take them independently of God in total disregard for his word, and attempt to enjoy life apart from God. I tell you again, there will be more people in hell because of their desire for nice and good things than people who are there because of their lust for things that in themselves are evil.

For life to be life, what must it be? In the book of Deuteronomy God explained to Israel—and our blessed Lord Jesus quoted it to the devil in the wilderness—‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’ (see Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4). That is not God being stingy or tantalizing, and keeping us back from good, as the devil would have it. The greatest significance about the beauty of the daffodil is that God made it for you. He wants you to enjoy it with him, for it to lead you to him. But to attempt to enjoy that daffodil in complete rejection or forgetfulness of God and his word, that’s not life. It’s the beginning of death.

‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ All these other stages of life were but the basis that God gave us as human beings to lead us to him and enjoy his fellowship, and thus eventually know eternal life. To take the gifts apart from him is to start dying.

One of these days, perhaps, some of you might even be inclined to have pity on an Englishman and ask me out to dinner. You say, ‘He looks a friendless soul.’

So I arrive in my best clothes, and you seat me in the place of honour at the table. You have prepared a marvellous meal. There’s nothing wrong with the meal. The soup is magnificent, the hors d’oeuvres out of this world, the fish course is delightful, and the meat course likewise, right down to the dessert at the end.

Just as we’re diving into the soup, you think it’s time to make conversation. So you say, ‘Where do you come from in England exactly?’

And I take no notice.

You say to yourself, ‘Englishmen are odder than I thought they were.’

So, a little later over the fish course, you have another go. ‘Have you seen much of Australia yet?’

No reply. I’m stuffing my mouth with the fish.

At the middle of the meat course, you make another attempt. ‘Did you go anywhere in particular on holiday this year?’

I raise myself up and look you straight in the eye. ‘Look here, I’d like you to know something. I think this meal is magnificent and those paintings you have on the wall are exquisite. But, as for you, I’m not interested in you. I very much doubt whether you exist, and even if you do, this food is enough for me. I’m not interested in you.’

What would you do? Reach for the ejector button on my seat, I fancy. You’d say, ‘What a fool this Englishman is. Did he think I’d put some paltry fayre in front of him? Of course the food is good, but the reason I asked him to this banquet was so that he should be able to get to know me, and we might become friends.’ To take the food and throw away the friendship, that’s insanity, isn’t it?

Taking the gifts but rejecting the giver

Yet, when the Son of God was here, he had to complain to his contemporaries. One day he had fed them miraculously with loaves and fishes, and they came the next day wanting more. 'There's no more for you, for all you're interested in is the food for your stomachs,' he said. 'You haven't the sense even to ask what hand was behind this marvellous miracle. "Who can this be? How wonderful he must be to be able to multiply food like that." You're not interested in me, only in food for your stomachs' (see John 6:26).

Tragic, isn't it? And that is surely what John means. 'Do not love the world or the things in the world.' If we love them and not the Father; if they come between us and the Father and so absorb our time, thought and energy that we have no time for God or his word, except a brief oddment on a Sunday, then it will not help us that the things are nice things. Without God the nicest of things become simply what John calls *the world*. If anyone loves the world like that, the love of the Father is not in him, says John.

You see, it has a way of progressing. When we start loving the world to the exclusion of the Father and in disobedience to him, then presently our goals and our standards become different, and there enters into it *the pride of life*. Now the whole objective in life is getting these nice things and that becomes our goal. We have a house that's better than the Jones's next door. We have a car that's superior. Our child goes to a better school than other people's children. It is not now the will of God, but the *things* of life that have become the governing feature of life.

It's not merely unbelievers who can be trapped in that kind of thing. Many are, of course, but it's possible for believers too, sometimes unintentionally. During one part of my life, I lived amongst the coalminers in the northeast of England, and I lodged with believers. They often used to tell me, 'David, in the days of *the Depression*, when our menfolk were out of work for years on end, we womenfolk often had to kneel down in the morning and pray to God for food to put on the plates at the next mealtime.' And they said, 'In those days, we lived near the Lord. But then after the war we prospered in the mines, and got good homes and good cars.' Said they, 'We're not living so near the Lord as once we did.'

It's a pity, is it not? 'Do not love the world,' says John, 'or the things that are in the world.' However good in themselves, if they push out God and his word, and capture our hearts to the exclusion of him, it is, of course, a slippery slope.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God in his mercy did not obliterate them, but put them under discipline. Amongst the discipline was daily work. 'Now,' says God, 'cursed is the ground because of you. You will have to till it in order to survive, and it will bring forth thorns and thistles to you, Adam' (see 3:17-18). Ever since, interesting as it is, there is the drudgery element to our work, isn't there? Often there are thorns and thistles of various kinds; work is a kind of an ordeal, and life is full of sweat and toil, and tears.

Don't say in your heart that God is being unkind. He is being kind. Often it is life's difficulties that bring us to the Lord. If mankind had been allowed to go on, taking of that tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and all had gone well in paradise, they wouldn't have missed God. It would have gone on until, going over the edge of time into eternity, they would have been lost for ever beyond recall. More often than not it is the hard disciplines of life that bring us back to sense our need of God.

Cain's defiance

But if Adam disobeyed God, Cain went further. That's why I read those verses at the beginning. Man was made out of the dust of the ground, and he was made to till the ground. Adam sinned, and the ground was cursed for his sake. Cain sinned, and he was 'cursed from the ground' (4:11).

You say, 'What does that mean?'

Well, think what was happening. When man sinned, God made a way back to God so that fellowship with God might be reintroduced. Abel was prepared to come by faith the way God had indicated to him (see Heb 11:4). Cain came another way. God said to Cain, 'Sorry, Cain, that won't do. You must come the way I tell you.' Cain got angry and he killed Abel, saying in effect to God, 'Look here, God, you'll have my sacrifice the way I bring it. If not, you won't have mine and you won't have Abel's either.' So he murdered Abel. What would you have done about that, if you were God?

Suppose you are rich, and you have a beautiful greenhouse in a lovely garden. You say to the gardener, 'I'm going away for six months, and when I come back I want the vegetable plot full of cucumbers, if you don't mind. Not tomatoes; I don't like tomatoes. Cucumbers, if you please.'

So you go away for six months, and when you come back the vegetable plot is full of tomatoes. You call the gardener, 'How do you account for this? I thought I told you that I don't like tomatoes, I like cucumbers. Where are the cucumbers and what are these tomatoes doing?'

And the man says, 'I know you told me that you don't like tomatoes, but I like tomatoes so I'm going to have tomatoes. And what's more, you're going to have tomatoes too.'

What would you say to the gardener? I know what we'd say in England, 'Here are your employment cards. Goodbye.'

Man was made not only of the ground; he was made to till the ground. According to Genesis, in those early days that was the man's *raison d'être*, that's why he was made. Adam failed. He was a bad gardener, and filled the world not only with thorns and thistles, but with a whole world full of sinners.

Cain was worse. When Abel came God's way and Cain didn't, God said to Cain, 'That won't do; you must come this way.' But Cain said, 'God, if you don't have it my way, you won't have it Abel's way either, for I shall murder him.'

God said, 'You might as well go, Cain, for now when you work the ground it shall no longer yield to you its strength. Get out' (see Gen 4:12).

You may not think that to be dismissed from gardening is a bad sentence, but you must understand that, in those far-off days, the reason man was made was to garden for God. So Cain lost the very reason for which he was created.

'My punishment,' said he, 'is greater than I can bear. Everybody will kill me.'

'No, they won't,' says God, 'I shall see to it that you still exist' (see vv. 13-15).

But just imagine the horror of existing, having lost the very reason for which you were created. This is the fate of everyone who goes after life's nice things and forgets God. Man was made not merely to till the physical ground, but to live for the pleasure of God. To lose fellowship with God, therefore, is to lose the whole rationale of existence. That will be hell, to exist for ever with no purpose.

Redemption and its goal

'What is the cure of it,' you say?

And somebody says, 'The answer is redemption.'

Yes, you've got it right first time: the answer is redemption. But I must add now a brief postscript to that. I want to take the story that we began yesterday a stage further and make the point that it is possible not only to pervert the good things of nature and turn them into worldliness, it is possible to pervert the very fruits of redemption and turn them into idolatry.

And you say, 'What do you mean?'

We thought how Israel were slaves in Egypt, and Pharaoh wouldn't acknowledge that they'd had a past, nor that there was a future inheritance for them. In his mercy, God broke the prison walls and brought Israel out. So they were on their journey, striding out to their great inheritance that lay before, and God had to teach them a lesson. What was the goal of redemption? Why had God redeemed them, and why has he redeemed us? But we must be careful here lest we come to a hasty and wrong conclusion.

Somebody says, 'In Israel's case the goal of redemption was obvious. It was the inheritance. Out there in the blue was Canaan, flowing with milk and honey. That surely was the goal of redemption?'

No, it wasn't. That was their destiny, but it wasn't the goal of redemption. To make the point exceedingly clear, long before they got to Canaan, God himself came down on Mount Sinai to explain to Israel what the goal of redemption was.

God is the goal of redemption

'Moses, go and tell the people about this offer that I want to make them. Say to them, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians; how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself"' (see Exod 19:3-4). 'Let my people go,' said God to Pharaoh. *So that they may go to Canaan?* No—'Let my people go, *so that they may worship me*' (see 7:16; 8:1; 9:13 NIV). That is the goal of redemption. Long before they got to Canaan, God had come down to make the proposal. Would they have it?

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (vv. 5-6)

God wanted to make it clear. The goal was not just the honey and milk of Canaan. There were lots of Canaanites in Canaan, stuffed full with honey and milk, but they didn't want God, and in the end God eliminated them. You see, what use would it be if we could get home to heaven and not meet God? God is the goal of redemption.

Substitute gods

Israel were still at Sinai when a desperate thing happened. They lost their faith in God and in Moses, and made themselves other gods. I can't tell you exactly how it happened. Moses had gone up the mountain to get instructions for making the tabernacle. He'd been gone for two or three weeks, and nothing had been seen of him.

Perhaps one day some learned man turned to his fellow, and said, 'You know, this is a very funny situation in which we find ourselves.'

'Oh, is it?' said the other.

'I mean, sitting at the bottom of a mountain in the middle of the desert. We're following a man we can't see, and don't know what's become of him. He's disappeared up the mountain out of sight. We can't sit here for ever.'

'There's no need to worry,' said the other man. 'Before he went up the mountain, he said that he would come back again.'

'That was two weeks ago and he hasn't come back yet. He took no food with him so he has surely perished. We're sitting here like a lot of fools. All this business of Moses coming back is not true, and we can't sit here for ever.'

The idea spread, and presently the whole lot of them came to Aaron.

'Look here, Aaron, we've had enough of sitting at the bottom of this mountain, trying to believe in a man we can't see, who's supposed to be coming back and he hasn't turned up. We've got to be aiming at something in life.'

Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him (32:1)

Then Aaron had an idea. 'Give me your earrings,' he said (vv. 2-3). In the ancient world, with no banks, people carried their excess wealth on their person, and these earrings were some of the wealth.

You say, 'What's wrong with wealth?'

Nothing at all.

'Where did they get it from?'

You may remember, when they were redeemed from Egypt, God said, 'you shall plunder the Egyptians' (3:22), and the Egyptians pressed on them their silver and gold, and all kinds of precious things. They got this wealth as a by-product of their redemption, but now it has become a substitute god, a substitute goal in life. They made the calf and danced around it. 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' they said (32:4). God came very near to destroying them in an instant (v. 10).

This has happened again and again many times. Take the previous two centuries in Britain, where there were great revivals and evangelical awakenings. People who had no education and couldn't read or write got converted and learnt to read and write. They lived on a pittance in those days, poor souls, but they loved the Lord and they read his word. They preached it and God blessed them, and thousands upon thousands of men and women were brought to Christ throughout the whole of the northeast of England.

As a result of being redeemed their material conditions improved. God be praised, they no longer got drunk, nor wasted their money on cigarettes and things. After a generation or two, these one-time unlearned and unlettered people became educated. They began to have decent homes, and their children benefitted. Then, instead of the gospel and the salvation of the soul, they substituted social improvement as the goal of their activities. They no longer preached the gospel. It was social concern, social betterment, and that kind of thing that they made their goal. They went one stage further and, instead of preaching the gospel of redemption, they said it was better education that would redeem and save people. In the end they gave up the gospel and didn't believe it any more. Christianity had become a mere social concern.

It could happen with us too, couldn't it? We're saved, thank God, and then by God's good grace we prosper. Little by little we wander in heart from the Lord and, instead of life's chief goal being God and his service, it becomes the material things of life. We love the world, and the love of the Father diminishes.

There is only one thing that can possibly save us, and that is to be found in the passage we read together (Exod 33:12–23). Said Moses to God, 'You have told me to bring up your people to their great inheritance. How can I possibly bring them up unless you go with me?'

'Show me now your ways' (v. 13); 'Show me your glory' (v. 18).

And [God] said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name "The LORD" . . . there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.' (vv. 19, 21–22)

When Moses came back down the mountain with the two tablets of the law, the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God (see 34:29). Moses eventually brought the people to the point of repentance; they built God his tabernacle and he came and dwelled among them.

My dear fellow believers, if it should be that the world is too near us; if it has forced itself in upon us by its treasures and taken over some of the love of our hearts that ought to be for the Lord, then shall we not pray, like Moses prayed his prayer: 'Oh God, show me your glory. Once again may the sight of your surpassing wonder so capture my vision, my imagination, my love, my affection and my devotion, that your glory shall become a consuming fire in my heart and be the great objective of my life?'

Overcoming the Pressures of the World

We come to the end of our little series of studies on overcoming the world. On our first evening we celebrated our Lord's declaration of the name of God that has exposed Satan's slanders, and thus, for all who trust him, has overcome the power of the ruler of the world. Then we allowed ourselves the luxury of sitting back to survey the glory of the Father, so that in our hearts it outshone the petty attractions of this passing world and will deliver us from the love of the world. Tonight we are to celebrate the power of God that enables us to overcome the pressures of the world. This short reading from the First Epistle of John will suffice to launch us on our study this evening.

If anyone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (4:20–5:5)

May God give us good understanding of his holy word.

John the apostle is thought by many people to have been a very old man when he wrote this epistle, because he constantly repeats himself and really doesn't advance the conversation further. God save us from becoming old men, if that be so. Old man or not, this is a beautifully planned and structured piece of writing. If it were a painting, we should call it a *triptych*: three pictures that form one logical group. To put our study in its larger context, I want to take a few moments at the beginning to call your attention to the beautiful way in which John has arranged his epistle.³

Part 1. The manifestation of the life of God (1:1–2:29)

Part 2. The manifestation of the Son of God (3:1–4:6)

Part 3. The manifestation of the love of God (4:7–5:21)

³ See [Appendix 2](#).

As I say, it is in three parts, and if you care now to look at your Bibles let's examine how they begin. Then we shall examine how each part ends, and then, being good Aristotelians, we shall look in the middle of each part.

The beginning of each part

Part 1. The manifestation of the life of God

The life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. (1:2)

These are magnificent words and spectacular concepts. You can hear the excitement surging through the apostle's heart and pen as he recalls those breathtaking days when he walked with Jesus of Nazareth through the fields and streets of Palestine and woke up to the fact that what he was seeing before his very eyes was 'the eternal life, which was with the Father,' now manifested. Says John, 'we heard him, we saw him, we contemplated him, and we touched him' (see v. 1). I suspect they scarcely spared time enough to eat, such was the spectacular wonder of the opportunity of surveying him. The first section of the book begins, then, with the manifestation of the life of God.

Part 2. The manifestation of the Son of God

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (3:2)

Not now the manifestation of the life of God, but of the Son of God. He was manifested by his incarnation: 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil' (v. 8 KJV). And now we look forward to that next great event, when the Son of God shall be manifested and the mention of it begins to warm and move our hearts. He is the one we have loved without seeing, and the one in whom we believe though we still don't see him (see 1 Pet 1:8).

One day I shall see him, and it could be soon. 'Oh, I shall see him descending the sky | coming for me, for me!'⁴ A wonderful moment when, according to the promises of God's word, I shall not only see him but I shall be perfectly like him for ever. So, the second section begins with the manifestation of the Son of God.

Part 3. The manifestation of the love of God

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (4:9-10)

⁴ Anon., 'Jesus my Saviour to Bethlehem came.'

The manifestation of the life of God, the manifestation of the Son of God, and the manifestation of the love of God. The life of God was manifested in his life on earth; the Son of God will be manifested one day when he comes again; and the love of God was manifested in the Saviour's death. Three major parts to the epistle, a lovely artistic triptych; three different pictures all combining together logically to present the topic of the manifestation of God.

The end of each part

Part 1. Warning against false Christs

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour . . . This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. (2:18, 22)

So the first section ends with a grave warning against false Christs, antichrists. In this modern time, when the *New Age Movement* is surging ahead in so many countries, we need to listen to John's warnings about false Christs.

Part 2. Warning against false spirits

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world . . . By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (4:1, 6)

If the first section ends with a warning against false Christs, the second section ends with a warning against false spirits.

Part 3. Warning against false gods

He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (5:20–21)

Idols are set against the true God, for idols are false gods. It is a very deliberate scheme to which John writes: a warning against false Christs, a warning against false spirits, a warning against false gods.

The middle of each part

Part 1. The attractiveness of the world

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away . . . (2:15–17)

In the middle of each section John talks to us about the world. As you might now expect, he's not repeating himself as though he were some doddering old man, but carefully and accurately pointing out to us that the world has different faces. It will show us one face at one time, and another face at another; and if it can't trip us up by that, it will turn yet another face. Let us look at this three-faced world.

These verses that we read the other evening talk to us of the attractiveness of this world: the world when it puts on its pretty and attractive face. The danger is that it will so captivate our love and affections and draw us away from the Father and destroy or suppress our love for the Father.

Part 2. The hatred and hostility of the world

Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. (3:13)

Sometimes the world can seem attractive and lure us. At other times it can be exceedingly hostile, hate us, and in many cases it has murdered the true children of God.

In our favoured circumstances perhaps we know little about it, whilst our good fellow believers in so many countries have known a great deal. I have found it a very humbling experience to be called upon to stand in front of those who have been imprisoned and tortured for the sake of Christ, and to dare to exhort them to anything. Who am I to talk to such noble people of God when they have suffered so much and have so little, and I have so much and have suffered so little?

That is the other face of the world: its face of hatred and hostility to the Son of God and the children of God, in the manner of Cain's hatred of Abel.

The attractiveness of the world, the hatred and hostility of the world, and now the pressures of the world. So look at the argument that is to be found in chapter 5.

Part 3. The pressures of the world

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. (5:3-4)

His commandments are not burdensome; they are not irksome. At times they may be very costly and entail much suffering, but a true believer will not find them irksome. 'The load that I put upon your shoulders,' said the Lord Jesus, 'is easy, and my burden is light' (see Matt 11:28-30).

True believers will not find the commandments of the blessed Lord Jesus irksome—a boring weight. They will often say, 'Lord, I have failed to do them, have mercy on me. But you know my heart, I want to keep your commandments.' Why do they not find the commandments of God irksome and weighty? John explains: 'For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.' That is a fact, and why the commandments of God do not appear irksome is because every true believer has within them the power to overcome the world. Of course, if people are not true believers they would not have that power, and would find the world a colossal pressure against keeping the commandments of God.

This world may not always be hostile; some days it may allure us with its attractiveness. But on no occasion will we find it so arranged as to make it easy to do the commandments of the Lord. The world isn't in that business.

For instance, in some countries, so I'm told, people customarily cheat on their income tax, and never pay what they should. Therefore, the income tax authorities always charge far more than they need to, which presents a very big problem for the ordinary believers. What are they do to? If they obey the Lord and pay their taxes, they'll be paying in excess of what they really ought to pay. They're keeping the law of the land, but it's going to cost them a lot. That particular tax system is not geared to making it easy for believers to follow their consciences and obey the Lord.

It's becoming common in many countries for men and women to live together without being married. When people get converted, young people in particular, it's one of the first things that they should put right. But then they lose financially by getting married, for they may get a smaller allowance. If they chose to live sinfully, the government would pay them more State allowances. The world isn't geared to making it easy for believers to keep the commandments of the Lord.

The news media is not setting out to make it easy either. It's constantly brainwashing us with permissive ideas, and often infiltrating the minds of the people of God so that, unconsciously and little by little, the church takes over the presuppositions of the world and its standards. In some countries, if you raise a voice to protest against the rampant divorce allowed in many Christian churches, you will be told that you're being very un-Christlike.

Someone may well ask, 'How is that un-Christlike?'

Well, you're going against the modern ethos of the world that says it's a very kindly thing. Sometimes you can even get ministers of the word of God preaching to you, who now have been married three or four times. The world infiltrates the church, and subconsciously the Lord's people often allow their minds to become conformed to it and adopt its standards. So, then, it is an enormous weight, a pressure against keeping the commandments of God, even when it's not trying to be positively hateful and hostile.

What is the solution to it?

1. A false solution

The first solution that John warns us against is a false one: the idea that, so long as we love one another, it doesn't really matter how we behave.

We had a bishop some years ago in Britain, who wrote a bestseller. It was called *Honest to God*,⁵ and he followed it up with all kinds of other strange and outlandish ideas. He advanced the theory that sexual immorality wasn't a bad thing in itself, so long as you did it from a motive of love. If you love somebody, it doesn't really matter. That is false. You might expect such things from a dreamy academic, but that is a standard of the world—if it feels good, do it. Anything that inhibits my pleasure is considered to be bad. Even God exists for my pleasure, and if I get bored with him, it's too bad for God. So the whole thing is a false solution to the pressures of the world.

⁵ Anglican Bishop of Woolwich John A. T. Robinson, 1963.

2. *We love our brothers and sisters in Christ*

John says quite explicitly,

If anyone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (4:20–21).

If you say, 'I love God,' whom you haven't seen, and you don't love your Christian brother and sister, whom you have seen, you're living in a fantasy world. And anyway, it's a straight commandment from God that he who loves God must also love his brother. That is a plain fact. But what does it mean to love your brother?

3. *We obey God's word*

And here comes John,

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. (5:2)

If I break the Lord's commandments in order to please my Christian brother, that is not true love. It is a false solution and we need to be realists. It's lovely to tell the Lord that we love him, but it doesn't sound too good unless it is the kind of love that issues in keeping his commandments.

'If we know God,' says John, 'we shall love him; and if we love him, we shall keep his commandments.' John is very insistent on it. He said earlier, 'And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him' (2:3–4). If I claim to know God, then I shall love him; if I don't love him, I don't know him. If I love him, then I shall keep his commandments; if I don't keep his commandments, I don't love him and I don't know him.

Suppose you came to me after this lecture, and said, 'You travel the world quite a bit, don't you?'

'Yes,' I say, 'a little bit.'

'What country do you love best?'

And after some scratching of the English head, I say, 'Well, now, I think Switzerland. I love every inch of it from corner to corner.'

'So you must like mountains?'

'Oh, no, I don't like mountains. I don't go anywhere near mountains, actually.'

'That's odd!' you say. 'You're telling me that you love Switzerland, but you don't like mountains?'

That's nonsense, isn't it? If I say that I love God but I don't keep his commandments, that's a similar nonsense. If I don't keep his commandments, then I don't love him. So we must beware, says John, of that false solution that, so long as we love people in our sentimental way, it doesn't matter whether we keep the commandments of holy Scripture or not.

4. *The real solution is the new birth*

What then is the real solution to this question of the pressure of the world that could make it difficult for a believer to keep the commandments of the Lord? It is one we have known for a long time. It is nothing short of *the new birth*: being born again of the Holy Spirit of God, receiving the life of God, and the nature of God. 'And his commandments are not burdensome. *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world*' (5:3–4). That is the fact.

The lark, that lovely little bird that trills its way up into the heavens, is hatched in a nest on the earth. But it hasn't been hatched long, nor breathing long, before its nature asserts itself and it rises above earth's gravity. It is the nature of the lark to do that. If a bird doesn't do it, one thing is certain, it isn't a lark. John says that it is the nature of believers who have been born of God to overcome the pressure of the world, and that is why they don't find the keeping of the commandments of God an irksome business.

If someone is born of God, if God really is their Father, that person will *love the Father*. Of course, that doesn't mean that any believer is sinless. We often make mistakes and become conscious that we've grieved the Lord, but it hurts us because we want to love the Father. We naturally love him. It's not put on; it's the expression of a reality that is the very nature of God within our hearts.

Then, if we love the Father we *love all the Father's children*. If we don't love them, it's doubtful whether we belong to the family of God at all. That's John's philosophy and it is an important lesson to be maintained in our modern world, when perhaps we are in danger of seeing much superficial Christianity. People who are Christianized without being born again; people who come into a church because they're in the community, but have never known the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

Peter warns us against this kind of thing. There was a great deal of what we would call *permissiveness* in some of the early Christian churches. Some teachers were teaching believers generally that permissive morality was okay and many were falling for it. They were going head over heels into it, and Peter explains why. 'What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire"' (2 Pet 2:22). I suppose it was rather bold of Peter to refer to a fable like that. It was a Greek fable, as you probably know. I wouldn't be allowed to use it in some countries in Europe, but I think you will allow Peter to quote it to you tonight.

Only a few of the Greeks at that time had private baths in their houses, and they had to go to the public baths. This sow had been watching the ladies of the town go to the baths, and how pretty they were when they came out all clean, in beautiful dresses with their earrings, and what have you. So the sow decided, if these other ladies could look like that, why couldn't she?

So she went to the baths and came out all dressed up and a jewel in her snout. She had been practising walking on her hind legs, so off she went up the street, trying to be the lady she thought she had now become. All went well until she came across a pool of mud and, forgetting all about being a lady, in she went, wallowing in it. Why did she do it? Because, though she'd been cleaned up outside, she had never been changed inside.

We need to listen to the warnings of the apostles, for our modern world is turning back to the pagan permissiveness of the ancient world. It troubled the church then, and it's troubling the church now. We need to be sure that we make the gospel clear. Nothing short of personal regeneration by the Holy Spirit of God is enough to introduce anybody into the family of God. It's cruel to soft pedal that emphasis, because only regeneration can give anybody the power to love God, to do his commandments, to love the people of God, and to overcome the pressure of the world. So John's solution to the problem of the world's pressure is the new birth (see John 3:3–7).

How does the new birth come about?

Everyone who *believes that Jesus is the Christ* has been born of God. (5:1)

But now we come a little bit deeper as we probe the context of these exhortations. If the new birth is so tremendously and basically important, how does it come about? What is the secret of this power to overcome the world?

There are two parts to finding this power:

And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (vv. 4–5)

1. *Our initial faith that Jesus is the Son of God.* The first time we came to see it and believed that Jesus is the Son of God, the initial victory was won. Praise God, that can never be undone. This is the victory that overcame the world, when we realized and believed that Jesus was the Son of God.

2. *Our continual victory in the warfare of life.* Notice the change of tense from the past to the present, 'Who is it that [constantly] overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?'

What is the secret to overcoming the world?

Let us think, therefore, of what John is now saying about the secret of overcoming the world. He doesn't say that it is believing that your sins are forgiven, even though that is important. He doesn't say that it is because you've got a wonderful feeling inside your heart, and you feel at peace. No, of course not. Faith in Christ does bring forgiveness, and you will have peace with God, but there is something more fundamental still.

If Jesus is not the Son of God, I have to tell you that the forgiveness you imagine is all empty talk. It's not real; you're not forgiven. If he is not the Son of God, you can have all the peace in your heart, wonderful feelings and ecstatic experiences, but they are all vain imagination for there is no Christian gospel. It's not just believing in him, though that is exceedingly important and it is the next step; *the absolutely vital first step is that I come to the deep and continuing conviction that Jesus is the Son of God.* That is the secret of overcoming the world.

There is a cost involved

Not to put too fine a point on it, ladies and gentlemen, overcoming the world and keeping the commandments of God, though not irksome, may well be costly.

My bank manager was a Christian, and he came to me once and said, 'Is it wrong for a Christian to be a member of the freemasons?'

Of course, it's wrong; it's sheer idolatry, like Ahab and Jezebel indulged in.

I said, 'Why do you ask?'

'The principals of the bank are putting tremendous pressure on me, saying that I've got to join the freemasons. If I don't join, we shall lose business and I'll miss all chance of promotion.'

He resisted the pressure, but there can be a cost. If Jesus Christ isn't the Son of God, you would be a fool to sacrifice anything for his sake, for there's nothing in Christianity at all. But if he is, we would be absurd fools not to sacrifice everything we've got, if called upon to do it, for the sake of Jesus Christ. As God's Son, he is the creator and owner of all that there is here, and the mighty galaxies that whirl in space, so we have lost nothing. This is the key that's going to determine our lifestyle as believers. We shall have very unhappy lives if we try to live in the twilight between the world and the true following of Christ.

What would you say to someone who says, 'I do believe; I want to go to heaven. I have trusted Jesus to take me there, but I can't afford to live outright for him here and I'm not interested in doing his commandments'? You would say that such a person is failing in his devotion to the Lord.

That is perfectly true, but it would also be true to say that he's failing in his intellect. To say in one breath that Jesus is the Son of God, and then add that he's not prepared to live absolutely flat out for Jesus, is illogical nonsense, an absurdity. For, if he is the Son of God, heir of the Father, inheritor of all things, not to live for him borders on insanity.

If everything depends on whether or not Jesus is the Son of God, I've got to ask a deeper question: How do I know he's the Son of God?

Why do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?

I was in a Bible class not so long ago of delightful young Christian people. They had asked me to talk on 'overcoming'. When I got round to talking about overcoming the world, I cited this verse that the secret is believing that Jesus is the Son of God (5:5). So I put a question to them: 'Why do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?' They were young, and I suppose they hadn't spent a lot of time thinking about that, for I was a long time getting some answers.

'I believe it because the Bible says so,' said someone.

I said, 'That's an excellent reason. And why do you believe the Bible?'

He wasn't quite sure why he believed the Bible, but he said that he did.

If you ask me why I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, I think, in all honesty, my first reply would have to be, 'because my father and mother told me that he was.' Thank God for my father and mother. What they told me was true, so that's a very good reason. Don't ever be ashamed if your mother and father, and your Sunday school teachers, taught you that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Thank God for those dear people, for what they taught you is true.

But if we're going to face this modern world, we shall have to have reasons beyond that for believing that Jesus is the Son of God. We ought to be so aware of our reasons for believing it, that if somebody woke us up in the middle of the night and said, 'Why do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?' we could rattle off the reason.

Could you cite half a dozen reasons? If you can't, my brothers and sisters, and you're going to fight this evil, ungodly, atheistic world, you're like children going out bare-handed against an army with machine guns. It used to grieve me to see bright young Christian people coming up to the university, and to watch their faith being destroyed, inch by inch, because in their churches they'd been content to teach them little stories suitable for the Sunday School, under the plea that young folk can't take deeper stuff. That is a foolish notion. These young folks were studying Physics and Computers in such depths as would stand me on my head. They were coming up unarmed to a university full of atheists, not really knowing why they believe that Jesus is the Son of God, except that believing it had brought them a kind of an emotional experience in their hearts.

Objective evidence for believing that he is the Son of God

What are the evidences, therefore? Of the many, John is led here to cite three:

This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. (5:6–8)

1. He came by water

Notice that. Not, he *went*, but he *came* by water. This is talking of his official coming to Israel. In John's Gospel, great emphasis is put upon our Lord's introduction by John the Baptist. When John the Baptist was asked who he was and what he was doing, he replied:

I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord' . . . among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie . . . This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me' (1:23, 26–27, 30).

He said, 'Actually, in my official capacity as the forerunner, I didn't know who the Messiah would be, but this is my testimony to you. I saw a dove alight and stay on him, in spite of all the surrounding commotion. This was the God-given sign that Jesus is the Son of God' (see vv. 33–34). He didn't just say what would have been true, 'My mother, Elizabeth, and father, Zechariah, told me this.' No, that's a good private reason, but it wouldn't do for a public reason.

Jesus did not come 'climbing up some other way' (see 10:1); he came in fulfilment of the great prophecies of the Old Testament, of which John was one (Isa 40:3; Mal 3:1). John was the one who came to 'prepare the way of the LORD'. It invites us to think of all those prophets, John the Baptist being the last of them, and consider the accumulative evidence that *Jesus Christ fulfilled their ancient prophecies to the full*.

He not only came by water at his baptism . . .

2. *He came by blood*

Notice again that it doesn't say, 'He *went* by blood,' though that in itself is true, but 'he *came* by blood.' Right at the very beginning of his public introduction of the Son of God, John the Baptist said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29). That is, from the very start John was announcing the purpose for which Jesus had come. It was in order to die for the sins of the world. Jesus' death as a sacrifice for sin was not some idea that the early Christian church thought up after they were disappointed because their Lord had been crucified.

He's the only one who has claimed it; no other religious leader has ever said that he came to die as a sacrifice for the sins of the world—there's a very good reason for that. If you had a friend who suddenly announced that he had come to this earth to die as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, I expect your reaction would be to call for a psychiatrist. If it is not true that Jesus came to die as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, then his claim would be a sign of lunacy. But this same Lord Jesus Christ has been responsible for more mental health, peace and calm than all the philosophers put together. This is your unique Jesus Christ.

How do I know he is the Son of God? I see the objective evidence in his introduction to our world by John the Baptist. It was stated right at the very beginning of his ministry that *this was the great purpose for his coming—to die as a sacrifice for sin.*

3. *He came by the testimony of the Spirit*

The Holy Spirit came down from heaven, first and foremost to vindicate the claims of the Lord Jesus, and then to demonstrate that he had been raised from the dead. Therefore, *the Holy Spirit confirmed that he was who he claimed to be.*

Subjective evidence for believing that he is the Son of God

How do I know a loaf of bread is bread that can feed me? Well, I know the difference between a loaf of bread and a piece of concrete, for if I try to bite the concrete it doesn't feed me. When I'm hungry, if I eat a piece of bread it does meet my need. As I survey the world's religions and all the philosophers, I'm still left with my own need as a sinner. It's no good just telling me to be good; I knew that before you told me. My trouble is that I have not been good. How can I find forgiveness in such a way to maintain my own moral values, let alone God's moral values?

It's no good saying, 'We'll forget your sins; just brush them under the carpet. What you've done doesn't matter.'

How would anybody build a paradise on that kind of nonsense? If our sin doesn't matter, then nothing matters. Neither Hinduism nor Buddhism has any answer to the problem. Jesus Christ is the only one who has the answer. Marvellous Saviour, he is unique.

How do I know if I've got this eternal life?

That's the next big thing, isn't it? How do I know if I've got it? Well, not simply by feelings within myself, though, according to John, the person who accepts the testimony of God will receive the testimony of the Holy Spirit within. Paul tells us that 'The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God' (Rom 8:16).

God's moral character

Behind it all is this moral, logical conviction. John says, 'If we receive the testimony of men' (5:9). We do it many a time, although sometimes we are let down. You ring up the airport and say, 'When is such and such a plane leaving?', and they say 'at such and such a time,' but when you get to the airport the airline has made a mistake. In spite of that kind of thing, however, we trust people's testimony.

'If we receive the testimony of men,' says John, 'the testimony of God is greater'. Indeed, if God says something and you don't believe him instantaneously just because he says it, you are bringing into question the moral character of God. In the last analysis, belief is a question of my moral estimate of God's character. Can God lie or can't he? God's testimony is this:

Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (vv. 10–12)

'How do you know it?' you say.

Because God said so; and if we refuse to believe it, it's to make God a liar. You'll not want to live in the same heaven with a God whom you can't believe, will you? So we have to settle what we think of the moral character of God deeply in our hearts, and as we are brought to believe him the devil's lie is undone. The trouble started in Eden when Satan was successful in his slander, and raised the question, 'Did God actually say . . .?' (Gen 3:1). When mankind succumbed to the temptation to disbelieve God, all the other disasters followed. It is only put right when we come to believe God because of his own moral character.

The Lord Jesus is the perfect expression of God

But then John says that there's more to believing that Jesus is the Son of God than that. What exactly does it mean to believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Is it merely that he's the Son of God, in that he is the inheritor of the universe? No, not merely that; though it is that, of course. It means that, as the Son of God, he is the perfect expression of God. You've never seen God, but if you have seen Jesus Christ, you have seen God.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. (v. 20)

'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9). To believe that Jesus is the Son of God is to believe that he is the telling out of the very heart of God, the manifestation of the love of God. To see him is to see exactly what God is like, and what a wonderful thing that is.

The manifestation of the love of God in the Son of God

So, finally, let us consider what the love of God is like as we have seen it revealed in Jesus Christ. As we see it, we shall find something else happening to us—but more of that shortly.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. *In this the love of God was made manifest* among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. *In this is love*, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:7–11)

John talks here about the manifestation of the love of God, from two points of view.

'In this the love of God was made manifest'—here was the outward demonstration of the love of God.

'In this is love'—here is the basic underlying principle and cost of God's love.

When you were a child, you pleaded with your parents to have, say, a bicycle for Christmas. It was in the bad old days of the Depression and you could see that they loved you when they gave you a bicycle. But it wasn't until you yourself were grown up and married, and hit bad times in the family that you thought about it. 'You know, I didn't understand it at the time, but that must have cost Dad and Mum. I remember that Mum wore the same dress for a long time. Providing bicycles for us cost a lot of money.' You begin to perceive the underlying cost: you first saw the manifestation of their love, and then you came to appreciate the cost.

'In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him' (v. 9). This is God's manifestation of love. Friends, what a magnificent exhibition it is. Tell me, what would you like God to do to manifest to you that he loves you.

And you say, 'Well, I think I'd like him to give me a job. That's what I would like just now, if he really loves me.'

Yes, that would be good. What if he gave you a galaxy one of these days, not just one world, but a whole galaxy full of suns and planets? Would that convince you that God loved you? Think for a moment. God's got so many galaxies, he wouldn't miss one or two; like a millionaire, giving you an ice cream.

God's not in the business of bribing you. Satan tried to say that God had bribed Job with sons and daughters, and houses, fields, wealth, health, and everything else.

'Ha,' said Satan, 'of course the man says he loves you and he doesn't mind singing a few choruses about it. Take away his goods, and he'll curse you to your face.'

God's not in the business of bribing us. If it would do us any good, he'd give us half a dozen galaxies. As a reward for your faithful work, maybe one day he'll give you a few galaxies to look after.

He gives us himself

That's not bribery; no one could ever accuse God of bribery. He gave his only Son, his own very life, that we might live through him. What a magnificent God you have, and not only does he share his heaven and his universe with you, he shares his very self with you. That's love.

Consider the cost of it. We made it very difficult for God to love us; well, I did. To start with, we didn't love him (v. 10). He had to take the initiative, and then we made it mighty

difficult, for God is holy and our sin was repulsive to him. Every time he thought of our sin it stirred his divine displeasure. How could he come anywhere near us? Consider what it cost God to love us. To overcome the difficulty that his holiness found, he sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins and exhaust the wrath of God that was against us. What a magnificent God, and what an exhibition of his love.

We ought to love one another

I can tell you what's going on in your heart. If you are a believer and you think again of the manifestation of the love of God, aren't you saying to yourself instinctively, 'I would like to love like that'? And that's what John is saying, 'Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another' (v. 11).

You see, if God loved us and we love him, we have a bounden duty to love one another. You may find it exceedingly difficult to love the Englishman in front of you, but if you're Christians you must overcome all the difficulties I present to you.

A man said a very funny thing to me the other day.

'We can't hold a church prayer meeting.'

I said, 'Why can't you?'

He said, 'We should only get ten people there.'

I said, 'That's interesting. How many have you got in your church?'

'One hundred.'

'Why don't they come to the prayer meeting?'

'There's a lot of old fogeys at the prayer meeting.'

I don't know whether they would include themselves in that statement or not.

My dear young folks, if the old folks in your assembly are old fogeys, you'll have to learn to overcome any distaste it might produce in you. God had to overcome your sin to come near and save you. If you profess that God loved you like that, you will find a desire in your heart to love your fellow Christians, in spite of any natural revulsion that you might feel against them because they're old and you're young, you're modern and they're ancient, or whatever it is. If we don't admit our duty to love one another like Christ has loved us, it raises the question of whether we have realized what the love of God is.

How do we know that God is real?

John raises the problem, 'No one has ever seen God' (v. 12). How do we perceive the love of God, and how is that love perfected within us? You can't see God; he's not visible. And when we get home to heaven at last, we shall not see three Gods, each one sitting on a throne. There is one God, and no one has seen him. How do we know God is real and that he is in us? Because we find that we begin to love one another, and while we cannot see God with our natural eye there is a spiritual perception of the love of God.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. (vv. 13-14)

My dear Christian friends, in the dying moments of these meditations, come once more with me to Calvary. Who is on that centre cross, and what is he doing? What do you see? The world nowadays sees very little. Some would say, 'It's the death of a martyr.' But you see more, don't you?

'Yes,' you say, 'thank God I see it. That's God incarnate there, the Son of God. He was sent by the Father to save me.'

Your very heaven will depend on your seeing it.

'We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.' In seeing it, you feel the very love of God mounting up within you, don't you? It has got through to you and into you. I nearly said, against your will. Not quite, but it will proceed to change you, and others through you. That's how we know it's real.

'By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgement, because as he is so also are we in this world' (v. 17). It is true positionally: Christ is in glory, accepted with God. If my faith is in him, I am just as accepted with God as he is, though I'm still in this world. It is true practically: failing as we are, if eternal life is real, there is already a sense in which we are like him. He loved us and expressed God's love to us; in turn we are finding within us the power and the desire to love God and keep his commandments.

We boast of nothing; we didn't take the initiative. 'We love because he first loved us' (v. 19). We want to keep his commandments; we don't find them an irksome bore. If we do, or if we try to get round them, and say, 'That's only Paul,' or, 'that was only the social conditions of the time, and we don't have to obey holy Scripture,' then it begins to raise very serious questions as to whether we have been born again at all. That is John's argumentation. We need to be realistic before God in our day.

Listen to John as he closes his exhortations.

'He is the true God and eternal life' (5:20)—this is the real thing, and this is how it works. 'Little children,' says he, 'keep yourselves from idols' (v. 21)—false gods, that seem to be the real thing, and are not.

An idol is something that we love rather than God; something that we trust instead of trusting God. God give us the wisdom to make sure that what we've got is the real thing: the true God and eternal life working out in our lives by his grace. When we fail, let us come boldly to the throne of grace and confess our sins, and, by seeking the Lord's mercy and an increase of his grace within us, show that we are genuine people of God.

APPENDIX 1

Three Creation Stories in Genesis

I. The First Creation Story (1:1–2:3)

- A. Creation, not all at once, but in a progressive series of creative acts: *and God said* (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). Creation by the word of God.
- B. Not only creation but organization (1:4–5, 7–8, 9–10, 14–18, 26–28).
- C. Creation as distinct from subsequent maintenance and development (2:1–3).
- D. The pinnacle of the series: man, made in God's image, to be God's 'viceroy' (1:26–29).

II. The Second Creation Story (2:4–4:26)

The Generations of A. The Heavens; B. The Earth (2:4)

- 1. Unifying theme: the ground (2:5–7, 9, 19; 3:17, 19, 23; 4:2–3, 10–12, 14).
 - a. Man's substance: out of the ground (2:5–7; 3:19).
 - b. Man's function: to till the ground (2:5, 15; 3:23).
 - c. The curse upon Adam: 'cursed is the ground because of you; . . . till you return to the ground' (3:17–19, 23).
 - d. The curse upon Cain: 'you are cursed from the ground': Cain forfeits his *raison d'être* (4:11).

NB: the difference between the curse pronounced on Adam and that pronounced on Cain:

Adam: 'cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; . . . By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, . . .' (3:17–19).

Cain: 'Now you are cursed from the ground, . . . When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. . . . Cain said to the LORD, ". . . Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden"' (4:11–14).
- 2. Descriptions of what life means:
 - a. man's 'basic materials': a material body and a non-material soul (2:7)
 - b. function, employment, work (2:5, 15)
 - c. aesthetic sense (2:8–9)
 - d. potential knowledge of moral values (2:9)
 - e. ability to sin and moral responsibility to God (2:16–17)
 - f. relationship to animals (2:19)
 - g. faculty of language (2:19–20)
 - h. man-woman relationship (2:20–25)
 - i. music (4:21)

- j. metal-work (4:22)
- k. lyric (4:23–24)
- 3. The meaning of 'life' and 'death'; the fall, its effect and consequences; sacrifice and the values it protects.

III. The Third Creation Story (5:1–9:29)

The Generations of A. Adam (5:1–6:8); B. Noah (6:9–9:29)

- A. Begins: This is the book of the generations of MAN
 - 1. Hebrew *adam* means:
 - a. The name of the species i.e. man, human being
 - b. The name of the first male human being, Adam
 - 2. In 5:1–2 *adam* = human being. NB. 'he blessed them and named them Man (*adam*) when they were created.'
 - 3. So in 6:1–7:
 - a. 'man began to multiply' (6:1)
 - b. 'daughters of man' = female human beings (6:2, 4)
 - c. 'My Spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh' (6:3)
 - d. 'the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth' (6:6)
 - e. 'I will blot out man . . . man and animals' (6:7)
- B. The development of the human race from Adam:
 - 1. man's constitution: spirit and flesh (6:3)
 - 2. man's perversion (6:1–6)
 - 3. the nature and effect of man's destruction by water (6:13; 7:23)
 - 4. the means of man's salvation: the ark (6:13; 7:23)
 - 5. cf. the leading terms of 1 Peter 3:17–4:6: flesh and spirit
- C. The new beginning for the human race in Noah (6:9):
 - 1. sacrifice: the basis of security (8:15–22)
 - 2. the new mandate (8:15–9:17)
 - 3. the covenant and its token rainbow (9:8–17)
 - 4. Noah's indiscretion (9:20–29)

The section ends with the death of Noah (9:29)

APPENDIX 2

Outline of The First Epistle by John

| 1:1–2:29 | 3:1–4:6 | 4:7–5:21 |
|---|---|--|
| THE MANIFESTATION of the LIFE OF GOD 1:2 | THE MANIFESTATION of the SONS OF GOD and of THE CHILDREN OF GOD 3:2, 8 | THE MANIFESTATION of the LOVE OF GOD 4:9 |
| Profession of fellowship with God tested by: | Profession of being a child of God tested by: | Divine love and life shown in: |
| a. right behaviour 1:5–2:6 b. true love 2:7–17 c. correct doctrine 2:18–29 | a. right behaviour 3:1–12 b. true love 3:13–24 c. correct doctrine 4:1–6 | a. the love 4:7–21 b. the obedience 5:1–4 c. the faith of God’s children 5:5–21 |
| THE WORLD and its attractiveness drawing the heart away from the Father 2:15–17 | THE WORLD and its hatred of the children of God 3:13–15 | THE WORLD makes it difficult to keep God’s commandments 5:3–4 |
| WARNING AGAINST FALSE CHRISTS 2:18–29 | WARNING AGAINST FALSE CHRISTS 4:1–6 | WARNING AGAINST FALSE CHRISTS 5:18–21 |

Some purposes John had in writing this epistle:

| | | |
|----|---|---------------|
| 1. | Fellowship | 1:3 |
| 2. | Joy | 1:4 |
| 3. | Holiness | 2:1 |
| 4. | Safeguard from deception | 2:26 |
| 5. | Overcoming | 2:13, 14; 5:5 |
| 6. | Assurance of the possession of eternal life | 5:9–13 |

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING was Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.