

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 72

CONCLUSION

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Transcript

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CONCLUSION

Our happy task is finished, and it is with a real sense of regret that we take up our pen to add an appendix. Before he commenced this commentary the author devoted ten years of special study to John's Gospel, having gone through it three times in the course of as many pastorates, and since then he has taught it in different Bible classes. For six years more we have labored hard in preparing a chapter each month. Over forty commentaries and expositions have been read through and their interpretations of each verse carefully weighed, and the endeavor has been made to supplement our own searchings by culling from them what struck us as being most helpful. Amid many labors and calls upon our time, our gracious God has enabled us to continue and complete this Exposition of John's Gospel, and it is with fervent thanksgiving to Him that we begin these concluding paragraphs. The instruction, the help and blessing which we have received personally, while preparing each chapter, has been a rich compensation for the time, prayer, and work we have put into them. Our own faith in the inerrancy and perfection of the Scriptures has been strengthened, and the conviction we had at the outset, that every verse contains a mine of spiritual wealth, has been confirmed again and again. That our production is very far from being perfect we are fully aware; but such as it is, we lay it before the Lord, and humbly entreat Him to use, own, and bless it to many of His dear people. One of our aims in prosecuting this work has been to stimulate others to the personal study of the Word. The Bible is not only a book to be read devotionally, but it is also a mine of spiritual riches to be worked (Prov. 2:1-5), and the more diligently we seek after its hidden treasures, the greater will be our reward. God does not place a premium on laziness. His call is, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Alas! most of His people have never been taught how to study. In this work we have sought to suggest one method which we have personally found to be very beneficial—the interrogative method: asking the Bible questions, drawing up a list on each passage as a preliminary to its careful examination. The point at which so many readers of the Bible fail the worst is that of concentration. Their energies are scattered too much. Suppose a man inherited a thousand acres of arable land, and that he found it impossible to hire laborers. It would be useless for him attempting to farm the whole piece. But if he fenced off, say, five acres, devoted himself to this small section, and went in for intensive farming, he

would be far more likely to succeed. It is thus with the Bible. While every Christian ought to read three or four chapters daily, and thus go through it once each year; it is impossible to really study the whole of it within the brief span of a life-time. In addition to extensive reading, there should be intensive study. Pray for guidance in your selection and then concentrate on a single book or chapter. If the Christian reader would spend fifteen minutes each day for a whole year on a single chapter—say, Exodus 12, Matthew 13, John 17, Romans 8, or Ephesians 1—he would, most probably, be surprised at the fruitful results. The necessity and the importance of concentration and its invaluable returns are realized by but few. If sixty-six Spirit-taught Bible expositors would each of them concentrate on one book in the Bible, devoting the whole of their special studies to it for ten years, at the end of that time (should the Lord not return before) the people of God at large would be enriched immeasurably. No one man is competent to write on all the books of Scripture; that is why the condensed commentaries on the Bible as a whole are so disappointing and comparatively worthless. Do not be too ambitious, dear friend. Aim at quality rather than quantity. One chapter thoroughly studied will yield more to your soul than a hundred chapters which are read but not studied. Again, other students of Scripture fail through their lack of perseverance. Because a passage does not open up to them at the first or second examination of it, they become discouraged. God often tests our earnestness. It is not the dilatory, but the diligent soul that is made fat (Prov. 13:4). "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him" (Ps. 37:7) applies as much to Bible-study as it does to prayer. Regular, persistent stick-to-itiveness (to use a word of Spurgeon's) is what counts. Note how one of the marks of the good-ground hearers is that they "bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. When Jehovah gave food to His people Israel in the wilderness, He did not furnish them with loaves ready made. Instead, He sent them manna as "a small round thing" (Ex. 16:14). Much time and labor were required to gather a sufficient quantity for a day's supply. After the gathering, it had to be "ground" and then "baked." This was a parable in action. It has a voice for us to-day. The way in which most of us learn is precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little" (Isa. 28:10). Be not disheartened, then, if you appear to get small returns from your Scriptural labors. No time spent in the prayerful study of the Word is ever really lost. To familiarize yourself with the letter of it counts for something, and later (if you keep at it) you will reap the benefit. Oftentimes Christians are almost discouraged when the Spirit of God enables a well-instructed scribe to bring out of his treasures things new and old. They say, "I have read that passage again and again, but never saw such beauties in it as he has pointed out, or such wonders as he has brought forth." Ah! you may not realize that, probably, he has given that passage special study for years past, that he has prayed over it scores of times, that he examined it again and again and saw no more in it than you did till, ultimately, God rewarded his patience, and now he rejoices as one that "findeth great spoil" (Ps. 119:162). But something more is needed than concentration and perseverance. We may focalize our attention, be very diligent and patient, but unless the Holy Spirit illumines our understanding, the wonders and beauties of the Word will remain hidden from us. The Bible is addressed not so much to the intellect as it is to the heart. Prayer is an essential prerequisite. Before we open the Bible we need, every time, to get down on our knees and humbly beseech God, for Christ's sake, to "open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. 119:18). Mysteries of grace which are hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed to "babes," i.e., the simple, humble, dependent ones. It is written, "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach His way" (Ps. 25:9). Have no confidence in your own powers: remember that "a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven" (John 3:27). Yet God is ever ready to give to those who ask in faith. When the chapter for your study has been selected, begin by asking, What is there here for my own soul?—what warnings, what encouragements, what exhortations, what promises? Examine it first of all from the practical standpoint, with a view to your own personal needs. Ask God to

make the passage speak unto your own soul, and to grant you the hearing ear. Next, and closely related to the former, in fact seeking God's answer to your first question, ask, What is there here about Christ? What is there that I can learn about Him, what example has He here left me, what perfections of His are portrayed, what typical picture of Him can I discover? From this, pass on to its evangelical message, its gospel bearing. Ask, What does this chapter teach me about sin, about the depravity of man, about the grace of God, about the way of salvation, about the blessedness of the redeemed? Every chapter in the Bible leads, ultimately, to Calvary. Then you may ponder its doctrinal bearings, its theological instruction. This will require you to look up marginal references from parallel passages. Ask, What is there here about the sovereignty of God, or the responsibility of man? What of the important truths of justification, sanctification, propitiation, preservation, glorification? This will require you to note the setting of the chapter which you are studying—its relation to those which precede and which follow; its bearing on the other chapters in the Epistle. These are but hints, yet if heeded, Bible-study will cease to be an irksome duty and become a profitable delight. It is from these angles that the writer has endeavored to examine each chapter in the Gospel of John, and these are the methods which, under God, he has found yield the best results. In addition to the general principles of study named above, we have also sought to give attention to some of the laws which regulate the interpretation of the Scriptures. God is a God of order, and the God of creation and the God of written revelation are one and the same. Just as we may discern "laws of Nature," so are there "laws of the Bible." Some of these have been pointed out during the course of our exposition: the laws of first mention, of progressive unfolding, of comparison and contrast, of parallelism, of numerics, etc. In connection with the spiritual arithmetic of the Bible we have been deeply impressed with the constantly recurring seven in the Gospel of John, and it is surely not without significance that there are twenty-one chapters or 3×7 , in it. It is true that the chapter divisions are of human origin, and that man does nothing perfectly, yet we believe that in the providence of Him who has "magnified his word above all his name" (Ps. 138:1, 2), He has not only superintended the placing of the different books in the Canon of Scripture, but has also guided, or at least overruled, many or most of its chapter divisions. Obviously is this so, we are fully assured, in connection with the Gospels. Matthew has twenty-eight chapters, 7×4 . Now, four is the number of the earth and seven of perfection. How appropriate that the Gospel which most directly concerns God's earthly people and the earthly kingdom of Christ, should be thus divided; for no perfection on earth will be witnessed until the Son of Man returns and sets up His throne upon it. Mark has sixteen chapters, 2×8 . Two is the number of witness and eight of a new beginning. Most suitably are those numbers here, for in this second Gospel Christ is portrayed as the faithful and true Witness, the perfect Servant of God, laying the foundations of the new creation. Luke has twenty-four chapters, 6×4 , or 2×12 . Whichever way we divide the twenty-four, the result is in striking accord with the subject of this third Gospel. In Luke Christ is presented as the Son of man, the last Adam. Thus 6×4 would speak of man connected with the earth; or, 12×2 would tell of that perfect government which awaits the return to this earth of the "second Man" (1 Cor. 15:47). John has twenty-one chapters, 7×3 . How striking this is! For seven speaks of perfection and three is the number of Deity. Thus, the very number of chapters in this fourth Gospel intimates that here we have revealed the perfections of God! These are what have occupied us as we have gone through it chapter by chapter. Everything in Scripture, clown to the minutest detail, has a profound significance. Of course it has, for its Author is Divine. The same God who has expended so much care over the formation and adaptation of every member of our physical bodies—e.g., the eye or the hand—has not devoted less to that Word which is to endure forever. In the Bible God has written a Book worthy of Himself. If this fact be firmly grasped, the devout student will expect to find in every passage depths, wonders, beauties, such as only the Allwise could produce. But let it not be forgotten that the Inspirer of Holy Writ alone can interpret it to us. To the reader who has, under

God, been helped and blest by this Exposition, we would say, Do everything in your power to make this work known to others. You owe it to your fellow-Christians so to do. Why should not many of them be instructed and gladdened, too? These books are not published as a commercial venture. The demand for this class of literature is tragically small. It takes from five to ten years to sell sufficient for the publisher to get back the bare costs of printing and binding. Nor is advertising of much avail. It is the personal word that counts. If you can do so conscientiously, earnestly recommend these volumes both by word of mouth and by letters, to your Christian friends, to your Pastor, to Sunday school teachers and other Christian workers. Bear them in mind when making a present to a friend. Another good way of interesting others is to loan your own copies, thus others may be induced to purchase for themselves. And now, dear reader, my work in composing this commentary and yours in going through it (the first time, at least) is now finished; but there remains the improvement which ought to be made of it, and the account which must yet be given to God, for He "requireth that which is past" (Ecclesiastes 3:15). It is by attending to the former that we shall be prepared for the latter. I have not written for the sake of providing mere religious entertainment, and we trust that you have read with some higher motive than simply to fill in a few spare hours. Unless each of our hearts has been drawn out in warmer love, deeper devotion, and purer worship unto Him whose manifold glories give lustre to every page of Holy Writ; unless the result of our studies of John's Gospel leads both writer and reader to clearer visions of and more whole-hearted obedience unto the Word made flesh, our labors have been in vain.

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