

The Book of John

The Essence of Jesus



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Gerard Meerstadt

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Cover illustration

Pompeo Batoni (1708-1787) - Saint John the Evangelist - 266912 -

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I chose this historically incorrect picture because, without caring about the reality of John as a bearded old man, Pompeo Batoni captured the spirit of John, youthful and inspired, looking up to the guidance of Jesus to write what he shows him. The eagle sits next to him as a symbol of wisdom and sharp vision.

To the reader

In our time it is more urgent than ever to know the truth about the world we live in and where it is going. Many ages ago the truth about our world and its future has been written down in the scriptures of the new testament, the part of the Bible that tells us about Jesus Christ and his mission on earth. The old testament, the larger part of the Bible, was a precursor to the revelation of the truth in the New Testament.

This most important message has been opposed throughout the ages and cleverly hidden by the powerful opponents of this truth. They could not destroy the message itself, so it has been surrounded with complicated theology and religious tradition in order to obscure it.

The message is essential for every person on earth and needs to be understood simply and clearly. Many religious people have no clear picture of what the simple and powerful message is. It cannot be grasped through religion, for the message itself has no need for religion, which has mainly worked as a distraction.

Reading all of the new testament can be a lot of work for someone who wants to zoom in directly on the essence of the truth, and maybe later on wants to read the peripheral things that may become meaningful in the light of that core message.

So what do we need, to grasp the full truth of the message without going into too much detail? Can we zoom in directly on the essence of the message and the person of Jesus Christ? Yes that is possible, as it should be with a message that is supposed to be simple and clear. We can

do so with help of the works of Jesus' closest friend on earth, his disciple John.

John wrote his book about the revelation by Jesus Christ in old age at the close of the first century. It is the last book of the new testament and looks ahead into the future where everything and everyone will be united under God in total love and freedom, something that still lies in our future today.

After the book of Revelation, he wrote his account of Jesus' life here on earth. By that time, the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke on the life of Jesus had been around for several decades. So what was still lacking that made John write his version? What was it that John wanted to emphasise about Jesus? Or, better said, what was it that Jesus wanted him to emphasise?

John writes his story to show us one thing: That this man Jesus was actually the son of God. And that he came to earth to free the whole human race from sin and death. When we can grasp that, the rest will follow effortlessly. By carefully studying the life story of Jesus, as John has written it down, we come to see what it really means that Jesus is the son of God, an insight and realisation that induces our personal transformation.

Being able to believe Jesus' claim makes all the difference. It will teleport us into a new reality, in which a new behaviour will follow from that change in perception. It means a transformation from death to life by one single deep realisation.

That personal transformation, entering into a new reality, is the purpose of this 'book of John - the Essence of Jesus'. The sequel to this book is the 'book of Revelation As It Is',

which takes us through the general transformation of the whole world as it will change from darkness to light. With these two books you will be introduced to all of the essence of the centuries old story of God and mankind, which is about to find its fulfilment in a not too far away future. And on top of that, our personal transformation will be immediate, it doesn't have to wait for anything other than our own readiness.

The story of Jesus, as written by John, covered in these two books, is a radical story. It cuts right through to the essence. Knowing, understanding and believing these two accounts from the new testament, with some additional contributions from the apostle Paul, is enough to know the magnificent truth about our life and become fully part of it. For people in our fast moving age with an overload of information coming at us, this is the short track to come to the relevant life saving knowledge that is available to us if we search for it and are not easily diverted from our intention.

Gerard Meerstadt, September 26, 2020

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The startling truth

Some people believe that our life is temporary; when you die, the story is over. Others believe that at the death of the body, the soul, the actual conscious person, lives on and enters a new phase of its eternal journey.

Neither of these things is taught by Jesus Christ. He shows us surprisingly that eternal life is optional. Optional? Yes, some people will have eternal life and others won't. And the choice is ours. Not having eternal life has been our default state that we inherited from our parents. When we die we stop existing. Death is the absence of life, of any form of consciousness. Personal intervention by Jesus was required to provide us with the second option, which is eternal life, for everyone who wants to, including those that have already died. How can that be? Just read on.

Eternal life is not something we can earn or attain through our own action, however hard we would try to achieve it. It is a free gift of our loving creator, that is offered to us without any strings attached. In fact, all it takes is that we believe this to be true. And that's where the catch comes in. How can we believe that this is true?

Jesus has already opened up the possibility to have eternal life for every person, the job has already been done and he invites all humans to come and share in it. Now it is up to us to accept the invitation and live our lives from this new perspective. It does not require that we are 'good' people, for in our present state nobody is good enough to attain it by merit.

John shows us, in his description of Jesus' life on earth, who he really is and with what purpose he was among

us. And it all comes down to two things, of which the first is that we may believe that he actually is the son of God, not an ordinary human, but the great creator, who, in his Father's name, has made everything that is. John introduces him as the phenomenal power through which everything that exists has come into being. In modern terms we could say he is the programmer of the reality that we live in. This is an important clue to our understanding and thus believing.

He created the universe, life on our planet, our ancestors and all the processes that maintain life on earth. This immense power, which acts out of universal love, had a compelling reason to come to us, to enter the reality he has made himself, to be born as a human child, growing up to be a perfect human, to help us overcome death, something we could never achieve on our own.

The second reason he lived among us, which we can understand if we acknowledge the first, was to give his perfect human life as a ransom, in the name of mankind, to free us from the acquired bonds of sin and death and restore for us the eternal life that had been intended from the beginning. How this can be is also explained in the story of Jesus, as written by John.

So this is a story that goes far beyond everyday subjects. And we will see how most people would not believe Jesus, would reject him and demand for him to be sentenced to death.

Ever since his presence on earth there has been a fierce opposition towards the simple loving truth of Jesus, many layers of deception have been built around it, as to hide it from us in plain sight. Religious empires have been built around it, while none of their contribution is

needed, materialistic science has been developed to deny his truth, and many more hurdles have been erected to direct searchers for truth into blind alleys. So, we may have some work on our hands to be able to come to the simple acceptance of his gift to us.

On the other hand, Jesus wants us to find his truth and accept his invitation for eternal life, so he will help us as soon as we resonate from within with the truth that he presents.

This truth is plain and simple and here for us to discover and make our own. As soon as we accept his invitation into this new reality, the world around us will change, we will live in the same space, but from a new perspective of eternal life, with truth as our intent and love as our main driver. That changes everything!

In the beginning

(read John chapter 1, the whole book of John is in the appendix)

John doesn't start his story of Jesus with his birth as a child. No, he deliberately approaches the situation from the other side! He starts his introduction with the Word of God. The Word was with God, it exists in his presence, and the Word was God, of the same nature as God himself.

In the original Greek language God is being called 'the God' (ho Theos), and the Word is called 'God' (Theos), without the article 'the'. This illustrates well that the Word directly emanates from God and is an expression of his essence.

This is the text in the World English Bible (WEB)

John 1: 1,2

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

In English it appears to be a confusing statement, but in Greek, with the article visible, the difference between 'the God' and the Word is evident:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with **'the God'**, and the Word was **'God'**. The same was in the beginning with **'the God'**.*

In our search for the exact meaning of a scripture, we can find the answer to many questions in the original Greek texts.

Who or what then, is the Word? John continues:

John 1: 3

All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made.

First there is God, he is the source of all, also of the Word. The Word then created everything that exists and all that is alive. So we can justly call the Word the creator of everything, be it on behalf of God, with the power that God has given him. One could say that after bringing forth the Word, God delegated the rest of creation to him. A little further on in the book John will use the terms father and son for God and the Word.

John 1: 4,5

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness hasn't overcome it.

As we see, the Word is presented as a person here, a powerful creator, with life in himself that was the light of men. Our life comes directly from him. We could see him as the programmer of our reality, comparable to a computer virtual reality that also has a programmer. As the creator he is outside of this world, but he defines all the rules by which it operates. So he is truly the source of this world.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness hasn't overcome it.

These words refer to what has happened after the creation of the world, where everything was perfect. Angels and humans were created in God's image with a free will, the freedom to follow the path of the light, or to choose any other path they wanted. In a perfect world God certainly wanted to have a creation that is really free, with

free choice and a personal responsibility. Their whole life would be a voluntary life, with everything in place to make it a wonderful experience.

That also implied uncertainty about what they would do, which path they would follow. As a consequence some angels have fallen away from the light and have dragged the first humans along with them into a path of darkness. Thus they introduced darkness into the world, which was inescapable for mankind, because the offspring of the first humans came forth after their descent into darkness, without the possibility to return to that perfect path of light and life.

While the human race was intended to live in the light, without death, they have fallen into a situation in which they could not evade death and were lost in a world of darkness, with no escape by their own means possible. That is why the prophets of old, those who have been shown future events in advance, had foretold that the Word itself would come into this world he had made, as the true light in the darkness, to free the human race from their prison of darkness and death and put them back on the road to life and light. And now, in the book of John, this is about to happen.

John 1: 6-8

There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. The same came as a witness, that he might testify about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but was sent that he might testify about the light.

This is not John, the writer of this book, this is John the Baptist, who came to baptize the people in water as a sign

of repentance, in preparation of the coming of the light, that they might recognize the light as such when it would come.

John 1: 9-11

The true light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own, and those who were his own didn't receive him.

John starts his story about the light by revealing how it would end. The world would not recognize its own maker, would let this unique opportunity for a direct encounter slip by. They would not receive him. How sad is this, what an enormous misunderstanding must have been at the basis of this.

There is so much relevance in this little piece of text, that we can hardly grasp it as we read it. The people were dwelling in darkness, without any hope to escape from it on their own. And then this one comes, the true light, to deliver everybody from the bonds of darkness. What he is about to do, will open the way for everybody alive and who has ever lived, to return to the light. But yet they would not recognize him.

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world didn't recognize him.

We, the people, don't recognise our own creator, who wants us to enter the light of life, return home to the much higher plane that we were intended to live on.

He came to his own, and those who were his own didn't receive him.

Because of the dark condition of their mind, 'his own' did not receive him. But he, the true light, does certainly not come in vain. He enlightens everyone, so from that moment on all people would have the opportunity and the ability to come to the light, which was not possible before. But they would have to receive him in order to profit from his presence.

John 1: 12, 13

But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God's children, to those who believe in his name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Imagine what John says here, whoever receives him, which means, acknowledges him as the light that comes to liberate us, he has given the right to become children of God! These are born of God, he says. Human powers cannot establish this, but God himself accepts us as his children if we recognise and receive the light that has come into the world. Then we are born of God, like a new birth, with a new perspective!

John 1: 14-17

The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John testified about him. He cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me, for he was before me.'" From his fullness we all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

Now John reveals to us how the Word, the light of the world, came to us. He became flesh and lived among us! He transformed himself into a human being. Now he is also called the one and only Son of the Father. He turns out to be not only the Word of God, but also the Son of God. That is why he was also called 'God', but not God himself, not 'the God', as we saw in the beginning of the book.

And now John the Baptist reveals to us the human identity of the Word, of the Son of the Father. It is the man Jesus, also called the Christ, the anointed one, for he was anointed for a special assignment here on earth.

This is such a big truth that John shares with us here. 'The word became flesh', or in our normal language, the power that created the whole universe has become human and has lived among us.

This is John's narrative about the background of the man Jesus, he is not presented as just 'a good person', or a prophet, or a saint. He is an entity of far greater significance than we can imagine, who comes down to our level to liberate us from a dark pit of death and fear, from which we could never escape by ourselves.

This world is still living in that dark state now, but individuals can escape from it, ever since the time of Jesus opening the way. Eventually all the world will make that transition, but first individuals will come, through all ages, including now.

'He is full of grace and truth'. His grace is his love for us, regardless of what we do, a love because we are his creation. He knows the imperfect state we are in and he loves to see us happy. He understands that we stumble

daily in our good intentions. He looks beyond those things and has come to us to release us from the burden that we carry along in our lives.

For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

The law that God gave to the Israelites through Moses, was a perfect law and that was the reason no one of the imperfect people could live up to it. They couldn't keep that law, so it did not lead to freedom for them but to judgment. The law makes us aware of sin, said Paul, without the law there would be no definition of sin.

About the concept of 'sin'

The word 'sin' has become so loaded with incorrect meaning in religion, that its real meaning needs some clarification. Sin is a general condition to which all people are subjected, it is the cause of death, and everybody dies. We are all 'under sin'. It relates to our imperfect nature, our inability to do the good things we want to do, our weaknesses, our repeatedly falling back to doing things we do not wish to do. So in the scriptural sense everybody is a sinner, not only the thieves, liars and fornicators, but also the people who are examples to their communities, who do many good works and are known for their unconditional love and helpfulness. All of mankind has to be raised from this condition to a much higher level of life and fulfilment than we are experiencing now.

Thus by means of the law of Moses, people were made aware of sin, but they were not set free from it.

And now 'grace and truth' come to us through Jesus Christ. What a giant leap ahead for all of mankind, for the grace and truth were not just for the Israelites, who lived under the law of Moses, but for all people.

The grace means that through our faith in Christ in his role as our liberator, we are accepted as children of God. For the time being we will remain in our imperfect nature, but we will no longer be held accountable for it, because now we are born of God, we are a new creature. We are considered as being without sin, while yet we remain in our imperfect, sinful, body. We no longer identify with it! But it is still there and that is an issue that can be troublesome for many.

This 'grace and truth' makes a very relevant and decisive difference in our lives. Many people are held back by the guilt and shame they feel for the things they have done wrong in their lives. In many ways they have been taught that they are not good enough to receive God's love and have started to believe this through repetition. The burden of guilt through sin is very common among the peoples of the earth. Religion and cultural beliefs have played a big role in this.

Through his grace Jesus actually says, I know you are imperfect, that you make mistakes and misjudgments, that people may feel that you have hurt them, but all these things are inherent to your present nature. They will be forgiven you, you do not have to feel guilty about them anymore. So even while you will make these kinds of mistakes again tomorrow, you may feel free of them and be a child of God anyhow, and let your spirit be lifted up by that truth, not be bogged down by the notion of sin and guilt.

And the truth has come through Jesus. He explained who God is, how everything is fitted together and how the world will grow towards the intended state of perfection, and how everybody can be part of that world, just by

wanting it, seeing it for the reality that it is, and keep acting accordingly.

John 1: 18

No one has seen God at any time. The one and only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.

The only way in which we can truly get to know God is through the Son, who has lived on earth as the man Jesus and who has taught us. He shows in his own being who God is. They are so much one that further ahead in the story Jesus says "Who has seen me has seen the Father, for the Father and I are one." This means that studying the life and teaching of Jesus and practicing his ways, will bring us in close contact with God, our Father.

The story continues as John the Baptist is at the water to baptize people and Jesus comes to him.

John 1: 29

The next day, he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world!"

John the Baptist makes this enormously profound statement. "*Behold, the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world!*" Just think about the history of the world, where sin and imperfection have reigned, under the loveless manipulations of the fallen angels, the millions of people who have died through violence and famine, the enormous exploitation and slavery, all those horrible circumstances, that are only increasing in our day, from which no man can deliver us, and then see how indescribably valuable that one line is . . . '*the lamb . . . that takes away the sin of the world!*' . . .

Here he comes walking toward John, 'the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world!' Just think about that, nobody can deliver us from the increasing misery on earth, nothing has ever had a lasting effect, and now Jesus has come to establish a world without sin, where nobody will do any harm and nobody will be unhappy or lonely. If we can really come to see that this statement is actually true in this life, then we will be utterly thrilled by this prospect.

This must be the greatest gift that humanity has ever received! And why is Jesus called the lamb of God? Because the literal lamb, that was sacrificed yearly by the Israelites to atone for their sins, was foreshadowing the sacrifice that Jesus would bring, giving his own life to liberate the people from sin and death. Why and how he saved mankind by this specific act is a theme that needs proper explanation, which will follow in a later stage in this story.

John does not mention that Jesus had come to John the Baptist weeks before, to be baptized himself too. We know that from the other reports about Jesus' life. First John refused to baptize him, for as a perfect human being he had no reason to repent. Jesus had not been conceived by a father and a mother in the natural way, he was born from a virgin by Divine intervention, in order not to be a descendant of Adam, born under sin, but yet to be a true human being. The reason for all of this is that it required a human being not born under sin, but completely equal to Adam, to undo the consequences of the original sin and the resulting fall from grace.

But Jesus told John it had to be so, and when he baptized Jesus he saw the spirit of God, in the appearance of a dove, descend on Jesus. This was the formal start of his

assignment as Messiah, as Christ. (Both have the same meaning, the first from Hebrew, the second from Greek). Right after his baptism Jesus withdrew into the desert, where he fasted for forty days and was tempted by the devil. But he withstood that test and was fully prepared to start his public task, which was now to begin as he approached the place where John was still baptizing.

The next day Jesus is walking along that place again and John repeats his saying: 'Behold the lamb of God!' Two of the disciples of John hear him say this and they go up to Jesus to be his followers. Thus on this second day back in the public eye, Jesus attracts his first disciples. They tell their story to others who are also coming to follow Jesus. This was the start of Jesus' work among the people as the Christ.

This first chapter of John has shown us the majestic origin of Jesus and the magnitude of his task on earth. Nothing in human history can even come close to this most important 'visit' to earth by the son of God himself. We have now seen how he began this task at the age of thirty, a task that would lead to his death as 'the Lamb of God', with which he would release all mankind from the bondage of sin and death. All of this had been foretold by many Jewish prophets and would now become reality, just as it had been written.

Water to wine

(read John chapter 2)

Everything advances quickly. Jesus has returned from his preparatory withdrawal in the desert on the first day of his public mission, the next day he gathers his disciples around him and on the third day, as a group, they are invited to attend a wedding.

John 2: 1-5

The third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. Jesus also was invited, with his disciples, to the marriage. When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever he says to you, do it."

This is an amazing and amusing event at the start of Jesus' mission as the Christ. You could say he makes a relaxed start, for he takes time to attend a marriage feast.

It may have been a very lively party, for too soon all the wine was gone. That was certainly not a problem of global proportions, but it was a pity for the guests who were having a good time. And there was Jesus' mother, telling him that they have no wine anymore, as if to say 'You can do something about that.'

He takes her remark as such indeed, for he gives her a somewhat reluctant reply in the sense of 'that is not my concern'. But his mother obviously senses that something is going to happen, for in spite of his answer she tells the servants to do whatever he may say.

And then we get a first glimpse of how Jesus is connected to his origin and to his power as the creator of life itself. What is going to happen here is very interesting for us, for it will teach us much about Jesus and about how life is constructed.

He asks the servants to fill six stone water pots, that happen to be there, with water, then draw out some of it and take it to the feast leader, who does not know where the drink comes from. He tastes it and then he calls the bridegroom and praises him for saving the best wine for last.

And the guests could drink on merrily. But what do we see happening here? There was no process of turning the water into wine, no effort from Jesus' side, no ritual, nothing. He needed to do nothing more than to will it and instantly the jars contained wine of superb quality.

Remember the Word of God, he speaks it and it is there. 'Let there be light' and the light was there. It is this same creative power that Jesus demonstrates here on a small scale. It shows that he has complete mastery over matter, over reality, and that he can change that reality at will, without any effort.

He can obviously still work from outside of our world, is not subjected to its natural and physical laws. It was a miracle for those inside our reality, who cannot understand how he can do these things. To him it is not a miracle, he does what he is used to do on a much larger scale. On his level of awareness it is a routine thing to do.

Here we see how John shows Jesus to us, as the original creator of the world. He is the only one of the four biographers of Jesus to record this event. Providing some

more wine to a party has no deep emotional importance, but nevertheless John can use it as an illustration of the effortless creative powers of Jesus.

All of creation around us is in fact a great miracle that we can experience every day. But if things happen all the time we can see the regularity of them and we do not call them miracles anymore. During the past ages, religion has built an image of Jesus as the man who could do miracles. But in fact that is not such a helpful and mature image of him.

It is much more helpful and stimulating to see that he does things that are normal to him, to show us who he really is, and that it is us, in our imperfect state, who cannot comprehend it. In that way it emphasises more of our present incompleteness than some special gimmick of Jesus.

Turning water into wine, without any effort, taking no time at all, shows us that Jesus had that total control over our world, of which he would give many more examples later on.

Well then, did Jesus come to earth to change water to wine? No, he came to prove that he is really the son of God, while at the same time being human! For people to see and believe that, is of crucial importance for their acceptance of his gift of eternal life. For faith in him is the way of freely receiving it.

It also shows us that Jesus is one of a kind and that he does not belong to any religion or nation. He has nothing to do with religion, he is the creator of mankind, of all humans, with all their religions and all their differences.

This creator of all has come to our material world to become human and solve our insoluble dilemma for us.

So Jesus performed 'miracles' to show who he is and what authority he has. He never performed these miracles to cure the world, only to show that he was really the son of God. He cured the sick people that crossed his path, but he never went out to look around for more sick people that he could cure. His message of eternal life by faith in him was the important aspect of his presence. Sometimes Jesus told the people that they did not believe him for his message, but only because of the miracles he performed and the direct benefits they had from that. That was a side effect of the miracles that did not help them really understand and believe what he had to say.

* * *

After this Jesus and his disciples go up to Jerusalem for the annual celebration of the Jewish passover feast. When he comes to the temple, which, in the old arrangement, is still 'the house of God', his Father's house, he chases the traders and money changers out of the temple and acts with great authority. Now everybody knows who he is, and the religious leaders, whom he has exposed, are not happy with him. He is a direct threat to their authority.

Being Born Anew

(read John chapter 3)

The Pharisees were Jewish religious leaders with great prestige and power among the people. As a group they felt compelled to oppose Jesus, because he undermined their authority with his teaching, that came directly from God the Father and exposed the Pharisees' teachings and rules to be without merit.

But privately some of the Pharisees were captivated by the words of Jesus and the great signs that he performed. One of them was Nicodemus and he came to visit Jesus at night to talk to him. In this conversation Jesus explains an important principle.

John 3: 1-3

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to him by night, and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."

Jesus answered him, "Verily, verily, I tell you, unless one is born anew, he can't see the Kingdom of God."

Rationally Nicodemus believes that Jesus comes from God, 'for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him'. But Jesus shows him that it is not about that level of rational belief. The recognition of truth comes from a deeper level. And then Jesus starts his words with 'Verily, verily, I tell you', which means as much as 'pay attention, for what I am going to tell you now is essential!'.

'unless one is born anew, he can't see the Kingdom of God.'

This is a special remark, which seems to refer much more to a transformation than to just a logical conclusion. We'd like to know what Jesus means by this. So does Nicodemus, so let's look at his questions and Jesus' answers:

John 3: 4-8

Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Verily, verily I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into the Kingdom of God! That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Don't marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but don't know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Being born anew, not for a second time through the womb of our mother of course, but from water and spirit, to enter into the kingdom of God. How can we be born of water and spirit? Believing the message and origin of Jesus leads to faith in Jesus, which leads to being born of the spirit and entering the kingdom of God. In that kingdom is the light, there is everlasting life that Jesus speaks about.

Once we realise that what Jesus says is the truth, that he is the son of God and that he actually does invite us to eternal life, our reality changes, eternal life has suddenly become our reality, right at that moment that we see it and embrace it.

What is born of the flesh is the carnal imperfect human, the descendant of Adam, who has inherited sin and death from him. This is not a proper condition for living in the kingdom of God. The path of the flesh just doesn't lead there. What is born of the Spirit is the new human who originates from the Spirit of God. This is a new birth that is open to us.

You can hear and feel the wind, but you don't know where it comes from and where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. All kinds of people hear the same words and see the same things. Of one the eyes are opened and he sees the light, while another shrugs and sees nothing special to wake him up. It is not really possible for us to determine what makes that difference. One is touched by the Spirit and the other is not. It is not that the spirit itself is selective in who it touches, it is our receptiveness that determines if we will be touched by it or not, when the opportunity is there.

If these things touch us at a deep level, and we feel that these are the most important things in life, the ones that we have always been searching for and that we may have found them now, then we may become born of water and Spirit. Jesus himself was baptized in water by John the Baptist and later on Jesus' disciples also baptized people in water who would follow Jesus.

The baptism in water is our part of the transformation process, it is our way of saying 'yes' to the invitation of Christ. He doesn't drag us into his kingdom, we will have to choose it voluntarily and we can show that by this deliberate act with great symbolic meaning. It symbolises the end of the old life of the person, born from the flesh, and the beginning of the newly born person from the Spirit, who has a completely different outlook.

This is a true transformation, much more so than you might realise at that moment, for you feel you descend into the water and come out of it as the same person, which is also true, but now you have consciously stepped into a new reality, which will manifest more and more from that moment on. And it is not because of some magic effect of your baptism, it is only because you deliberately made the choice to step into that new reality that Jesus has opened up for you. That is what completes the transformation.

Yet the baptized person will remain in the imperfect condition of the fallen Adam and will age and die in this system. A second transformation into a perfect bodymind for eternal life is yet to come.

So Nicodemus didn't have to go back to his mother's womb, of which he was right that that is impossible, through his faith in Jesus he had to cross over to another reality, led by the Spirit.

John 3: 9-15

Nicodemus answered him, "How can these things be?"

Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and don't understand these things? Verily, verily, I tell you, we speak that which we know, and testify of that which we have seen, and you don't receive our witness.

If I told you earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Jesus points out to Nicodemus that he could have understood all these things if he really would have known the scriptures of Moses and the Prophets. He is a teacher of the people, a scribe, and the scriptures that he is supposed to know and understand speak about the coming of the Messiah and the purpose of his coming. He could have seen that Jesus is the fulfilment of everything the prophets have written, but his thinking is carnal, he has no spiritual insight. Just being amazed by the miracles that Jesus performed will not do for him! He's got to go further than that!

Since this book is also meant for people who do not have any knowledge of the scriptures of Moses and the prophets I'd like to give some background about Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness, because it is such a perfect example of the phenomenon we are dealing with here.

The Israelites had lived as exiles in Egypt and their time to cross the desert to a new home had come. Moses led his people through the desert. Because of their unfaithful behaviour the trip lasted much longer than necessary and they came across all kinds of hardships. At one time the camp was flooded with poisonous serpents that killed many people.

Moses asked God for help and was told he had to make a copper serpent and lift it up on a pole and place it in the middle of the camp. Now if anyone was bitten by a serpent, all this person had to do, was turn to the pole and look up at the copper serpent. After that, the poison would not hurt them anymore. They just had to look at it.

By doing that they showed their faith in that arrangement and their reality shifted to one in which the serpents poison would not hurt them.

And here comes the important analogy by the words of Jesus:

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

The Son of man, Jesus, must be lifted up and whosoever believes in him may have eternal life. That's how simple it actually is! That's what it's all about. But simple things can be made to appear very complicated by twisted reasoning, among which is the belief that 'it can't be that simple!'

You get bitten by a poisonous snake, you look up at the copper serpent and the poison has no effect anymore. How can that be? That is ridiculous, isn't it? You believe that Jesus is the son of God and you have eternal life. How does that work? How can that be?

This is the position in which Nicodemus was with his questions. He didn't see it, he couldn't grasp it. He was stuck in his own thinking that it could not be possible. He forgot to realise or acknowledge, as a teacher of Israel, that he was dealing with the programmer of reality itself, the one who can literally do everything.

John 3: 16, 17

For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God didn't send his Son into the world

to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

And here we arrive at the important core of all things, the love of God for his creation. God is Love, the Bible teaches us, love is God's most determining factor. It is not an attribute, it is his true being. It is love that makes him create the world, it is love that makes him bring forth his only begotten son and let him do all the other creative work.

The son is the perfect representation of the father, equal in love. He makes everything wonderful and ingenious. The great beauty and diversity in nature are a display of that love. He creates man as a caretaker of the earth, he creates them in the image of God with true freedom of choice. And then Adam and Eve, the first human couple, choose the way of separation from God. They lose the perfection that could only be found in their bond with their creator, and introduce decay and death into the human family.

Their offspring, born in imperfection and mortality, cannot make that choice, like Adam and Eve could. They are stuck in this low state. There is no way out without help from outside. But God is love and they are his creation. In his love he is going to save them, *without violating their right of free choice*. If they are to be saved, they will have to want to, and choose it freely. It will require a simple act of faith from them, as little as possible, like looking up at a copper serpent.

Because here we see this simple beauty again:

that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Do you see how few the requirements are? You only have to believe in him! And you can only believe in him when you really do. You can't pretend to believe, that won't work. Nicodemus saw the miracles Jesus performed and reasoned that he must be sent from God, otherwise he could not do these things. That might be a step towards faith, but it is not faith yet. The reality of the situation just didn't break through to him. He was still struggling with it obviously. He wanted to see Jesus but wouldn't do it in the daytime.

Nicodemus and his fellow Pharisees did many things to be seen and admired by the people. They wanted to be revered as pious and learned men, holy men, teachers of the people, high up there on a holy pedestal. And that prevented them from seeing Jesus as their teacher and master. They just couldn't find the humility to see Jesus for who he was and openly acknowledge him.

But if we do believe in him, there is nothing else that is required of us to be accepted by him. We will enter that new reality and from there our life will be filled in, all by this core principle of love. Truly believing Jesus means entering into that other reality, that reality in which he is the son of God and is going to make this world a perfect place to live, inhabited by people with everlasting life. And anybody can choose to inherit that future by now stepping into that reality. This is the new birth of water and Spirit that Jesus speaks about.

So except for faith it demands nothing else of us. No rituals, no protocols, no duties, no prohibitions; in short, no religion, no other commandment than to love our Father, to love one another, to love all of creation and care for it. To follow Jesus wherever he goes. And that can be done

in any life circumstance, it doesn't require specific external conditions.

For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

See, there is no angry, punishing God who is always on the lookout for our errors and mistakes. Jesus has no interest in judging us for our sins and imperfections, but in helping us, making us happy, setting us free from fear and death, to keep us in love and freedom. And to teach us how to live in love and freedom with each other. He is going to change society and make it a perfect world, and we are invited to join him in this work! Do we dare to trust him? Or is there still too much of Nicodemus in us?

Many may not find the way to get to the truth of Jesus to be easy. It can even seem very hard, like it must have seemed to Nicodemus. But this is the one important thing to remember if you might feel you are not there yet: Nothing else is required but faith that Jesus actually is the son of God. So if you meet with difficulty, know that it is your faith that is still not complete. It is not any other thing, for it cannot be. So you don't have to go searching anywhere else, just keep investigating your faith in him, right where you are, there are no specific circumstances required. What is holding you back? Investigate that and resolve it! That's the path!

Jesus the living water

(read John chapter 4)

Jesus departs from Judea to Galilee in the north and passes through Samaria, a province of the northern Israeli tribes that have been separated from the official Judaism. In their tradition Jews have no interaction with Samaritans.

In Sychar they come to the well of Jacob, the disciples set out to buy some food and Jesus stays behind at the well alone. A Samaritan woman comes from the village to draw water and Jesus asks her to give him something to drink.

What? says the woman, you, as a Jew are asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink? That was very unusual, Jews and Samaritans never spoke to one another, so Jesus broke a deep rooted tradition with his question.

In his answer he doesn't bother about the tradition, but he uses its origin to show her something of the truth that he represents.

John 4: 10, 11

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.

She is not immediately on the same level with Jesus when she hears his words and replies:

"Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. From where then have you that living water?"

John 4: 13-15

Jesus answered her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I don't get thirsty, neither come all the way here to draw."

Then he asks her to go back to town and bring her husband. 'I have no husband' she says and Jesus answers "You said well, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands; and he whom you now have is not your husband. This you have said truly."

Well, the woman says, I see that you are a prophet. And then she starts talking about the worship of God:

John 4: 20, 21, 23, 24

"Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship."

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour comes, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, will you worship the Father.

But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to be his worshippers. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

Jesus does not acknowledge the traditions and beliefs of the Jews and the Samaritans, his teaching is of another level. The time to worship God in specific places is over,

that was just a shadow of the truth. Now we shall worship the Father in spirit and truth. We will be much closer to him, have a far more personal relationship. Here Jesus separates true worship and acknowledgment of the Father from religious practices, with their hierarchies and dogma's, their exploitation of the sin and the guilt and the fear that is in the people. Here Jesus introduces true science, knowledge of how things really are. God is spirit and we must worship him in spirit.

John 4: 25, 26

The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah comes," (he who is called Christ). "When he has come, he will declare to us all things."

Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who speaks to you."

The woman already knew from the old Hebrew Scriptures that Messiah would come and would declare all things. She believed that. And Jesus only had to say 'It's me!', so she could freely receive him. From what he just said she knew that being a Samaritan was no obstacle at all!

At that moment his disciples return and see him talking to the Samaritan woman. The word 'disciple' means 'pupil, student' and that they are still students of the truth becomes clear, for they are amazed that he would speak to the Samaritan woman, still being under the influence of traditional teachings, although they had been taught by Jesus.

This is common among people who become followers of Jesus. Even though they are being taught by him, they also remain subject to the imperfect limited thinking of carnal man. That is why it remains necessary for a disci-

ple of Jesus to keep being taught by him, until the 'major upgrade' is going to happen of which we will be hearing more as we progress.

The woman goes back to town and tells the people to come and see. It may be the Messiah that I just met at the well. They immediately go with her and many of the Samaritans believe in Jesus, no longer because of what the woman told them, but because of what they heard from him themselves.

The striking thing here is that Jesus brings something totally new and easy in the relationship between God and man. Something which is spiritual and true and is outside of the habits and rules of people. And the Samaritans can readily absorb it and live in that new revolutionary truth.

In general the human mind wants to capture this truth in rules and religion, definitely with some form of hierarchy involved. But as soon as they do this the spirit and the truth escape through their fingers and they are left with a dead construct. This is true in our time, where the truth of Jesus, his science of reality, is hidden for most people, beneath a pile of religious dogma's and traditions.

Jesus' power over death

Jesus travels on and arrives back in Cana of Galilee, where he manifested the wine at the marriage feast. A man who's son is dying comes to Jesus to ask him to come to his home and cure his son. This is Jesus' primary reaction:

John 4: 48

Jesus therefore said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will in no way believe."

This reply contains an important clue. People come to him for the signs and wonders that he does, but the really important part they do not see yet. What is the issue here? Jesus has come with a special assignment from God to save the human race from darkness and death for eternity. That is how big it is. In order to show who he is, that he is not just another man with a story, he performs signs and wonders, so people will pay attention. But the effect is that they mainly come for the miracles and do not see the bigger thing that he puts before them.

John 4: 49

The nobleman said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

The father wants his son to live and he believes that Jesus can cure him. Indeed he can, and he does cure the son, but all of that is only part of the 'signs' that he does to show who he is and what power is given him.

The signs are unmistakable and speak to the imagination of the people, but in fact he points at much bigger things that are behind that, and that is that anyone who believes in him will have eternal life. That is, not only to believe that he can cure us now, but to believe that he can, and will indeed change our total world into a different world in which we will live forever.

But the man has other things on his mind and says 'come quickly, before my son dies.' We would probably all respond like that if we were in his situation, but the point is that people keep looking at the signs while the deeper, more important message seems to elude them.

Jesus tells him to go home, his son has recovered. The man believes him immediately and goes home. Halfway

he meets his servants who come to tell him his son is cured. Since when? Exactly since the moment Jesus told him to go home, for his son was cured.

Again, we see the ease with which Jesus does these things, almost casually. And we see that the man believes him completely. So he does have faith in Jesus, but for the things of his direct interest and for the advantage he gets from it. But will this man stand up for Jesus when the pharisees want to kill him? That may be a totally different story.

So people do have faith in Jesus when they see him perform miracles, but often they fail to also get the most important part of his message. That is why Jesus can say 'if you do not see signs and wonders you will surely not believe.'

If the people would have thought about these words they might have answered: What do you mean? It is all about the miracles that we believe in you. We believe that you can do these things and that is what we want more of, what else is there to believe? What else could I wish for than that you cure my son?

They are so entangled in their daily lives that the most important part of the message escapes them. Just check it out, Who is Jesus? The son of God, the Word of God. He says to the man, your son is well, and the son recovers at that same moment.

He says it and it happens, just as with the wine in Cana. He doesn't have to do anything for it except to will it, to make it happen. Whether you call this miracles or not, he has total control over our reality. He doesn't need to hear from the man where his son is or what his ailment is, he

oversees everything and can adjust it. So easy it is, for the one who has made everything, to change reality.

But why is the son of God among the people and why does he do these signs and wonders? Not to temporarily eradicate sickness and death. He only does these things for people that happen to cross his path, he doesn't set up a campaign to solve these issues in the whole area. So they are signs, tokens of his authority over reality.

And when the people see this authority then they can also believe the bigger message that he gives them, about the cause of suffering and death and about the kingdom of God that will transform the earth and allow people to live in accordance with the original purpose for them, as children of God with an eternal and open future.

Eventually the son of this man, who was cured by Jesus, has died at some point, just as his father has. That was the end of the story that he was so concerned about when he met Jesus. But that both this man and his son can live again through the resurrection, as perfect people, free from sin and death, that is the more important part that Jesus had to say.

That is why he could say 'you are only interested in the signs' because in reality these were minor things compared to what he really had to offer them. Even the death of that man's son was a minor thing compared to what Jesus really came to show.

Those who hear will live

(read John chapter 5)

After this, Jesus and his disciples go up to Jerusalem again for a Jewish festival. (Since Jesus was born as a Jew under the law of Moses, he kept that law, as was required of every Jew. He had come to eventually bring an end to that phase, that foreshadowed his coming, but until then he lived by the law of Moses).

They arrive in Jerusalem at the sheep gate, where is also the pool of Bethesda, where all kinds of diseased people gather in the hope to be cured. There was a belief among them that as soon as the water would begin to move, the first person that would enter it would be cured from whatever disease or infirmity they had. And only the first one, who would come in second would have bad luck.

Here we see a good example of how easily superstition can creep into a scriptural text. Very early on a copyist has added a piece of text that is now known as John 5:4. Later copyists have just copied it. It clearly doesn't belong there, but as an example we will take a look at it and see how easy it is to expose it as false.

John 5:4

for an angel went down at certain times into the pool, and stirred up the water. Whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made whole of whatever disease he had.

The American Standard Version, that I use for its accuracy in general, also contains this verse, as does the King James Version. The World English Bible, that we use

throughout this book, is a modern rendering of the American Standard Version, so it has the verse too.

But here every reader can determine when something is a cheat, that is when it is sheer nonsense, that would indicate arbitrariness of our creator. Just imagine what that text says. Once in a while an angel descends, a heavenly servant of God, and stirs the water. And, as if it were a television game show, the first one who reaches the water will be cured from his disease. Only the first, it seems to be a cruel kind of game, with many people suffering who could have been helped too, if it all would be real. One can really be appalled by something like this, attributing it to the loving God. Let that angel stop teasing the people and let him come down and cure all these people that are present!

Of course it is all utter nonsense, some superstitious person thought it necessary to give some extra explanation in this passage. This happens so many times. When people start messing with the scriptures, error almost instantaneously is introduced.

Who is behind something like this? What spirit does it reflect? Who profits from it? What could be the purpose of it? This image of the creator who arbitrarily cures someone every now and then, and always someone who is fast, the slow ones have no chance at all, this image is so far removed from the love and the justice of the creator of the world, who is the Father of Jesus and of those who follow him. Those who deliberately want to create a false image of him would profit from a story like this.

When I first read this text long ago, I immediately thought 'this can't be true, for it goes against everything I have learned so far.' And that turned out to be the case. In

the oldest manuscripts the text does not appear. It is indeed an addition by a copyist. And what he added was the general superstition about that pool at Bethesda. It has nothing to do with the truths that Jesus teaches. There was no angel of God involved.

When Jesus passes by that pool he goes up to a man who has been sick for 38 years, who had been there for a very long time, because he hopes, just like the others, that one day he may be the first to reach the water and be healed, which he has never been able to do.

John 5: 5-9

A certain man was there, who had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had been sick for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to be made well?"

The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I'm coming, another steps down before me."

Jesus said to him, "Arise, take up your mat, and walk." Immediately, the man was made well, and took up his mat and walked. Now it was the Sabbath on that day.

This is our third example of how Jesus performs 'miracles' without any effort or ritual. Jesus' mission is to show people how they can enter into the kingdom of God. To show them who he is, with what authority he speaks, he cures sick people that he comes across. Again, it is not his mission to heal people, otherwise he could have cured all the people at Bethesda, yes even every person on earth, for his ability to do so is unlimited.