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October 13th: 2 Kings 4 & 1 John 2:7-29

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The raising of the Shunammite's son and other miracles of Elisha. Do not love the world or the things in the world.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

2 Kings 4. Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves. And Elisha said to her, What shall I do for you? Tell me, what have you in the house? And she said, Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil. Then he said, Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels, and not too few.

Then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons, and pour into all these vessels. And when one is full, set it aside. So she went from him and shut the door behind herself and her sons.

And as she poured, they brought the vessels to her. When the vessels were full, she said to her son, Bring me another vessel. And he said to her, There is not another.

Then the oil stopped flowing. She came and told the man of God, and he said, Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest. One day Elisha went on to Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived who urged him to eat some food.

So whenever he passed that way he would turn in there to eat food. And she said to her husband, Behold now, I know that this is a holy man of God who is continually passing our way. Let us make a small room on the roof with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that whenever he comes to us he can go in there.

One day he came there, and he turned into the chamber and rested there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunemite. When he had called her, she stood before him.

And he said to him, Say now to her, See, you have taken all this trouble for us. What is to be done for you? Would you have a word spoken on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army? She answered, I dwell among my own people. And he said, What then is to be done for her? Gehazi answered, Well, she has no son, and her husband is old.

He said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the doorway. And he said, At this season, about this time next year, you shall embrace a son.

And she said, No, my lord, O man of God, do not lie to your servant. But the woman conceived, and she bore a son about that time the following spring, as Elisha had said to her. When the child had grown, he went out one day to his father among the reapers.

And he said to his father, O my head, my head. The father said to his servant, Carry him to his mother. And when he had lifted him and brought him to his mother, the child sat on her lap till noon, and then he died.

And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door behind him, and went out. Then she called to her husband, and said, Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, that I may quickly go to the man of God and come back again. And he said, Why will you go to him to-day? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath.

She said, All is well. Then she saddled the donkey, and she said to her servant, Urge the animal on. Do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you.

So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her coming, he said to Gehazi his servant, Look, there is the Shunammite. Run at once to meet her and say to her, Is all well with you? Is all well with your husband? Is all well with the child? And she answered, All is well.

And when she came to the mountain to the man of God, she caught hold of his feet. And

Gehazi came to push her away. But the man of God said, Leave her alone, for she is in bitter distress, and the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me.

Then she said, Did I ask my Lord for a son? Did I not say, Do not deceive me? He said to Gehazi, Tie up your garment and take my staff in your hand and go. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not reply, and lay my staff on the face of the child. Then the mother of the child said, As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.

So he arose and followed her. Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the face of the child, but there was no sound or sign of life. Therefore he returned to meet him and told him, The child has not awakened.

When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. So he went in and shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the Lord. Then he went up and lay on the child, putting his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands.

And as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm. Then he got up again and walked once back and forth in the house, and went up and stretched himself upon him. The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

Then he summoned Gehazi and said, Call the Shunammite. So he called her, and when she came to him he said, Pick up your son. She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground.

Then she picked up her son and went out. And Elisha came again to Gilgal, when there was a famine in the land. And as the sons of the prophets were sitting before him, he said to his servant, Set on the large pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets.

One of them went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered from it his lap full of wild gourds, and came and cut them up into the pot of stew, not knowing what they were. And they poured out some of them for the men to eat. But while they were eating of the stew, they cried out, O man of God, there is death in the pot! And they could not eat it.

He said, Then bring flour. And he threw it into the pot, and said, Pour some out for the men, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot.

A man came from Baal-shalisha, bringing the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And Elisha said, Give to the men, that they may eat. But his servant said, How can I set this before a hundred men? So he repeated, Give them to the men, that they may eat.

For thus says the Lord, They shall eat and have some left. So he set it before them, and

they ate and had some left according to the word of the Lord. Elisha is given a double portion of his master Elijah's spirit, and he goes on to perform twice as many miracles as his master does.

He also performs themes from the ministry of Elijah, albeit transposed into a different key. In 2nd Kings chapter 4 we find several of Elisha's miracles, miracles that should readily recall those of Elijah. While much of Elijah's ministry was outside of the land, in Zarephath, in Sinai, or near the brook Cherith, the ministry of Elisha is largely based in the land itself.

And whereas Elijah's ministry was particularly characterized by judgment, the ministry of Elisha is one that brings life and healing. Elijah is the prophet of the desert. He is also the prophet of the drought, whereas Elisha is a man who heals and gives water.

The ministries of Elijah and Elisha are tied up together. The one completes the ministry of the other. The transition to the ministry of Elisha brings a new and more glorious stage of God's work through these prophets.

During the drought that he had pronounced upon Israel, Elijah after he left the brook Cherith, stayed with a woman of Zarephath, a widow who had one son. Elijah was in a cocoon of protection that the Lord had established around him. First of all, he was protected by the ravens, and then he was protected and fed by the woman of Zarephath and her son.

The widow of Zarephath provided for Elijah with her oil and her flour, which would not run out as long as she was providing for Elijah. If she offered the prophet Elijah a cake first, then there would be enough to provide for her and her son until the prophet needed food once more. The widow and her son then were kept alive as a means of keeping Elijah alive.

At the beginning of this chapter we have a story with several similarities to that earlier story but with significant differences. Now there is a widow with two children, and the threat this time is not starvation but slavery, that her two children would be sold into slavery to pay for her debt. Once again there is a miracle of a jar of oil not running out.

However, while the last jar of oil just continued to provide enough to keep them going, this jar provides such a superabundance that a great many vessels provided by many neighbours are filled before it finally stops flowing. Once again God is sending his servant as a redeemer of widows, but now to an Israelite widow, not just a Sidonian one. In this chapter we also see that a community is being formed around Elijah.

The sons of the prophets, the wealthy woman who supports him in Shunem, a remnant community is being formed in a way that might remind us of Jesus and his disciples in the Gospels. Elijah performed two miracles for the widow of Zarephath. Her oil and her

flour were extended, and her son was raised.

Here we have another extension of oil, and it's followed by a story of a child being born and a child being raised from the dead. It begins with an act of hospitality. Elisha goes through Shunem and a wealthy woman urges him to eat some food with her.

Subsequently, every time he passes that way he goes in to eat some food. The woman speaks to her husband and suggests that they build a little room at the top of their house, in which he can stay every time that he visits. The room will have a bed, a table, a chair and a lamp.

Peter Lighthouse suggests that there might be an allusion here to the various items of furniture in the temple. The bed is the altar, the table is the table of showbread, the chair is the mercy seat throne, of which the Ark of the Covenant is the footstool, and then the lamp is the lampstand. The fact that Gehazi is always the go-between might suggest some sort of priestly connotation.

Elisha represents the Lord, and Gehazi is his priest. What the woman recognises is that God's presence is particularly in and with Elisha. Israel does not have the temple that the Southern Kingdom has, but it does have God's work in someone like Elisha, God's presence being especially known in and around him.

Part of this presence is the new community that is being formed in his orbit. With his servant Gehazi as a go-between, Elisha discovers that the principal thing that the woman wants is a son. When she is summoned, she stands in the doorway, and Elisha declares to her, At this season, about this time next year, you shall embrace a son.

She struggles to believe it, but sure enough that time next year she bears a son, as Elisha had said. There is of course an event that this should remind us of. In the book of Genesis, chapter 18, verses 10-12, the Lord said, I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.

And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah.

So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, After I am worn out and my Lord is old, shall I have pleasure? The similarities can be readily seen. In Genesis, chapter 18, the promise of a son is given after the act of hospitality to the angels. In both cases the parties are older and seemingly beyond childbearing.

In both cases the woman is standing in the doorway. And in both cases the same turn of phrase is used, I will surely return to you about this time next year. The birth of another child in the manner of Isaac, one of the great forefathers of the nation, is a propitious sign for God's blessing of his people.

It is also a sign of God's power over death. This whole chapter is a chapter that shows God's power over death, his power over scarcity, and his commitment to redeem his people. However there is a twist in this particular story.

After the child has grown, one day when he is out with the reapers, he complains of a sore head, and the father instructs his servant to carry the child to his mother. The Shunammite woman's response is to bring the child up to the room of Elisha, to lay him out on his bed. This upper room is a place that is as it were sealed off from the rest of the world.

It is a realm where the servant of the Lord dwells, the man who is anointed by the Lord's spirit. If there is any hope for the child, it will be found by sealing him up in this realm, a sort of cocoon of God's presence, distinguished from the wider world. The woman then goes to seek the prophet Elisha.

She saddles her donkey and sets out for the mountain. When Elisha sees her coming afar off, he sends Gehazi his servant to meet her, and the woman assures Gehazi that all is well with her, her husband, and the child. However when she meets Elisha, she grabs his feet in her bitterness.

She then goes on to tell him what has happened, highlighting the injustice of it all. She had not asked for a child, but yet a child had been given to her, and now that child has been taken away, treating her more cruelly than if she had never been given the child to begin with. Elisha sends on his servant Gehazi ahead of them.

However when Gehazi lays the staff of Elisha upon the face of the child, the child does not rise. Nothing happens. Elisha then comes into the room and prays to the Lord, and he goes and lies on the child, puts his mouth on the mouth of the child, his eyes on his eyes, his hands on his hands.

He is identifying himself with the child, in much the same way as Elijah related to the child of the widow of Zarephath. When he does this the first time, the child's flesh becomes warm, but nothing further happens. After walking back and forth in the house, he goes up again and does the same thing, and now the child sneezes seven times and opens his eyes.

He then instructs Gehazi his servant to tell the woman to pick up her son. Once again this is a story with many similarities to other ones. It is a story that might remind us of the binding of Isaac.

There there is not a child that has died, but a child that will have to be put to death. Once again it is the promised child, the child that has been given by God to the barren woman. Here, after the child has died, the woman undertakes a journey very similar to the one of Abraham.

She saddles her donkey, and she travels to the mountain. There is also, as there was back in Genesis chapter 22, a reference to seeing something afar off. We earlier saw the similarities between the room that was prepared for Elisha and the temple, and the bed was like an altar.

Now the body of the child is laid out on the bed, like the body of Isaac was laid out on the altar. However, now the child's body is laid out, not to be killed, but to be raised up. Back in Genesis chapter 22 there is no reference to Sarah in the story.

The impression is strongly given that Abraham does all of these things without consulting with her. Here, something similar happens but the other way round. The woman places the child in the upper room, without even telling her husband, and then goes off to seek the prophet, without telling her husband the purpose of her journey.

In some ways we could imagine this story as a sort of way in which Sarah could respond, had the sacrifice of Isaac gone ahead. She had been promised this child, this child had been given to her in the Lord's kindness. Was he going to take this child away? No, she would go back and she would insist upon the Lord's goodness that the child be restored to her.

There is another story that this might remind us of, a story that immediately precedes the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. It's the story of Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness. In that story there is also a woman with a dying son, and it ends with the woman being told to pick up her son, much as our story in 2 Kings chapter 4. It is through reflecting upon such stories and their close relationships and the way in which they invert particular characters and particular scenarios that our theological imagination is developed.

We can consider a different permutation of the characters in the story of the binding of Isaac, and consider what would have happened in that case. Through such reflection we have a better understanding of the original story of Genesis chapter 22 and of the highly related story of chapter 21, and the meaning of 2 Kings chapter 4 is thrown into far sharper relief when we read it against the backdrop of Genesis. After the raising of the son of the Shunammite woman, we read of a meal at Gilgal that is prepared with the sons of the prophets, and in the pot one of the sons of the prophets places some wild gourds that he found that poisoned the stew.

When they eat it they discover that it was poisoned, and they tell Elisha, who instructs them to bring him some flour which he throws in the pot and heals it of its poison. A few chapters earlier he had healed the waters of Jericho by casting some salt in them, and now he casts flour in a pot to have the same effect. As with the raising of the woman's son we should probably see some sort of sign here.

The pot might represent the nation, all the people together, and the wild gourds might

make us think of the cultivated gourds that you see in the temple. The nation is poisoned by this wild fruit, but God is going to cast into the nation the salt and the flour of his word and his people, and through them to heal the nation of its poison. This chapter ends with a further miracle, the miraculous feeding of a hundred men with the first fruits of the man of Baal Shelisha.

The presentation of the first fruits to Elisha might be another way in which Elisha is being associated with the temple. As in the extension of the oil of the widow at the beginning of the chapter, the multiplication of the bread that ends it is another miracle of plenty, illustrating the abundance that God can provide for his people, a joyous success that provides for all that is needed, with more left over. A question to consider.

In what ways could we compare Elisha and his miracles to our Lord and his miracles? First John chapter 2 verses 7 to 29 Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

I am writing to you little children, because your sins are forgiven for his namesake. I am writing to you fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you children, because you know the father. 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 the pride of life, is not from the father, but is from the world.

And the world is passing away with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. Children, it is the last hour, and you have heard that Antichrist is coming. So now many Antichrists have come.

Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.

But they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you not because

you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the Antichrist, he who denies the father and the son. No one who denies the son has the father. Whoever confesses the son has the father also.

Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the son and in the father. And this is the promise that he made to us, eternal life.

I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you receive from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything and is true and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him.

And now little children, abide in him, so that when he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. In 1 John 2, John moves into a discussion of a new commandment.

The language of commandment isn't that common in the New Testament, apart from references to aspects of the Mosaic law. Here John speaks about the message of Christ in terms of the language of commandment, and this might strike us as very strange. However, in both his gospel and in his epistles, John uses the language of commandment on several occasions in such a manner.

In John 13, verse 34, a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. In John 15, verse 12, this is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you. This is both an old and a new commandment.

It is the same commandment that was given to Israel at Sinai. The law was always summed up in the commandment to love God and one's neighbour as oneself. Jesus teaches this in places such as Matthew 22, verses 35-40.

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? And he said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment, and a second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. The multitude of the commandments were always refractions of this single great principle of love for God and neighbour. However, something changes with the coming of Christ.

In Christ, the fulfilment of the law in love is made manifest. In Christ we discover what

love really means. God's love is seen, heard, touched and people bear witness to it.

And what is more, the Christ-shaped reality of love is worked out in our lives by the Spirit of Christ that He has given to us. This new commandment is the fulfilment of the law. It is also the writing of the law upon the heart that was promised long ago as the fulfilment of the new covenant.

This new covenant is not merely an external commandment. It is something that is true in Christ and true in us. It is a commandment that is being fulfilled in the love of Christ that is at work in our lives by His Spirit.

All of this is a manifestation of the passing away of the darkness of the old age and the rising of the true light of Christ in the world. Where do we stand relative to this rising light? The test, once again, is that of love. Do we love our brothers? Hatred and hostility are the way of darkness.

The darkness is a realm of blindness where people constantly bite and devour each other. However, the light is a realm of illumination and love. Those who dwell in it will be marked out by their love.

As Jesus says in John 13, verse 35, By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. In verses 12-14 of this chapter, John addresses three different groups within the church in succession, twice in a row in the same order, little children the first time, next time as children, fathers and young men. This is a perplexing passage in many ways.

Why does John interrupt the flow to address these groups and to explain his reasons for writing? Why these groups in particular? Who are the groups in question? Are these different ways of speaking about the same people or distinct categories of persons? Why does he repeat himself within it? How do we account for the structure and the order? Why, for instance, is there a threefold reason for writing to the young men at the conclusion of the second cycle? The children - the word used of them changes in the second cycle - are associated with forgiveness and knowledge of the father, the fathers with knowledge of the one who is from the beginning, and the young men with strength and overcoming. As those begotten by God, the children have had their sins forgiven, and as those in the family of God, they enjoy access to the father through Jesus. By speaking of children, John is probably speaking of all Christians, but especially of young converts.

The fathers are likely the more mature believers, and the elders and overseers of the congregation. He writes to them on account of their knowledge of him who is from the beginning, presumably a reference to Christ, perhaps looking back to chapter 1 verse 1. He may be suggesting that they enjoy a deeper and longer-standing knowledge and experience, but the expression itself doesn't seem to make this clear. By repeating it in

both cycles, he underlines it, tightens the connection between the two cycles more generally, and invites us to reflect upon the difference between it and the other two categories.

The young men are likely the younger, but not the new believers. The church is a family with different levels of maturity and experience. A rounded church needs the sense of dependence and free welcome enjoyed by children in the faith, the vigour and the fervour of the young men, and the maturity and the wisdom of the fathers.

Where one or two of these are lacking, churches will tend to be stunted in various ways. Churches ought to be intergenerational bodies, informed by each of these generational constituencies in the faith. Opposed to the love that characterises those dwelling in the light is the love of the world and the things in the world.

There is an antithesis between the people of God and the world, which is discussed at various points in John's Gospel. In John chapter 15 verses 18-19, for instance, If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you are of the world, the world will love you as its own.

But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. John chapter 17 verses 14-16 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. By the term world here John is referring not so much to material objects, but to a system of life in all of its constitutive aspects. Peter Lighthouse expresses this very well in the following passage.

Probably drawing on the temptation of Eve in Genesis chapter 3, John details the law of the world under three headings. First, the world revolves around the desire of the flesh, which might include sexual and sensual desire, but also might include the desires that lead to the works of the flesh. Second, the world operates by spectacle and show, arousing the desire of the eyes.

Finally, the world operates according to the pride of life. Life here, as in chapter 3 verse 17, probably refers to wealth, and includes the status that often accompanies wealth. Loving the world means idolising mammon, and striving for celebrity and fame.

The relationship between the world and desire is complex. Verse 16 indicates that desires and boastfulness make up the contents of the world. The desire of flesh, eyes and boastfulness of life constitute the all that is in the world.

The end of verse 16 however suggests that the world is the source of desires and boasts. The desire of flesh, desire of eyes and boastfulness of life are from the world. Desires

thus make up the world.

Yet the world is also distinguished from the desires, such that the world produces, evokes and provokes desires and boastfulness. Verse 17 distinguishes the world from its desires, as if the desires are accompaniments of the world. To put it more sociologically, sinful human culture, its institutions, practices, products, are all embodiments of evil desire or boastfulness.

John hints that we should evaluate the world not only on the basis of what's done or what things it contains, but on the basis of desire. And desire has a multiple relationship with culture. Desires are the contents of culture.

Culture is made up of embodied dreams, aspirations, lusts. On the other hand, the world is the source of desire, evoking certain kinds of desire. As Lightheart recognises then, for John, the world is a vainglorious complex of unruly desires and drives.

It's a realm that provokes us to think and to act and to love and to desire and to imagine in particular ways rather than others. It excites our appetites. It calls us to consume.

It tells us what we should want and how we should want it. And it is very hard not to become deeply entangled and enmeshed within such a realm. However, this world is transitory, it's passing away, whereas those who do the will of God will endure.

The Apostle Paul makes similar points about how we have to loosen our grip upon the world, upon its desires, its treasures and its relationships, as those looking for the reign of Christ in 1 Corinthians 7, verses 29-31. This is what I mean, brothers. The appointed time has grown very short.

From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus had warned his disciples of false teachers and messiahs arising at the end of the age.

The fact that many such persons had already arisen was proof that it was the last hour and that the coming of Christ was imminent. Within a few years, Christ would come in judgment on Jerusalem and the whole old covenant order would collapse with its temple. The Antichrist, as he goes on to explain, is the one who denies that Jesus is the Messiah, the person who denies both father and son.

The false teachers with whom he is dealing seemingly went out from the apostolic group on teaching missions. However, they were not truly of the apostolic group, which was demonstrated by the fact that they all went in their own ways, departing from the apostolic teaching. This made their true character plain.

People will generally reveal their character if you give them time and watch them closely, and these false teachers were no exception to that rule. Christians have been anointed by Christ, who is the Anointed One. John might allude here, perhaps, to the promise of the new covenant in places such as Jeremiah 31.34, and no longer shall each one teach his neighbour, and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

In declaring that they have all knowledge, and later on that they have no need that anyone should teach them, we should see some reference to the work of the Spirit in the congregation. In John 16, verses 13-15, When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine, and declare it to you.

All that the Father has is mine, therefore I said that he will take what is mine, and declare it to you. The anointing that has been received is the gift of the Spirit then. In the Spirit the church has been given all knowledge.

It has been given the fullness of this knowledge in principle in the once for all gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. It is given this knowledge in the opening of our spiritual perception to recognize God's truth. By his Spirit within them, the sheep of Christ hear their Master's voice.

They answer to his voice, but they do not answer to the voice of a stranger. This knowledge is also given in the ministries of teaching within the body. The people of God have all that they need to recognize and grow in the truth of God in what they have been given in the Spirit, and they must abide and grow in the truth that they have been given.

They must do this so that when Christ comes they can stand before him without any shame. We prepare for the full advent of the light by walking in the light at the moment, by living as people of the day, by being people that do not shrink back from the exposure and the judgment that comes in the light, but rather receiving the forgiveness of Christ, walking in the light so that when he comes we will rejoice at his advent. Once again, people are known by their fruits.

If God is righteous, and he is righteous, then we can be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of God. The sons and the daughters of God will share the character of their father. A question to consider, how might John's analysis of the world, his understanding of the world in terms of pride, lust and desire and other such things, help us to understand our own societies and their systems better?