

CHAPTER SIX

John

Each of our evangelists had a different story to tell. Each of them had his own understanding of the significance of the events, and each had different problems to face. Each selected the material and arranged it in a way that would help his community see what the gospel meant for them. We have looked at the way in which Matthew and Luke handle the story, and noticed how each of them, while making use of the same material as Mark, underlines different aspects of what Christ's death means for Christian believers. When we turn to the Fourth Gospel we find a very different account, based on an independent tradition. It will be helpful to examine the way in which this author tells the story.

John's narrative, like that in the other gospels, finds its climax on Golgotha, but the story he tells before we reach the cross is very different. John has selected different material, and presents it in a different way, which means that though we meet familiar themes, they are expressed in different modes. Where, for example, are the passion predictions which played such an important part in the lead-up to Mark's passion narrative? John does not include them. Instead, we find Jesus announcing that the Son of man must be lifted up.¹ But surely these sayings *are* the passion predictions in a different form! Like them, they refer to what will happen to the Son of man, but instead of referring to his death and resurrection, they say that he will be lifted up. Now the verb *hupsoō* which is used here is as ambiguous in Greek as it is in English, for it is easy to see that it can refer both to Jesus being lifted up on the cross and to his exaltation in glory. In looking at Mark, I suggested that perhaps we should not speak about passion predictions, because these sayings refer to Jesus' resurrection as well as to his death. Almost invariably, Mark follows every reference

to the Son of man's suffering with an affirmation of his future vindication; conversely, references to the Son of man's future glory acknowledge the necessity for the suffering which comes first. The two ideas of suffering and glory are held together in the synoptic tradition: as the Risen Jesus expresses it in Luke's gospel, 'the Messiah had to suffer and so enter glory.' But what has happened in John is that the two ideas have coalesced, so that one verb now sums up the ideas which in Mark were spelt out in two. The Son of man will be lifted up – first in death and then in glory. The result of this is that the death of Jesus is being presented to us in a very positive light: Jesus' death is seen as a lifting-up – an exaltation. The horror of Mark's stark references to death and to crucifixion is blunted, and we are a long way now from sharing the anguish of the disciples on the first Good Friday. John is of course recording Jesus' words with the benefit of hindsight, and instead of remembering how the despair and pain which Jesus' death caused at the time were followed by the jubilation of his resurrection, he thinks of death and resurrection together, as the saving activity of God. He interprets the lifting-up on the cross – the exposure of Jesus' naked body – in the light of the glory which was to follow. It is a bold stroke to describe this in terms of exaltation!

This is not the only way in which Jesus refers to his coming death in the Fourth Gospel. He speaks also, especially in the Farewell Discourses, of going to the Father,² which means that once again, his death is being seen in the light of what follows, and is simply the means by which he returns to God. Even more startling is the way in which he refers to his death as his glorification: as with the verb *hupsoō*, so with *doxazō*, to glorify,³ we seem to have two opposites which have coalesced – the glory superimposed upon the shame, the exaltation on the death; but this time there is no question of our verb being ambiguous, for *doxazō* certainly means 'to glorify'. It is as well to remember, however, that when we speak about the glory of God we are in fact speaking about the disclosure of his nature,⁴ which means that in his death, Jesus glorifies God and he himself is glorified; in other words, we see here the nature of God, and the nature of his Son. The glory of God

2 13.3, 33, 36; 14.4, 5, 28; 16.5, 10, 17. See also 7.33ff. and 8.21f.

3 7.39; 12.16, 23, 13.31; 17.1.

4 See 8.54; 11.4; 12.28; 13.31f.; 14.13; 15.8; 16.14; 17.1, 4f., 10.

1 3.14; 8.28; 12.32 and 34.

is revealed – not, as we might suppose, in the resurrection, but in the shame of the cross.

It is hardly surprising, then, that in the Fourth Gospel Jesus speaks about his death from the very beginning. As early as 2.4, he says that his hour has not yet come – in other words, the hour of his glorification (cf. 2.11); so, too, in 7.6–8, 30; but finally, in Jerusalem, he announces that his hour has come (12.23, 27). These statements replace the appeals to the scriptures which we find in the synoptic passion predictions, but like them, they convey the idea of the divine plan, for the hour is set by God. But they also suggest that Jesus controls his own destiny, since it is *his* hour. He knows that the Jews are plotting his death (7.1, 19f.; 8.37, 40), and he knows from the beginning that Judas will betray him (6.70): but no-one can do anything until Jesus' hour arrives. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep (10.11, 17f.) and he does so deliberately, for no-one takes his life from him. Notice the way in which John handles the story of Judas: instead of telling us how Judas went to the authorities and offered his services; we are told that Jesus knew that Judas would betray him (13.10f., 18f.), that he singled him out and even sent him off to make arrangements for the arrest, (13.21–30): Judas may be a devil, but what he does is part of the divine plan and the fulfilment of scripture (v. 18), and since John believes Jesus to have been totally in control, even of his own death, he understands Jesus to accept and authorize, as it were, the treachery of Judas. The verb for 'betray', used again and again in the story, is the familiar *paradidōmi*.⁵

Perhaps this is why he does not include the story of Jesus in Gethsemane, for it is difficult to reconcile that tradition with the picture of Jesus in control, aware from the very beginning of his ministry that the divine plan must lead him to the cross. There is an echo of the Gethsemane story in chapter 12, however, where Jesus prays: 'Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?' Immediately he rejects the thought, however: 'No, for this purpose I have come to this hour.' This is not a struggle, as in Mark's account of Gethsemane (and even more in Luke's); rather, it is a reminder that Jesus is fully in accord with the will of God.

'For this purpose I have come to this hour': but what was the purpose of Jesus' death? This is set out in what is perhaps

the most famous passage in the gospel, in 3.16f.: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life; for God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.' If we leave aside the contrasting negative phrases, we see that the introductory statement that God loved the world leads to two balancing clauses:

- 1 He gave his only Son, in order that those who believe in him might have life.
- 2 He sent his Son, in order that the world might be saved through him.

Now these two statements echo passages in Paul, some of which we have looked at, where he speaks either of God giving his Son or sending his Son⁶ in order to restore men and women to fellowship with himself. Here John combines the two ideas of 'sending' and 'giving' – what *we* would describe, technically, as 'incarnation' and 'atonement': the coming of Jesus and the dying of Jesus belong together in God's purpose for mankind.

But how does this salvation 'work'? This is something which John never really explains, though he does provide us with a few clues, the first of which comes in the opening chapter. In the Fourth Gospel, John the Baptist recognizes Jesus from the beginning, and points him out as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.'⁷ But what sort of lamb does the evangelist have in mind? Four suggestions have been made. The first (made by C. H. Dodd)⁸ is that 'the Lamb' was a recognized messianic title; but there is little evidence to support this suggestion, and it does not explain why this lamb should take away sins. The second is that it refers to the Passover lamb; this seems much more likely, since – as we have already noted – in the Fourth Gospel Jesus dies at the very moment that the Passover lambs were slain. There is just one drawback, and that is that the Passover lamb did not remove sin either: the original Passover lambs were sacrificed in order to ward off God's

6 Rom. 4.25; 8.32; 8.3f.; Ga1. 4.4f.

7 1.29, 36.

8 *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge 1963, pp. 269–71.

5 6.64, 71; 12.4; 13.2, 11, 21; 18.2, 5; 21.20.

angel, and the annual festival is a reminder of this salvation. A third suggestion traces the lamb to Isa. 53.7, where the Servant of God is said to be like a lamb led to the slaughter; Isaiah 53 goes on to interpret these sufferings as 'for our sins'. And finally, it is possible that the evangelist was thinking of the sin-offering, for this sacrifice could be a lamb, and was certainly intended to deal with sin.

Which of these explanations is the correct one? I suspect that had we been able to ask the evangelist himself, he might have found it difficult to choose between them. For in the course of his Gospel he sets out to show how Jesus fulfils and replaces all the festivals and ceremonies of Judaism.⁹ All of them point forward to him – just as the Jewish law points forward to him. If Jewish scriptures and Jewish worship point forward to Jesus and find their fulfilment in him, we can expect him to fulfil every lamb in Judaism. But to justify that statement, we need to read on through John's gospel.

In 2. 13–22 we meet a familiar story – it is the so-called 'cleansing' of the temple, which leads up to Jesus' saying about the destruction of the temple and its rebuilding. Mark places the story at the end of his gospel, immediately before the passion narrative: indeed, we have seen how it is the event which leads to Jesus' arrest and death. John places it at the very beginning of his gospel. We do not need to argue about which author has placed the story in the correct historical position. Each of them is more concerned to understand the significance of the story, and we would be wise to do the same, for each of them has important theological truth to tell us. For John, also, the story links up with the death of Jesus: challenged by the Jews to provide a sign to justify his behaviour, Jesus replies 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up'. We may well be perplexed to understand how these words provide any kind of sign, but fortunately John explains by telling us that when Jesus was raised from the dead, the disciples remembered – and understood – the saying. In other words, the sign Jesus offers is that of his own resurrection. The saying, then, is apparently not about the temple at all, but about Jesus' own body: his enemies will destroy it, but he will rise again.

John has taken a tradition which is familiar to us from the

⁹ John's narrative is woven around the various festivals: Passover in 2.13, 6.4, 13.1; 'one of the Jewish festivals', 5.1; Tabernacles, 7.2; Dedication, 10.22. The various miracles and discourses pick up themes connected with the festivals and show how they are all fulfilled in Jesus.

Synoptics, but he has spelt out its implications in a way which the other evangelists do not do. Whereas Mark tells us that false witnesses accused Jesus of threatening to destroy the temple and rebuild it, and leaves us to work out what Jesus really did say, and what it meant, John supplies us with both the saying and the interpretation. But the saying is not simply about the death and resurrection of Jesus, for it forms the climax of Jesus' actions in the temple, and supplies the authority for those actions. Though Jesus is understood to be referring to the temple of his body, his words are nevertheless clearly relevant to what takes place in the temple at Jerusalem. Just as Mark linked the death of Jesus with the destruction of the temple, so does John – indeed, in a sense he identifies them. Why?

This story comes, as we have seen, almost at the beginning of John's gospel, immediately following the story of Jesus changing the water into wine at Cana. Both actions of Jesus are signs – signs of the new life and the new worship which Jesus brings. The water which Jesus changes into wine was intended for the Jewish rites of purification, but in his presence it is changed into the heady wine of the Gospel. The worship of Judaism is condemned by Jesus and brought to a standstill; the temple is to be destroyed and replaced by a new one – the temple of his body – so that from now on worship is to be centred on the risen Lord, not on the temple in Jerusalem. The implications of this are spelt out in the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in chapter 4: men and women will no longer worship God in Jerusalem, because they will worship him through the Spirit of truth – the Spirit who is to come when Jesus is glorified (7.39). And it is the death of Jesus which brings about this dramatic change. John tells us that Jesus hesitates to change the water into wine because his hour had not yet come – the hour, that is, of his glorification, his death. What happens in Cana, then, points forward to his death; no wonder John comments: 'this sign Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory'. At Passover (the season when Jesus is later to die) he goes to Jerusalem, and his actions in the temple point forward both to his death and the temple's destruction, since one inevitably brings about the other. But beyond Jesus' death we are promised resurrection, new wine, a new community.

In placing these two stories at the beginning of his gospel, John has made it quite clear to us that Jesus is not only the fulfilment of Jewish worship, but that he inaugurates

something much greater – so much greater that it can only be described as being on another plane altogether. The water-pots and the temple in Jerusalem belong to the old way of life, but to experience the new way of life which Jesus brings is like being born from above. In the story of Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus we have the account of another conversation, this time between Jesus and a respected leader of the Jewish people, but like the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus thinks in the old ways and cannot grasp what Jesus is talking about. The life which Jesus offers is available to those who believe in him – because the Son of man has been lifted up on the cross. Once again we have a reference to the death of Jesus, which is the means by which we move from old to new, but this time, his 'exaltation' on the cross is compared with the way in which the bronze serpent was lifted up by Moses, an action which saved the Israelites who had been bitten by earthly serpents,¹⁰ another reminder that the Old Testament points forward to what happens in Christ.

In John's gospel, the event which causes the priests and Pharisees to plot together to destroy Jesus is the raising of Lazarus. There is an irony in the sequence of events which is not lost on our evangelist: Jesus raises another man from the dead, and immediately his own fate is sealed. When his enemies meet together, Caiaphas remarks: 'It is expedient that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish' (11.50). It is clear from the context that his words are intended to apply to political expediency, for if Jesus is allowed to continue unhindered, there is a danger that the occupying Roman power will be alarmed and will send troops who will destroy both the temple and the nation: here is more irony, for that in fact is what eventually happens. But there is further irony still in Caiaphas' words, 'it is expedient that one man should die for the nation'. Here we have the familiar word *huper* – 'for': Jesus' dies for the whole nation. But what does his death achieve? He is to die 'so that the whole nation should not perish.' Compare these words with the saying in 3.16: 'God . . . gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish.' Clearly John believes that Caiaphas has spoken more truly than he knows; so significant are his words that we are reminded of them, later in the story, at 18.14. But meanwhile he adds a 'footnote', as it were to Caiaphas'

¹⁰ John 3.14; Num. 21.9.

words: Jesus died, he says, not for the nation of Israel alone, but in order to gather into one all the children of God.

This is not the only place where we find the death of Jesus linked with salvation for the Gentiles. In chapter 10, the statement that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep is followed by the comment: 'I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also.' And in 12.20ff., we have the story of the Greeks who come to Philip with the request that they should see Jesus; when Jesus is told about them, he says that the hour has come for him to be glorified, and speaks about a grain of wheat which falls into the ground and dies in order to bear fruit. Nothing more is said about the Greeks, who are apparently left standing outside! Presumably we are to understand that they can 'see' Jesus only through his death; that will be the means by which the Gentiles will be brought into the people of God.

But if Jesus' death brings salvation, it also brings judgement. The purpose of God's sending and giving of his Son, we are told in John 3.16f., is not to condemn the world but to save it. The theme is repeated in 12.44ff.: 'I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.' Nevertheless, his coming inevitably brings condemnation: 'and this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light' (3.19). Their preference for darkness is seen throughout the Gospel, where Jesus and his opponents are constantly in conflict. In the Synoptics, Jesus' opponents are the scribes and Pharisees, but in John they are regularly referred to as 'the Jews'. It is an odd description, remembering that Jesus himself and the disciples were also Jews! But by the time John was writing the opposition between Jews and Christians (whether Jewish or Gentile) had become extremely bitter, and the Jewish people, by and large, had rejected the Christian message. In rejecting salvation, they inevitably fall under judgement, but it is not simply men and women who fall under judgement, for this is a conflict between good and evil, between darkness and light. The conflict comes to a head in the passion: this is the hour of judgement (12.31). This final scene in the drama is seen as a personal battle between the ruler of this world and one whose kingdom does not belong to this world. So in 12.31 we are told that the hour has come for the ruler of this world to be cast out; in 14.30, referring to his coming death, Jesus says that the ruler of this world is coming, but that he has no power over him; and in 16.11, we learn that Jesus' 'going-away' means that the ruler of this world is judged.

The death of Jesus is seen as an eschatological battle, in which Jesus triumphs over evil.

The story of the anointing of Jesus (12.1–8) is very similar to the one we have in Mark. In John, however, the woman (here identified as Mary, sister of Lazarus), anoints the feet, not the head of Jesus, so that her action is not seen as a 'coronation'; nor do we have the comment which links it with Jesus' burial. Nevertheless, the story still points forward to Jesus' death, for the criticism of the woman's action, voiced here by Judas, is answered by Jesus' comment that 'You have the poor with you always; but you do not always have me.'

Next in John comes the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (12.12–19), and in this gospel it is indeed a real triumph. Whereas in Mark, Jesus is simply hailed by fellow pilgrims as one who comes 'in the name of the Lord', in John, the crowd sets out to meet Jesus and welcomes him to Jerusalem with palm branches and acclamations; their cries spell out what is only hinted at in Mark and clearly identify him as 'the king of Israel'. John also tells us plainly something else that is only hinted at in Mark – namely, that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on the back of a young ass fulfilled the words in Zechariah about the arrival of Zion's king. His arrival is seen as a royal progress – and yet, says John, 'his disciples did not understand these things at first, and realized their significance only after Jesus had been glorified': John is telling his story with the benefit of hindsight and is anxious that we his readers should see what was hidden at the time.

John's account of Jesus' last meal with his disciples is strikingly different from that given us by the Synoptics; nevertheless he performs symbolic actions and speaks about service and about the meaning of his death and departure. Instead of bread and wine, he takes a basin and a towel (13.1–11). The actions he performs are quite different from those in the Synoptics, yet they express the same truth, that he lives – and dies – for others. The meaning of what he does is obscure to the disciples, but once again, as so often in John, we are told that they will understand 'later' – which now can only mean after Jesus' death. In this way, his washing of their feet is linked with his death, which is thus seen to be an act of service. What Jesus does for them symbolizes first of all the fact that they have 'a part with' him: the language reminds us of other passages which speak of the close relationship between Jesus and his followers – of the Johannine description of the vine and its branches in

John 15 and the Pauline image of Christians as members of the body of Christ;¹¹ it reminds us, too, of the synoptic account of the Last Supper where, in distributing the bread, Jesus shares his 'body', himself, with his disciples. The washing signifies also that they are clean – a link this time with Matthew's account of the Last Supper, where Jesus' blood is said to be poured out 'for the forgiveness of sins' (26.28). But the service Jesus performs for the disciples is also one that they ought to perform for one another (v. 14). This is one of the echoes which we occasionally find in John of the theme which was so prominent in Mark, that the disciples must follow the example of their Lord. We have another in John 12.25f., in a saying reminiscent of Mark 8.35: 'He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If any one serves me, he must follow me.' As in Mark, the disciples claim to be able to face up to this challenge: in John 11.16, they recognize the danger involved in Jesus going into Judaea when Thomas says 'Let us go too, so that we may die with him'. And in the Farewell Discourses, John's equivalent of Mark's so-called 'Apocalyptic Discourse' (Mark 13), Jesus warns the disciples that they will be hated as he has been hated, that they will be persecuted, excommunicated from the synagogues, and killed (John 15.18–21; 16.1–4). But all that lies in the future: in 13.36–38 he warns Peter that he will deny him that same night; like the revelation in 13.18–26 that one of the twelve will betray him, this section is very similar at this point to the synoptic account of the Last Supper (Mark 14.17–21, 26–31 and parallels).

Although the Johannine account of Jesus' last meal with his disciples is so very different from that in the synoptic gospels, therefore, there are fascinating parallels with the synoptic tradition. Nevertheless, one of the enigmas of the Fourth Gospel is why it is that John does not record the tradition about the bread and wine at this point in his story, since it is not only the Synoptics, but Paul as well, who record that it was 'on the night that Jesus was handed-over' that he took bread and took a cup. But John does include his own tradition about the body and blood of Jesus earlier in his narrative, in chapter 6, and it is characteristic of John that he should draw our attention to the significance of Jesus and his actions from the very beginning of the story. Jesus was recognized as Messiah by his disciples at their very first

¹¹ Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12.

meeting, singled-out as the one who takes away sin by John the Baptist; already he has 'manifested his glory' (the glory that belongs to the cross) in Cana of Galilee, and spoken about his death and resurrection in the temple at Jerusalem (at the feast of Passover); already in Jesus' discourses we have had spelt out for us the significance of his coming and of his words and deeds; already the Jews have tried to kill him (5.16–18). We know the outcome of the story from the beginning – and we know its significance, because John has woven into the story the interpretation which Christians have given to it in the light of subsequent events. So it is perhaps not surprising that he gives such prominence to the stories of Jesus providing wine (2.1–10)¹² and bread (6.1–15, 25–65), or that he includes eucharistic sayings in the second of these: for those with eyes to see, both stories point to Jesus' death and resurrection, since Jesus reveals his glory in the first, and the second takes place when Passover was near.

The sayings in John 6 come at the end of a discourse about Jesus as the bread of life which follows the miracle of the feeding of the crowd. The passage takes the form of a 'midrash' – an exposition of Jewish scripture: the bread which is given from heaven, spoken of in Exodus 16, is not, as had hitherto been supposed, the manna eaten by the Israelites in the wilderness, but Christ himself, who is the true bread, to which the manna points forward. Now manna was often understood as a symbol for the law, which was also given to the people 'through Moses', and John emphasizes throughout his gospel that the law points forward to Jesus. So both the manna and the law find their fulfilment or completion in Christ. The law revealed the will of God to Israel, but now God is more fully revealed to his people in the person of Jesus; John has said something very similar already in the prologue: the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came in Jesus Christ.

God is revealed in the words and deeds of Jesus, but he is revealed supremely in his death. The bread which God gives is Jesus (6.32), and the bread which Jesus gives is his flesh (6.51). The final paragraph of the discourse is one of the most difficult in the whole gospel: Jesus demands that his disciples eat his flesh and drink his blood, for only so can

¹² This story may well be based on the tradition recorded in Mark 2.19–20, 22.

they have eternal life. John does here what neither Paul nor the other evangelists do – speaks about eating flesh and drinking blood. No Jew could have contemplated for one moment eating human flesh or drinking any kind of blood; the blood was always carefully drained from meat, lest any of it should be eaten, because the life was in the blood. Of course the words of Jesus are said to have offended the Jews! Their very absurdity provides the clue to their meaning: here, as so often in John's gospel, Jesus is talking at one level – the spiritual level – while everyone else is plodding along with their feet firmly on the ground, taking everything literally. But we cannot take the words literally. We may compare his words to Nicodemus about being born again (3.3–8): the Greek word *anōthen* is in fact ambiguous – it can mean 'a second time', but it can also mean 'from above'; Nicodemus scoffs at the notion of entering again into the womb, but Jesus is talking about entering the kingdom of heaven. Again, we remember how in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus offers her living water, but she can think only of the daily trek to the well (4.10–15). The problem as John sees it is summed up in 8.23, where Jesus says: 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world'. His words about flesh and blood must, of course, be understood in the same way: those who believe in him are totally dependent on him; they participate in him, share his life. Jesus gives his flesh and blood by his death, and it is through his death that believers find life. The 'offence' caused by Jesus' words here is also symbolic, for it reminds us of the offence caused by a gospel about a crucified saviour.

John has chosen to spell out this eucharistic teaching in chapter 6, and to focus his account of Jesus' last meal on his action in washing the disciples' feet and on the Farewell Discourses, in which he spells out the ongoing relationship between Jesus and his followers and the need for them to continue his work. In John's narrative, the account of the arrest follows immediately after Jesus and his disciples arrive in the garden after supper (18.1–11). John tells the story in such a way as to emphasize that Jesus is in control: Jesus, he tells us, knows everything that is to befall him (v. 4), and insists that he must drink the cup which the Father has given him (v. 11) – another echo of the Gethsemane story, but how different it sounds when it is reported in this way, for there is not a moment's hesitation. From the minute that his enemies arrive, Jesus takes the initiative: he comes forward,

asks the questions, and even issues the commands. And when he identifies himself with the words 'I am he', which echo the divine name, the soldiers are so overcome that they fall backwards on the ground. Even his arrest seems to be part of a royal progress.

John reports a trial scene before Annas, whom he describes as father-in-law of the high priest Caiaphas (18.12–23), but tells us nothing about what happened when Jesus is sent on to Caiaphas himself.¹³ The account of Jesus' interrogation by Annas is sandwiched between the story of Peter's three-fold denial, and the irony of the situation is brought out by John in his own unique way through his arrangement of the material. First, Peter is asked whether he is not one of Jesus' disciples, and he declares that he is not. Then Jesus is questioned about his disciples and about his teaching; he says nothing about his disciples (perhaps because it was useless to appeal to them!), but concerning his teaching, he tells his questioners to consult those who heard him. Finally the scene switches back to the courtyard, where Peter is asked again whether he is not a disciple, and whether he was not in the garden with Jesus, and he twice more denies any knowledge of Jesus. As in the Synoptics, the picture of Jesus, firm under interrogation (though the questions put to him are different here), stands in contrast with that of Peter, who denies every suggestion that he is a disciple. The scene now moves quickly to the residence of the Roman governor. Notice the irony in John's comment that the 'Jews did not enter the praetorium 'so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover' (18.28): in spite of their precautions they are of course defiling themselves by engineering the death of the true Passover lamb. Notice, too, how the fact that the Jews hand Jesus over to Pilate for execution, and refuse to judge him themselves, is understood by John as a fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy concerning the manner in which he was to die: what takes place is now seen not simply as the fulfilment of scripture, but as the fulfilment of Jesus' own words (18.29–32), because his will is identified with that of his Father. Once again, we have the impression that Jesus is in total command of everything that is taking place. In a series of conversations, Pilate makes repeated attempts to release

¹³ John's account is somewhat confused. He appears to describe Annas himself as high priest in v. 19. The Synoptics do not mention an interrogation by Annas.

Jesus, since he realizes that Jesus is innocent of the charges brought against him, but he is powerless to resist. One might perhaps think that it is the powers of darkness that are in control and that have swamped both Jesus and Pilate, preventing the latter's attempts to uphold what is right. But no! The power which Pilate exercises over Jesus has been given him from above (19.11), and the drama which is being enacted has been written by God. We remember the words of 14.30f: 'the ruler of this world has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me.'

But the rule of Jesus belongs to another world. In answer to Pilate's question, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Jesus replies, 'My kingship is not of this world' (18.36). Once again, we have a conversation on two levels: Pilate can think only in this-worldly terms and is bewildered by Jesus' words. He insists on calling Jesus 'king of the Jews' and his soldiers mock him, crowning him with thorns and clothing him in purple and hailing him as king (19.1–3). Pilate presents Jesus to the people with the words 'Here is your king!' (19.14) and insists that the inscription on the cross reads 'the king of the Jews' (19.19–22). The inscription is written in three languages, in order that the whole world may know the truth. As in Mark, Jesus is proclaimed as king on the cross – but his kingship is denied by the Jews, who protest at what Pilate has written. In rejecting their king and claiming that they have no king but Caesar they commit the ultimate blasphemy. The cry we might expect to hear from Jews is 'We have no king but God – and his vicegerent, his Messiah'. So Pilate finally hands Jesus over to them to be crucified: the verb, of course, is *paradidōmi*.¹⁴

The account of the crucifixion itself is quite different in atmosphere from the story told in Mark. Instead of the horror – the taunts, the cry of dereliction, the darkness – we have a scene of calm. Even here, Jesus seems to be still majestic, in control of what is happening. John tells us that Jesus goes out, bearing his own cross (19.17), whereas in the Synoptics, Simon of Cyrene is compelled to carry it. Some commentators explain John's omission of this tradition as deliberately anti-Docetic; he wants to avoid any possibility of it being suggested that it was Simon, not Jesus, who was crucified. Others suggest that John is thinking of the story of Isaac in Genesis 22, carrying wood for his own sacrifice on his back. Yet another suggestion links it with the saying in

¹⁴ 19.16. See also 18.30, 36; 19.11.

Luke 14.27 – ‘Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple’.¹⁵ Has John perhaps deliberately worded his account with that saying in mind? Whether he has or not, those who are familiar with it will recognize that in bearing his own cross Jesus does what he challenges his followers to do. But perhaps the simplest explanation for John’s wording is that he simply wishes to stress that Jesus is deliberately laying down his life: even at this point, he is doing what he has come to do, and is not being compelled. And of course, what happens is the fulfilment of scripture: four times in the course of the crucifixion narrative – in 19.24, 28, 36 and 37 – John uses fulfilment formulae, followed by Old Testament quotations. Whatever took place happened in order that the scripture might be fulfilled. Similar formulae are found earlier, referring to the passion, at 13.18 and 15.25. These references to scripture are much more explicit than in the Synoptics, which suggests that John was concerned to spell out the way in which everything that happened took place in accordance with scripture.

John adds the story of Jesus’ words to his mother and to the beloved disciple (19.25–27), and once again we find Jesus in control of the situation. Even when he says ‘I thirst’ it was ‘to fulfil the scripture’; John certainly seems here to be interpreting what we would normally think of as ‘result’ in terms of ‘purpose’. Jesus’ thirst is the closest we come to the agony which we have in Mark, and the end of the story is very different from Mark’s. Jesus’ final words are ‘It is finished’ – a cry of triumph (19.30): Jesus has completed the work which he came to do.

Verses 31–7 describe how Jesus’ bones are not broken, but his side is pierced. Both things are seen as the fulfilment of scripture – but what scripture is being quoted in v. 36? It might be Ps. 34.20, but almost certainly there is a reference here to Ex. 12.46 or Num. 9.12, where instructions are given about the Passover lamb. If Jesus dies as the true Passover lamb, then his bones must not be broken. This perhaps provides a clue as to how we are to interpret the water and the blood, which flow from Jesus’ side when it is pierced with a lance. What do these signify? Some commentators suggest that they stand for the sacraments, but it would be odd to find the eucharist represented by blood

alone, though of course the blood flows from the body of Jesus. Others suggest that the blood and water are guarantees of the reality of Jesus’ death, and that may be part of the explanation (v. 35). But John is certainly likely to have seen symbolic meaning in them. Perhaps they stand for the water and blood of birth, and so symbolize the new birth of those who are born *anōthen* (John 3). If Jesus died as the true Passover lamb, then perhaps the pouring out of the blood is a natural corollary, for the blood of the sacrifice has to be poured out. As for the water, in John 7.37–9 Jesus is said to have summoned those who were thirsty to come to him and drink. His summons is followed by an obscure and unknown quotation about water flowing from someone’s belly, which is then interpreted of the Spirit, which is to be given when Jesus is glorified. So perhaps the water which flows from Jesus’ side points forward to the gift of the Spirit, which takes place in 20.22. Once again, we do not necessarily have to choose between these explanations, for John may have had more than one meaning in mind. Whatever the true interpretation, it looks as if he understands blood and water as symbolizing in some way the new life which comes out of Jesus’ death. Certainly we have, earlier in the Gospel, sayings about drinking both the water and the blood which Jesus provides (4.10–15; 6.53–6). The final paradox is that they are supplied by the one who thirsts on the cross.

Even though at a superficial level John’s account of what took place on Good Friday is similar to what the Synoptics tell us, the effect of John’s passion narrative is very different from theirs. Indeed, there is a sense in which John does not contain a ‘passion’ narrative, and it might be truer to describe his account as a ‘glory’ narrative, for it is the story of how Jesus was glorified and how he glorified God through his death. John has already provided us with the key to understanding the story in the verb *doxazō*.¹⁶ In this sense, John’s account of the crucifixion is far removed from that of Mark. Whereas Mark tells the story of Jesus’ suffering on the cross, feeling utterly cut off from God, John tells the story of Jesus triumphant on the cross, at one with God. Which of them is right? The answer must be both! The paradox of the cross is that God is found, and revealed, in the midst of suffering and pain. Paul knew this, and used both ideas: he sees the cross as the sign that Christ was under the curse, that he became sin, that he knew the

15 C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge 1963, pp. 124f.

16 See above, n. 3.

darkness of isolation from God;¹⁷ and yet he sees it also as the glorious demonstration of the wisdom and strength of God.¹⁸ For both Paul and John, the cross is seen in the light of the triumphant resurrection which followed. We need both Mark's story and John's – Mark's to remind us of the cost, John's to assure us of the glory. Each of the evangelists has something to add to our understanding of the death of Jesus; even when we have read them all, we have only begun to explore a mystery whose significance can never be exhausted.

'The cross is seen in the light of the triumphant resurrection which followed' – and in spite of John's understanding of the cross as itself an exaltation, the resurrection is still a necessary part of the story. John tells the resurrection stories in such a way as to remind us of the importance of faith. As in all the gospels, the first visit to the tomb on Easter Sunday was made by a woman – in John, by one woman only, namely Mary Magdala. She reported to the disciples that the tomb was empty, and Peter and the 'beloved' disciple rushed to see for themselves. Peter burst into the tomb and saw that it was empty, apart from the graveclothes – in other words, he saw the evidence – but the beloved disciple 'saw and believed' (20.1–8).

Mary now sees two angels, but the news that Jesus has been raised is conveyed to her by Jesus himself: if the synoptic story is remarkable in that there the only witnesses to the empty tomb and the first people to hear the news of Jesus' resurrection were women, John's account is equally remarkable in that a woman is the first person to see the Risen Lord (20.10–18). It is later in the day that he appears to ten of the disciples (20.19–23), and a week later that he appears again to the same group with the addition of Thomas (20.24–9); the story of 'Doubting Thomas', who had been absent on the first occasion and who refused to believe until he saw the Lord for himself, stands in contrast to that of the beloved disciple, and points us to the fact that stories about an empty tomb and about appearances of the Risen Lord are not in themselves sufficient to bring men and women to Christian faith. Thomas demands more – and he is given what he demands – but the story is used to remind us that true faith does not depend on seeing and touching.

John's account comes to an obvious conclusion at the end,

of chapter 20, and most commentators believe that the gospel originally ended at this point. Someone has added another section however – chapter 21 – telling the story of Jesus' appearance to his disciples when they were fishing on the lake of Galilee. Jesus enables the disciples to make a huge catch of fish, and prepares a fire; then he offers them bread and fish: the Risen Lord thus provides sustenance to his followers (21.1–14). He also offers forgiveness to Simon, with the threefold question 'Do you love me?' and with the commission to tend his flock (21.15–19). In the final challenge, 'Follow me,' the man who had denied that he was a disciple is given the opportunity to begin again on the path of discipleship – and warned that following will mean that he, like Jesus, will glorify God through martyrdom. The chapter may be an addition to the gospel, but it certainly provides an appropriate ending.

¹⁷ Gal. 3.13; 2 Cor. 5.21.

¹⁸ 1 Cor. 1.18–31.