THE LEGACY OF JESUS

His parting words preparing us for mission today

PHILIP GREENSLADE
CONTENTS

Foreword 7

1. John 12:27–50
   Preparing for the Future 9

2. John 13
   The Hospitality of the Cross 27
   The Legacy of Jesus
   His example
   His commandment

3. John 14
   The Journey to the Father’s house 51
   The Legacy of Jesus
   His promise
   His Spirit
   His peace

4. John 15:1–25
   The Community of Friends 83
   The Legacy of Jesus
   His joy

5. John 15:26–16:33
   The Advocacy of Truth 101
   The Legacy of Jesus
   His witnesses

6. John 17
   The Trinity of Love 125
   The Legacy of Jesus
   His prayer

7. Welcoming the Future 143

Resources 157
Notes 159
As always, Lynette Brooks and all the team at CWR deserve credit for seeing another small book of mine into production. I continue to be forever grateful for my wife Mary’s patient support. I owe her more than I can say.

I thank my friends Trevor Martin and Stuart Reid for continuing to supply stimulus and refreshment, both of the intellectual and liquid kind!

I am grateful to my colleagues Kathy Overton and, more recently, Rachel Causey, who make my work more efficient and more enjoyable.

In approaching John 13–17, I was aware, even more than I usually am, of how much I owe to keener minds and holier hearts than mine. These chapters are a special country where explorers go unshod and vulnerable as if around a burning bush of revelation.

I am thankful to God that my first teacher of John’s Gospel was the renowned New Testament scholar, George Beasley-Murray, Principal of Spurgeon’s College during my time there and, later, the author of a well-received commentary on the Gospel.

George’s lectures, not least those on John, were unforgettable experiences, an exhilarating blend of passion and deep learning, exact exegesis and enthusiastic proclamation. When he finished speaking, an awed silence usually followed, until we banged our desks in noisy appreciation.

One of my fellow students, who became a good friend, was Bruce Milne. Bruce went on to enjoy a distinguished career as a
theological teacher, and author of many books, including a superb study of John’s Gospel in IVP’s The Bible Speaks Today Series. He has lately retired from his post as Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Vancouver, Canada.

Both George and Bruce epitomise for me the best of preacher-theologians, truly Johaninne men, ‘full of grace and truth’. I was privileged to know them and I am so thankful to God that their lives touched mine so beneficially. I dedicate these reflections to them both.

‘And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world’ (1 John 4:14).
CHAPTER ONE

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

(John 12:27–50)
PRELUDE

George Smith was a keen art lover.

To fulfil a lifetime’s ambition he went one year with his wife to Biarritz to savour the atmosphere of his favourite painter, Picasso, who was rumoured to be staying in a fishing village just down the coast.

Walking on the deserted beach before dinner one evening as the sun sank lower in the sky, George spotted a squat and solitary figure further along the shoreline. As he got closer, he saw that the man, deeply tanned even on his close-shaven head, was drawing fantastic figures in the sand with a discarded ice-cream stick. George ventured closer, still unnoticed by the stooping artist, absorbed in the sweeping gestures of his impromptu masterpiece.

George stood rooted to the spot. Before him was spread a swirling array of Grecian lions, mythical maidens, dancing children strewing flowers along the way. The artist stopped, surprised to see someone so near. He looked at his work and, childlike, shrugged a little sheepishly; then he looked at George and smiled. George could only stare back and whisper the man’s name, once, to himself. Then he strolled up and down the rows of startling figures, relishing the wonder. His eyes flicked to his hotel window. Should he run and get a camera? But even as he looked, the sun slipped beneath the horizon. The artist smiled again, bid goodnight and was gone.

Later at dinner, as Ray Bradbury tells the tale, George stopped suddenly while reading the menu.
THE LEGACY OF JESUS

‘What’s wrong?’ asked his wife.  
He turned his head and shut his eyes for a moment.  
‘Listen.’  
She listened. ‘I don’t hear anything,’ she said.  
‘Don’t you?’  
‘No, what is it?’  
‘Just the tide,’ he said, after a while, sitting there, his eyes still 
shut. ‘Just the tide, coming in.’

Is this how it would be with Jesus?  
Here today and gone tomorrow; so lately with us, so soon gone, 
leaving no trace, no indelible mark on the shoreline of history?

Time like an ever-rolling stream,  
Bears all its sons away;  
They fly forgotten as a dream  
Dies at the opening day.  
Isaac Watts

Was Jesus to be no exception to the grim rule?  
Jesus wrote in the sand once. What He wrote is not recorded.  
His words were swept away in a cloud of dust as quickly as they 
had been written. No trace of them remains.  
But that He did write in the ground exemplifies the humble 
mystery of how our God saves His world. As if God, not wishing to 
over-ride our will or impinge on our freedom, chooses not to 
write in unavoidable and intimidating letters in the sky. Instead He 
stoops to write in the sand, in the dust of our humanity and
PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

our history.

Jesus never penned His autobiography or left His manual of instruction. But if He never wrote a book, He left us witnesses who did.

They were a priceless, indispensable part of His legacy to us. ‘This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true’ (John 21:24).

The time of tide shall never
His covenant remove;
His name shall stand for ever,
His changeless name of Love.

James Montgomery

Let’s listen to John and discover afresh the legacy of Jesus.

JOHN 12:27-50

27“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? “Father, save me from this hour”? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 28Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.’ 29The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

30Jesus said, ‘This voice was for your benefit, not mine. 31Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 32But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.’ 33He said this
to show the kind of death he was going to die.

34 The crowd spoke up, ‘We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain for ever, so how can you say, “The Son of Man must be lifted up”? Who is this “Son of Man”?’

35 Then Jesus told them, ‘You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. 36 Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.’ When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

37 Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. 38 This was to fulfil the word of Isaiah the prophet:

‘Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’

39 For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere:

40 He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn – and I would heal them.’
Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

Then Jesus cried out, ‘When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no-one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.’

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

‘Post-Christian’ is merely the latest trendy adjective being used to describe our cultural condition in Western Europe after the slow death of Christendom. But if anyone had to face a ‘post-Christian’ future, it was the first disciples.

The Farewell Discourses – as they are called – record the last
words of Jesus as He prepares His disciples for His ‘going away’ and for a future without His physical presence.

The departure speeches of important figures are a familiar feature of ancient literature and practice. This one is particularly reminiscent of Moses’ farewell speeches to the children of Israel on the verge of entry to the promised land and there are fascinating echoes of Deuteronomy all through this moving section.

Like Moses, Jesus, too, seals His legacy of teaching with prayer.

But if there are similarities, there is of course a huge contrast between the situation addressed by Moses and that faced by Jesus.

As John Pryor puts it, these farewell words serve ‘as more than the parting discourses of a great leader; they fill out the covenant blessings and obligations of the new community of God, as their covenant mediator is about to leave them’.

The second half of John chapter 12 highlights the contrast by vividly setting the scene for the Farewell Discourses of chapters 13–17.

We will put ourselves in a better position to approach the discourses with sensitivity if we briefly explore this setting.

I do this under three headings: convulsion, crisis, courtroom.

**CONVULSION 12:27–30**

‘Now is my soul troubled …’ (12:27, ESV)

Jesus confesses to being in inner turmoil. The verb used by the evangelist is ‘tarrasso’, suggestive of a turbulent sea, with storm-tossed waves.
Jesus is experiencing violent psychological upheaval.

What John is offering us here, some suggest, is his version of the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.

But whatever the co-relation with the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus’ agitation is real. It echoes His evident distress at the grave of Lazarus (11:33–35), and anticipates His sense of horror over the seeming triumph of evil in Judas (13:21). George Beasley-Murray describes Jesus’ state of mind as ‘convulsion and shock of spirit’.3

Jesus was no plastic man, a cardboard cut-out figure. In Don Carson’s words, he ‘cannot contemplate the cross as a docetic actor, steeped in dispassionate unconcern’.4

Here then are the gut-wrenching, stomach-churning, heart-sickening emotions felt by someone on the verge of battle and so facing imminent danger and possible death. This is our Saviour and Lord. But given who He was and what His mission entailed, He felt these things to an unparalleled degree.

We must never lose sight of the unique pressures bearing down on Jesus, as we see Him – in chapters 13–17 – pre-occupied not with His own foreboding and fate but with the fears and future of His disciples!

At the same time, what we must never do is pity Him! Jesus refuses to be spared the pain that, for Him, was woven into the fabric of His destiny. ‘What shall I say? “Father, save me from this hour?” But for this purpose I have come to this hour’ (v.27b, ESV).

John’s narrative has portrayed Jesus with great intensity as moving towards ‘His hour’ as something yet to come (2:4; 7:6,8,30;
8:20). But his appointment with God’s destiny is now to be kept: ‘His hour has come’ (12:23; 13:1; 17:1) and He is willing to embrace the turmoil that goes with it.

Characteristically, Jesus brings the burden He bears and lays it on the Father’s heart in prayer. And when Jesus prays He has one overriding priority: to glorify the Father’s name.

He has taught His disciples just this: ‘When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name . . .”’ (Luke 11:2).

Very soon – in the great high-priestly prayer of chapter 17, we will overhear Him praying in exactly the same way: for an honourable vindication of Himself that would bring further glory to the Father!

CRISIS 12:31–36a
‘Now’ is judgment time for the world and its demonic ruler (v.31).

The word ‘krisis’ translated ‘judgment’ denotes crisis and decision. It is used in conjunction with the word ‘krino’ (‘to judge’): cf. 3:17–21; 5:22–30; 7:24; 8:16.

Now in the cross the hour of final resolution has come. The world is judged, its false standards of success and power and glory are overthrown.

The final judgment occurs in the cross.

Thankfully it will prove to be a saving judgment.

‘In him,’ stressed P.T. Forsyth, ‘the world passed its judgement on God, and Christ took it. But still more in him, God passed his judgement on the world and Christ took that also.’

We can appreciate the saving judgment of God even more when