

JRWS Thanksgiving Service:  
St Paul's Cathedral, 13 January 2012

*Lord, may the entrance of your word give us light. Amen*

"Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful." Revelation 17:14

We come – from across the world – to remember our brother John. We come to give thanks to God for him; and to offer his family, with those like Frances Whitehead who were closest to him, our shared support in loss, and in that grief which goes with love. And along with them, his curates, colleagues, study assistants and innumerable friends – and latterly his devoted nurses and carers at the College of St. Barnabas.

John Stott would, I think, be pleased that my text begins by drawing our eyes to Jesus; not the child Jesus of Christmas and Epiphany, not even the Man of Galilee, but to Jesus Christ, risen, exalted, victorious and reigning. It is that Jesus who is at the heart of our worship today as he was always at the heart of John's life and ministry.

As you know, in these central chapters of the Book of Revelation, the Apostle has been shown, amazingly, a door open on the unutterable mysteries of heaven. Here in chapter 17 he is shown Jesus, the Lamb slain, as the final Victor in the cosmic struggle between good and evil, reigning supreme in the heavenly places as Lord of lords and King of kings. It is an awesome vision of eternal reality.

And, so the Apostle discovers, there with the exalted Christ are the called, the chosen, and the faithful.

The called

John, as we all know, was called while still a schoolboy to follow Christ. It was a story he was never tired of telling. Searching for God, unsatisfied, restless of spirit, he was pointed to that dramatic image, in this Book of Revelation, of Christ knocking at the door of the human heart. It is the subject of Holman Hunt's famous picture, *the Light of the World*, here in the South Aisle of this cathedral.

You may have heard John tell of this experience. "I, too, have talked with Jesus Christ through the keyhole," he would say, "I have pushed pennies under the door in response to Jesus' knock." He

would explain how, in the picture, the hand that knocks still bears the scars of the nails, and how there is no handle on the outside of the door. Christ must wait, and indeed has been waiting while brambles have overgrown the doorway, until we open that door to all our life and personality, and receive Christ as guest, then host; as Saviour and Lord. To that call, John ever looked back. He observed 21 February as the anniversary of his New Birth. Many distinctions were to come his way: Chaplain to the Queen, CBE, academic honours. But through it all his true calling remained simply, 'to become more like Jesus.'

Called, and chosen.

Following Paul's conversion, we read in Acts 9 how Ananias was told that Paul was now 'a chosen instrument of mine to carry my Name before the nations'. So God chooses those whom he calls, and equips them, for particular tasks. He chose John Stott, surely, in our day, as he once chose Paul, 'to carry my Name before the nations'.

At the start, this was done mainly through All Souls; and then through the great university missions, through those long, arduous days at The Hookses, wrestling to leave us a permanent legacy in print; and through the many structures he cared for and helped to create: - the Eclectic Society, the National Evangelical Anglican Congresses, EFAC and CEEC, the Lausanne Movement, the London Institute, the Langham Partnership, and many others.

Do you remember John's famous sermon, borrowing from Martin Luther King, at the opening in 1975 of the re-developed All Souls? "I have a dream", he said, of a church which is *biblical*, loyal in every particular to the revelation of God in Scripture; which is a *worshipping* church, a *caring* church, and a *serving* church, one whose members obey Christ's command to permeate secular society as the salt of the earth, the light of the world, whose people share the good news of Jesus with their friends, a church which has a global vision, and an *expectant* church, faithful and active because it is looking for its Lord to return.

This is a glimpse of the vision which John Stott was chosen, and wonderfully gifted, to impart, not of course to All Souls alone but to Christians and churches across the world; both in his own unceasing missionary journeys and still today in his writings and in the continuing and expanding work of the Langham Partnership. It says much for the measure of the man that his work should not die with him, but should continue to grow and flourish under the hand of God.

## Called and chosen and faithful

I can be briefer here. I guess we can all bring vividly to mind particular instances of John's determined faithfulness to his calling and work, his Bible, his gospel and his Lord. As I have been pondering this sermon, a well-known voice has been always at my elbow, saying "Not about me, but about Jesus!" And I do not think John would feel I had been true to his memory if I did not now ask each of us how we ourselves stand before those words, *called and chosen and faithful*.

So, in a phrase I learned from John, may I put to you – to each of you individually – the direct question: "How is it between you and Jesus Christ?" I have no time to elaborate on that, but as earnestly as I know how, I leave the thought with you, called? chosen? faithful? How is it this Friday morning between you and Jesus Christ?

What else do we know of those glimpsed by the Apostle through heaven's open doorway? Just this: they are "with him"; or as Paul put it, "with Christ which is far better." John prepared, as you may have read, a formal document in which he told his doctors: "The reason that I do not wish to cling to life is that I have a living hope of a yet more glorious life beyond death, and I do not wish to be unnecessarily hindered from inheriting it."

That living hope was founded on the cross of Jesus Christ, the centre of all John Stott's life and teaching. In his book, *The Cross of Christ*, he speaks of the three great achievements of the cross: saving sinners, revealing God, and conquering evil. He goes on to add, "The cross transforms everything" – our relationship with God, our understanding of ourselves, our incentives to give ourselves to mission, a new love, a new courage.

So, therefore, when the Apostle looked through that open doorway, he was shown that it was the Lamb – the Lamb slain, the crucified Jesus – who is yet Lord of lords and King of kings: and they that are with him are called and chosen and faithful.

Thanks be to God. Amen.