



# Reflections on John

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## Introduction

I'm really not sure what to call this; is it a book, a Bible study, a devotional, a small group study, a commentary? To be honest, it isn't quite any of those things, yet it has aspects of all three. It's hardly long enough to be a book; it isn't complete enough to be a commentary. It's not quite a devotional, but it could be used for devotions. It's not quite a Bible study, but it could easily be used for that, too. If you're creative, it could also be used to teach a class, but it isn't in a proper format to be curriculum.

One thing differs here from the first two collections I have released. For this collection, I have not included discussion questions, but anyone could make up their own for use in a discussion or class setting.

This little "document" is freely given to you. By all means, feel free to share it with others for free. Please do not use any of this for commercial purposes! Make use of whatever helps you grow in your relationship with our Lord and anything here that isn't helpful, by all means set it aside. Helping other believers in their walk with Christ is my only purpose here!

All blessings to you in Christ!

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## A Brief Introduction to the gospel of John

Of all of the Gospels, John's is without a doubt my favorite, just as John is my favorite New Testament author. John just has a certain way with words. His language isn't the best grammar, and sometimes he has a way of writing in circles, yet as he does so, he leads to major revelations in which he takes the complex and makes it so very simple that it's not easy to miss the point. Of course, much of the theology written in the centuries that have passed has succeeded in doing so, but it usually takes an awful lot of education and training to miss John's points!

His Gospel is unique in that it is not synoptic, which is to say that it is the only one of the four that is not always in chronological order. It is a biography of sorts, but it is not merely the story of the life of Jesus, it is a revelation of deeper significance than one would gain from a recitation of narratives as Mark's contains, for instance. John relates Jesus' life from a heavenly point of view, while Matthew relates it from a Jewish point of view, Luke from a Greek point of view, and Mark from a Roman viewpoint. As a consequence, John is the only Gospel author who wrote to a universal audience. Why did he write the book? Here is John's answer to that question:

*“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

John 20:31

Simple enough.

He wrote the book sometime between 85 and 95 AD, with a clear New Covenant orientation, and begins in a way that only John writes about; a deeper view of the birth of Christ. He introduces Jesus Christ to us in a way that is similar to Hebrews 1:1-4 and 1John 1:1-4 which provides us with a Heavenly overview of His nature, position, identity and purpose, beginning with the words, "In the beginning...." The "Christmas story" is usually told from Luke chapter 2, but in John chapter one you see the theology of that story. Thus we can easily say that Luke, the historian gave us the facts, but John the Apostle of love gave us the behind the scenes background that gives Luke's account a significance that is the reason this birth is celebrated 2,000 years later.

So here we go, back to the very beginning...

## In the Beginning

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.*

John 1:1-4

John begins his account with the words, “in the beginning” with a very different beginning in mind than we find in Genesis 1:1, for while Genesis begins with the creation, John begins with God alone. The “God” that John refers to here is first called the Word (logos) God, the uncreated Creator, before the creation of anything... The Word. That “Word” was there first of all... with God; in fact the Word was and is God.

We throw those terms around in our day, don't we? “The Word” referring to the Scriptures, and we seem to like to use it to prove our various points in arguments with each other as though the “Word” is our own very precious tool for debating. Yet John, the Apostle of Jesus Christ uses it as a name for Almighty God.

Notice how the Word becomes God, and then in the next verse God becomes “he.” He was with God in the beginning. The Word was with God in the beginning: “The Word” “God” and “He” were all together in the beginning, before anything had been created.

They are One.

Jesus is God's messenger to mankind, as well as being the embodiment of God's message (Heb. 1:1-4) It was by His Word that the universe came into being, and it is by His blood that we may enter into relationship with Him, as told in His Word. Thus, we may say that the Word is not only God's person, essence and power, but that it is one and inseparable from the person of Jesus Christ, who is entirely one with God. Verse 2 is set up as transition in the sense that it begins the move from “what” to “whom”; from “the Word” to “he”: Jesus was there.

Now it becomes clear and unambiguous that this “he” is the one through who all things have been made. This is stated positively “all things” and negatively “without him nothing...” Within him was life which reminds us of God breathing life into Adam. (Gen. 2:7) “He” contained life, was its very source, and this essence will be the light of the world. Life and light are two themes that carry throughout the entire gospel of John, and will become more and more clear as we go on. For now, suffice it to say that His very essence is “Truth” and that will illuminate a dark world that carries on without either Truth or God's presence, since fellowship with God had ceased after the entry of rebellion into the world.

I hope that you have noticed how much theological truth that John has expressed in four simple, clear and easy to understand little verses; scholars write volumes and can't say so much. This is precisely why I always tell my students that John's gospel is very much a “Big Boy” book.

## Shining in the Darkness

John 1:5-9

Verse 5 begins the next little section of John's text, a section that continues through verse 13. The theme is that of the manifestation of the Word in this dark world, and in this it is interesting to note the transition from the Word, to God and then of Word-God into "light". We can easily see through this device that the three terms, Word, God and light are being used interchangeably to describe attributes of God, thus they are One in their reference to Christ, who is as yet unnamed in the text.

*The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*

John 1:5

Once again, John has put into one simple statement a fact that theologians have struggled with for centuries; the world around us just doesn't "get it". OK, those poor souls who live in the darkness of this world don't understand the light; why does this surprise us? At the same time as we are surprised that this world struggles with the message of Christ, some of us are surprised that we should be called to reach out to the world around us to deliver the message of light to them and help them to see it for what it is; grace and truth. Why should we be surprised to be called to help others understand it? Why should we resist this calling?

There was a guy who did not resist the calling, and his name was John. This John is not the same guy who wrote the gospel, yet both of them were only too happy to share the light with a dark world. Verses 5-9 set up what follows by pointing out that this John (the Baptist) was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah who was about to burst upon the scene in the person of Jesus. John was not the light, just as you and I are not the light, yet he was sent to prepare the people to hear the message that would come in Christ.

In our time, the light has already come, and we have received it and received grace as a result. We are sent to share that light, and to help those around us to comprehend it that some should receive it also and share in its blessing. When you think about, this is an awesome calling.

## Children of God

*He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

John 1:10-13

When I was a youth, these verses changed everything for me; this is where I began to comprehend the truth of Jesus Christ. Don't get me wrong, I believed in Him before that, but simple belief isn't the same as comprehension, and though my comprehension was not, and for that matter still is not as complete as I might like, this was the turning point for me. Yet again, simple John took a major theological concept and boiled it down to a few simple sentences that anyone can understand; it is clear and simple. This "light" who is also the Word-God, came into this world of darkness, and even though He made the world, the world simply didn't recognize Him for who He really was. He even came amongst his own covenant people, the ones who had received the message of the prophets concerning Him and His coming, yet they for the most part, didn't recognize Him any more than they recognized the prophets when they came. Yet, for those who did see Him for who He was, He made it possible for them to be reborn as children of God.

Wow!

What could be simpler?

The interesting thing about a text like this is that while I'd like to write on and on, I'm pretty sure that I would either resort to being redundant, or I would translate simplicity into complexity, and neither of those are very good outcomes. Accordingly, I think I'll just leave you with...

Wow!

What could be simpler?

## The Word Became Flesh

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

John 1:14

Up to this point, we know that the Word was with God and that the Word was God; the “Word-God.” We have also seen John refer to this Word-God as “he”. Now, for the first time, John identifies “him” as the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Yes, for it was none other than Jesus who became flesh and made His dwelling among us at the incarnation, it is of Jesus that the Hebrews author asserts, “and through whom also he made the universe” (Hebrews 1:2) which is parallel to John 1:3; there can be no doubt about whom it is that John is referring to here. It is Jesus who is the Son, having come to us from the Father.

Now that we are certain of just who John has been talking about, we can look at the attributes John mentions about Him, He was full of “grace and truth.” Notice the balance between those two; how many of us maintain that kind of balance between grace and truth when we are interacting with others? Some of us have a great deal of grace, so much so in fact, that we can overlook almost anything; we might even make the truth hard to find. Others are so strong on truth that we find ourselves pointing fingers at those around us, seldom displaying love or compassion or understanding.

I used to give my students a little chart containing two axes, the north-south axis was labeled “justice” at the top and “mercy” at the bottom, and the east-west was labeled “truth” on the west and “grace” on the east. Then I would ask them to rate themselves by making a little “X” where they think they fall on the chart as I asked them four or five simple questions. After that, I would ask the questions again and have them rate me...

Almost without exception, the students rated themselves right in the middle of the chart, and almost without exception they rated me in the upper left hand quadrant: they were all full of grace and truth, while I was cold, aloof and correct.

I always got a kick out of that and joked that they should just remember who was the one who was correct in the room. Then, springing the trap, I would congratulate them, for they had each placed themselves on a par with none other than Jesus Christ Himself, a position much loftier than anything the Apostle Paul would ever dare to claim!

The preacher who pounds his pulpit while heaping condemnation on the sinners around the room thinks he’s being just like Jesus, but where is the grace? The preacher who is willing to tolerate virtually any behavior also thinks he’s being just like Jesus, but where’s the truth? Oh yes, dear reader, it is so very hard for us to see ourselves the way that others do, and even harder to see ourselves as God sees us, but since being like Christ is our goal, we need to try.

It might just be that you, me and everyone else should seek His guidance in this through fervent and regular prayer that He, through His Spirit would guide our every action, that all around us would see His love at work in each of us.

## Would You Like to Know God?

John's text continues as he mentions that John the Baptist testified concerning Jesus in verse 15, and then in 16-18 gives his own testimony about Him.

*Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*

John 1:16-18

John's first statement is about the abundance of grace that we have received through relationship with Christ. Then, John expands on his statement, pointing out that while the Law was "given" grace and truth "came." I think that's worthy of a little thought, for as John has structured this, the Law is a rather top-down thing. The Law was handed down by God to Moses, and then from Moses to the people; the people could take it or leave it. They took it, and then for the most part, they left it; there was no relationship with Law, for Law just is. The result was that that very Law became their condemnation, not their salvation.

And then, grace and truth *came* to them...

Grace and truth came to them in a person; they could talk and laugh and cry and walk together; there is relationship with grace and truth, for grace and truth become a part of who we are as human beings; there is no fear in grace and truth.

In the remainder of this text, John reveals to us that through Jesus, God can be known to Man, for Jesus is Himself God. Through Jesus, therefore, we can have relationship with God, the Creator of everything: Grace and Truth.

Would you like to know God?

Get to know Jesus. Would you like to know Jesus?

Get to know the Word who became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

Dear reader, this is really too simple for us to miss! Out of all of the knowledge that has come to humanity over the ages, this is all we need to know to receive forgiveness and eternal life; grab onto it and hold on tight, never let it go...

## John the Baptist Testifies About Jesus

John 1:19-34

Many scholars consider this section to be a second introduction to John's Gospel, bringing the first section of a Heavenly view down to an earthly witness of the one sent to prepare the Messiah's path. John the Baptist is the first witness of Jesus as the Christ, and his is the first testimony recorded. Witness or testimony is the clear theme of this passage, and in doing so, the Baptist has made a clear link between the Old Testament prophets and the appearance of Jesus on the scene; this is a theological foundation to Jesus' later claims on this subject.

Verse 19 refers to "Jews of Jerusalem", "priests" and "Levites". These distinctions should be understood as referring first to what we might call the "powers that be" among the Jewish leadership of the time. The "priests" are those Temple functionaries who perform the duties of that office under the Law, and "Levites" refers to those from the same tribe who perform ancillary functions in the Temple, such as being "teachers of the Law" and Temple guards. This delegation was sent from the city to find out just who this crazy guy was who was dressing badly and baptizing people in the Jordan. John's reply to all of their questions was "no"; he was not any of those...

So, if John wasn't the Messiah, Elijah or the Prophet, then who was he and why was he making such a commotion?

John now identifies himself by quoting from Isaiah 40:3. John was God's word spoken, not God's word incarnate; John's mission was to call for the people to prepare themselves for God's arrival by repentance and baptism in water. He baptized in water to make preparation, but the One who was coming would baptize another way...

*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."*

John 1:29-31

"The next day" is not always understood the same way by scholars. Some maintain that it is a chronological reference, while others insist that in the Gospel of John it refers to the next significant event. In either case, after the Jewish delegation had left, at some point, John made his declaration that Jesus was the One for whom he had been preparing the way. He calls Jesus the "Lamb of God" making a clear reference to the sacrificial animal used in Temple sacrifices for the atonement of sin. Jesus would take sin away entirely, not merely making a temporary atonement as the lambs in the Temple did. John's statement that he hadn't known Jesus refers to John's not understanding that Jesus, his cousin, was the One.

*Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me,*

*‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.”*

John 1:32-34

Here, John clearly tells the people how he knows Jesus is the One; John has seen the sign that God told him to watch for. Thus, because John has been made to see the Spirit of God descend upon Jesus ‘like a dove’ and then remain there, John states positively that Jesus is the Son of God.

Final Note: There is some dispute among scholars on the matter and timing of Jesus’ baptism by John. Note that in this text, John told the Jews that there was standing among them someone that they did not know (vv. 26-27). Of course this is one of the issues debated. It would appear that John had baptized Jesus at some point and then John had seen the spirit descend. Was it immediate or was there a lag in time? Verse 29 makes it appear that there was a time lag, even though John seemed to have suspected something the day before. Naturally, since the gospel of John is not synoptic, the fact that the Apostle doesn’t stick to a strict time-line can also muddy the waters a bit. Whatever the answer is, one thing is beyond debate: John, by a sign from God came to recognize that Jesus was the Christ and stated that fact boldly and publicly to the assembled people.

## Jesus Calls Disciples

John 1:36-51

This section deals with the call of disciples of Jesus. It is interesting to note that this concept has its beginning as a reaction to the testimony of John, as opposed to any sort of dramatic event. None of them had angelic messages or voices from on high; they simply reacted to the person of Jesus Christ. Why is that noteworthy? Because that is exactly how you and I are “called”. I’ve never met a man who claimed that he was a follower of Christ because he had experienced a personal audience with an angel, prophet or indeed God Himself. He simply reacted to who Jesus is.

John’s story of the calling of disciples begins in verses 35-42; taking it as a whole, we see two main components, the first being John’s testimony that Jesus was the “Lamb of God.” This is the confession that marks the difference between a world that is lost and a follower of Christ. The second aspect is the response of the two disciples of John who heard it: they followed Jesus. Notice however that their initial following of Jesus was literal in the sense that they were going to go where He went as opposed to give Him their lives. When Jesus saw them he simply asked them what they wanted, a question that He would ask many over time. The two did not give a great theological reply; they just wanted to see where He was staying, maybe to have a chance to talk with Him later. Jesus gave them a classic reply, “Come and you will see.”

In truth, this is the matrix for all personal evangelism: Someone hears about Jesus and they want to check it out. Our approach is “Come and see”. In the case of our text, they arrived at Jesus’ lodgings at around 4 in the afternoon. Time in the Gospels is reckoned more or less as a twelve hour day from roughly 6 am to 6 pm. The tenth hour would be about 4 pm. During their visit, Andrew goes off to get his brother Simon, who comes along to see Jesus. Andrew was now certain about the identity of Jesus. Jesus, in verse 42 tells Simon that he will be called Cephas. Note that the synoptics record this name change roughly in the middle of Jesus’ ministry; is this a conflict? It is not a conflict because Jesus did not change Simon’s name to Cephas; He only said that he will be called by that name: future tense, it will happen someday.

The next section, vv. 43 ff takes place on the next day as Jesus moved on and in the process came upon Phillip. He simply said to him, “Follow me.” Phillip’s response was immediate: He followed Jesus. When Phillip came upon Nathaniel, Nathaniel was more of a skeptic. Nazareth was a nowhere town. It isn’t mentioned in the Old Testament, nor in any surviving pagan writings. It’s kind of like Fallon, Nevada: Noplaceville! Funny, it is interesting that the Son of God should be from “Nowhereville”, and He was born in a stable on a road trip, and He died on a cross, naked and penniless. There is no worldly appeal to Him; there is only who He is to draw a person closer. Phillip’s reaction is a classic: “*Come and see*”.

When the skeptical Nathaniel first meets Jesus he is surprised by what Jesus knew about him. His reaction was to believe what Phillip had told him, and he responded in faith. Jesus has an interesting reply to Nathaniel’s expression of faith: You ain’t seen nothin’ yet! Jesus begins His final comment in this chapter with “Truly, truly I say to you” the first of 25 times in this Gospel to introduce an important statement, and then proceeded to make a statement that reminds us of

Genesis 28:12, Jacob's ladder. "...you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." This statement gives the commentators some trouble, but my take is that His disciples would see that Jesus was directly connected with heaven, speaking for heaven and being of heaven. Jesus and the Word cannot be separated. This is also His first use of the title "Son of Man". It seems to be a favorite of His; it can refer to no one else.

## Jesus' First Miracle

John 2:1-12

This is the story of the first miracle of Jesus. It has no parallel in the synoptics, and it stands quite alone giving insight into the way Jesus and His disciples lived that many Christians love to ignore: Jesus drank wine. (Horror!) Just for fun, compare this passage with Colossians 2:20 ff.

If this blows your mind, then let me quickly sum up this passage for you: Jesus performed His first miracle at Cana, where for the first time His glory and authority was revealed, and His disciples came to believe in Him; let's have a closer look...

The scene is set: Jesus, His mother (John never says "Mary") and the disciples were there. This seems to have been three days after the calling of Phillip. No reason is given for the reason the wine ran out. Some have postulated that the attendance of Jesus and the disciples was the cause, but since John says that they had been invited, this seems unlikely. It would also seem that Mary was well known to the family involved here, since she so quickly took charge of the disaster. When she brings this social catastrophe to Jesus' attention, His reaction is interesting: literally, "What's it to me?" Notice that Mary seems to be aware that Jesus can remedy the situation easily; why else would she pass right over His question and tell the servants to do whatever He says? Jesus statement that His time has not yet come has troubled some commentators who haven't noticed that In John's Gospel, John uses this wording to refer to the time of Jesus' being glorified (by the cross) and not to His performance of miracles, in this case a rather mundane one, if indeed a miracle can ever be called that.

The total capacity of these jars would have been in the range of 120 to 180 gallons. It is worthy of note that Jesus used all of the jars and had them filled up completely; nobody could say that Jesus' power was limited, nor could they claim that He just slipped some kind of magic fairy dust into them: they were full.

When the servants drew the "water" from the jars and served it to the master of the banquet, the master confirmed that not only was this wine, but it was the "good stuff". It can be hilarious reading commentaries about these verses when the commentator goes on and on about how this was "obviously" not really wine but unfermented grape juice.

One of the cardinal rules of interpretation of the Bible is that you must set aside your pre-suppositions, opinions and traditions and let the text speak for itself. When you are confused or feel that you have come upon a contradiction, there are various things you can do to figure out what the meaning is. Here are two easy ideas: You can usually do a word study and find out what is going on. In addition, a close examination of the complete context will also aid in determining what the text is teaching. After this has been done, if the Bible turns out to support your pre-suppositions, opinions and traditions: Marvelous. But where it doesn't, your presuppositions, opinions or traditions are wrong. In this case, if you are bound and determined to say that Jesus would never allow the serving of wine, you have two problems to deal with: First, the Greek word used here is *oinos* which happens to mean "wine". The Greek word for grape juice is *thyx*. Why would John, *under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit*, make such a

writing error? Second, note what the master of the banquet said in verse 10. Does that even remotely indicate that they were dealing with grape juice? Does it sound to you like what he would say if the wine was watered down to less than 50% wine? A better question would be, "Was Jesus trying to get everyone drunk?" The text does not tell us that Jesus had everyone's glass refilled, it tells us that the master of the banquet, the only one we know for sure that was aware of the problem got a sample. We don't know what the other attendees did after that, or if they even became aware that the wine was gone. We do know why Jesus performed the miracle, however.

The brand new disciples, who had responded to the testimony of John the Baptist, and then to each other's saw for the first time that Jesus was more than a man who had been blessed by God: He had a power that no mere mortal possessed, and they put their faith in Him. This would also be the reason for His future miracles; to confirm His true identity and the authority by which He taught.

Yes dear reader, this is the point, and all of the silly business of trying to explain away the wine only draws our attention away from the majesty of our Lord.

## Jesus Clears the Temple

John 2:13-22

Since people would have travelled to Jerusalem from all over, they would not have been able to bring animals for sacrifices with them and still be able to meet the ceremonial requirements for perfection. Having a marketplace right within the Temple (Court of the Gentiles) would have been quite convenient. At the same time, it would have been quite convenient for the priests who received a percentage from the sales. In addition, Temple taxes were required to be paid by the Jews in the coin of Tyre. Money changers were on hand to exchange other coins for the ones required for Temple taxes, sometimes at high fees: Clearly, Passover was a time for commerce in the middle of the National House of Worship.

Jesus was filled with righteous indignation and drove the traders out, overturning their tables and ordering all of the goods to be removed. Note that He did not harm the animals or confiscate the money; He was not doing this to cause harm, but rather to stop the desecration of the Temple. His whip was made of rope, not leather. It would have gotten a man's attention, but it would not have caused anyone serious harm. The issue that Jesus reacted to here was not that running a market and engaging in commerce was a bad or sinful thing in and of itself, but that the Temple was not the place for such things. Remember, the Temple in Jerusalem during the Old Covenant was the dwelling place of God (in the Holy of holies). The dwelling place of God, the place of His worship, was not to be taken callously and turned into a marketplace for personal enrichment; it was reserved for reverence.

In verse 17, John is quoting from Psalm 69:9. The Psalmist is consumed with love for God's house, and so is Jesus. Jesus' zeal for God's house as a house of prayer has interesting possibilities for us to consider. First, He certainly had a zeal for the Temple as a place of prayer, but a careful look at the Gospels will reveal that He is never portrayed as praying there. He is mentioned to be praying in the desert, mountains and Sea, but not particularly at the Temple. Of course, creative students will recall that the Temple in the OT is symbolic of a NT reality as mentioned several times in Hebrews. In the NT, many will say that the Temple represents the church, not a building, but the Body of Christ wherein He dwells through the Holy Spirit. It may be said that this approach is a bit of a stretch to apply to this passage, but it is interesting to ponder. What is clear however, is that His consummation took place at the time of His crucifixion, which was done for the forgiveness of sins that His people could be redeemed... and so that all peoples could be redeemed into the Body of Christ.

Naturally, the authorities demanded a sign of His authority. What Jesus gave in reply seemed ridiculous to those who can only think of the physical, but after the resurrection, His disciples understood that the Temple He referred to was that of His own Body.

Hmm... so what do you think?

## A Private Interview

John 3:1-21

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the ruling council came to Jesus in the night with a question, and although he never actually got around to asking it, Jesus gave him considerably more of an answer than Nicodemus had bargained for. In fact, Jesus in His answer gave what many commentators believe is an example of His early preaching; a wide ranging explanation of how a person can be saved through the New Covenant He would make with Man. He will speak of many things in this conversation, and by the time it concludes He will have set out God's plan for Mankind.

Nicodemus opens the conversation with a statement; saying that "we" know that Jesus is from God for His miracles have confirmed the fact. The use of "we" is interesting, for it implies that as of this early date many or all of the Pharisees had come to the realization that Jesus was the real deal. In His reply, Jesus goes ahead to answer the question Nicodemus is working up to when He tells him that he must be born again.

Nicodemus, as most people would do, has taken Jesus' statement literally; it seems at first to be ridiculous. Jesus, on the other hand is speaking of an entirely different kind of life, a life that is entirely apart from this physical realm. This birth is of "water and the Spirit" rather than from flesh and blood. Keep in mind that from the OT Jewish point of view, a person is born into God's Kingdom (earthly Israel) through physical birth. This is a shadow of things to come, for what will become reality through Christ is "rebirth" into the Kingdom of Heaven. This will be accomplished through water at baptism and the Spirit through the Gospel message ( cf. 1Cor. 4:15 and 1Peter 1:23 ). This kingdom is not a small and weak little nation that is living under foreign occupation, but a majestic and ultimately powerful kingdom headed by God Himself that will cover the entire globe forever.

Verse 8 illustrates Jesus' remark in verse 6: When something is born of flesh, you know where it came from, but something born of the Spirit is like something borne by the wind, you don't know where it came from or where it is going, because your physical senses can't quite perceive these things. Someone or something born of the Spirit can only be perceived by someone else who is born of the Spirit.

Poor Nicodemus is having trouble following this, and so would we in his place... ad so does anyone who is not "of the Spirit" today. Jesus' main point here is that He has been teaching the people about earthly things, and they haven't believed... even though He has been telling them about things that He has witnessed. Thus, He has been giving testimony. In the same way, nobody can testify about heaven unless he has been there; Jesus has come from there and is giving testimony of what He has seen, heard and knows for a fact. It's as though Jesus were telling Nicodemus: "Come on buddy, you're a teacher of Israel, you're supposed to understand this stuff. If you didn't know about it before, you're supposed to be educated enough to recognize reliable testimony and believe it: stay with me here!"

Jesus continues to attempt to communicate with Nicodemus by using an illustration from Israel's past that he would be familiar with. This illustration comes from Numbers 21:4-9 when God sent a plague of snakes upon His grumbling and rebellious people. When the serpent was lifted up before them and they gazed upon it in faith, they would live. If not... they would die. In the same way, Jesus will be lifted up before the people (on the cross). Those who look to Him on the cross in faith will live.

Verses 16-18 are probably the most familiar part of this text of all to Christians; it is the very heart of the Gospel setting out just exactly the whole core of Christian Theology. God has sent His Son into the world to save Mankind from the consequences of rebellion against God. Those who believe Him will have eternal life; those who refuse will perish for they have condemned themselves by their refusal. God loves all Mankind and genuinely wants them to be saved, but He allows them to exercise their free will on the matter: How will you decide?

The final verses of this passage use the illustration of "light". Jesus is the light, the truth that shines in a dark world. The world has done evil, it has rejected the light; it has rejected the truth. Yet, if we do what is good, if we believe the One who was sent by God as the light of the world, we will move into the light and our testimony will light the darkness and the world will see that we are doing God's work. Again, this is a thumbnail of the Gospel message at work in our lives. In the remainder of this chapter, John has set forth the testimony of John the Baptist about Jesus. It is interesting to note that John (the author) has put these passages together in this way. First, you have the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in which Jesus sets out the whole Gospel plan to a Pharisee, who presumably will report on it, and second you have the Baptist's testimony that Jesus is the Christ and about the Gospel as a third party validation. Jesus' teaching, followed by a third party validation: John is pulling out all of the persuasive stops in this section!

## Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

John 4:1-26

The first four verses of this passage set the background for the story; John the Baptist has been arrested (3:24; Matt. 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 3:20). Opposition was brewing amongst the Pharisees in Jerusalem because Jesus' reputation was growing and He was gaining followers and Jesus decided that this was the time to move back to Galilee. It seems that the arrest of John had the affect of freeing Jesus from John's ministry; John was decreasing, Jesus was increasing. Jesus takes the mountain road that goes through Samaria that He would later send His disciples on (Acts 1:8). When Jesus arrives in Samaria our story begins.

The plot of ground referred to here is referred to in Gen. 48:22 and is roughly a half mile from Jacob's well (see also Josh. 24:32). Jacob's well was certainly a well-known location, famous for the spring of bubbling water that it created access to. Jesus arrived there that day at about noon, tired and thirsty.

Approaching a woman at the well He asked for a drink, and the woman's response is interesting in that she seems to have assumed a superior tone; you are a Jew and yet you ask *me* for a drink? Jews did not associate with Samaritans; in fact the Jewish teaching of the time said that associating with Samaritans would cause a Jew to be defiled. If that were not enough, Jewish men did not speak to women in public; not even their own wives and here is Jesus boldly walking up to a *Samaritan woman* and asking for water.

As was His custom, Jesus went directly to the lesson He was going to teach, ignoring the customs and traditions of men. The 'gift of God' and His identity are the real topics they would discuss: Jesus could provide 'living water' and if she understood this she would be asking *Him* for a drink. Taking Him literally, she notes that Jesus has no means by which to draw water and asks him if He is greater than Jacob whose water isn't so effective. Of course when Jesus mentions water that would quench a thirst for a lifetime, the woman is interested so that she wouldn't have to draw water anymore which was very hard work. Notice that in v. 14 Jesus refers to a "spring of water welling up" which is a direct reference to the reputation of Jacob's well. The water that Jesus was talking about here is a metaphor for eternal life that was the ultimate gift of God; accomplished by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Himself.

In verses 16-19, an interesting thing happens: In response to Jesus directive to go and get her husband, the woman tells a falsehood with a half-truth. Jesus knows the whole story, to her amazement and this insight on His part is the probable reason for why she is drawing water at high noon instead of in the cool of the morning with all of the other women. Apparently shocked, she perceives that Jesus is a prophet.

Changing the subject, the woman goes on to religious matters... after all Jesus must be a prophet. Jesus tells her that God isn't really interested in where a person worships; God cares how a person worships. In God's sight what is important is that a person worships in 'spirit and

in truth': The time has come for this epochal change. From the coming of Christ forward the old regulations and traditions are set aside and replaced with reality. In modern vernacular you can almost hear the woman say "whatever". She says that when the Messiah comes he will tell us all about this (not you, a mere prophet). Jesus' reply reveals to her who He really is, for He is the Messiah. (v. 26)

Isn't it interesting how much like this woman we are!

## One Sows and Another Reaps

John 4:27-42

Last time, we saw Jesus and His conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. As their conversation was just about to wrap up, His disciples who had gone into town to buy food come upon the pair; this is what followed...

Upon their return the disciples were a bit shocked to see Jesus speaking with this woman for the reasons recounted last time, but they did not insert themselves into the situation. It seems unlikely that they would question Jesus' morality, and by now they would certainly have noticed that He didn't observe all of the usual customs of the day; they waited for her to leave. She leaves her water jugs behind and rushes into town to tell the people to come and see this man who has told her everything about her life. These townsfolk would most likely be aware that there was much to tell, and her testimony has power in their eyes. Her conclusion that He was a prophet she freely gave, but notice that His statement that He is the Christ she is cautious about; "Could this be the Christ?" The people came to find out...

The disciples want Jesus to eat something and Jesus tells them that He has food they know nothing about. As always seems to be the case, they take Him literally, wondering if somebody else has given Him food; maybe that woman?

Jesus explains His meaning: His food (nourishment) is to do His Father's work. Then He proceeds to change the subject to the harvest of souls. His main device in explaining this to them is to point out that it isn't always the same person who sows the seed and also reaps the harvest. In their case, they have gone into town to buy the food that someone else planted, worked and harvested. They did no work, they just paid for it; someone else did the actual work. The harvest of souls is near; Jesus wants His disciples to see that the time has come to reap this harvest. Of course all of this sowing and reaping is analogous to the Gospel; First the Word of God will be planted in the people, in fact it has already been done; the people expect the Messiah to appear. It is for Jesus and especially for His disciples to bring in the harvest of those who will believe that they might turn to God and receive eternal life.

Because of the woman's testimony about Jesus, many of the townsfolk believed in Him. As a result they asked Him to stay in their midst and He did so for two days. During this time, even more believed because of His teachings. Now, not only did they believe because of the woman's testimony, they also had the opportunity to see and hear Jesus for themselves: The harvest in that small town had been reaped. The people there understood that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world.

Isn't it interesting that when we share our testimony about Jesus, some people respond right away in faith while others resist and refuse to accept it? Could it be that those who respond easily have had the seed of faith planted by someone else, maybe years before? Could it be that those who refuse our plea may respond easily to someone else weeks or years later?

Certainly Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that they were to bring in the harvest of the crop that was ready for harvest, *and* to plant the seed for the harvest that would follow later: I think we can learn from this.

## A Sabbath Healing

John 5:1-15

This passage lies at the beginning of a unit within the Gospel that continues through 12:50 that covers the major Jewish festivals. The specific festival in question here in chapter 5 is not identified by the text, so for our purposes we will not worry about trying to speculate on this point, although there are various theories put forth by commentators; the application here is not affected by which festival is involved.

The pool at Bethesda was stirred periodically, we don't know how often, and the first lame person into the pool when it was stirred would be healed. The man who is the subject of our text was so disabled that he was not able to move quickly enough to be first, and had suffered his disability for 38 years. In our text, Jesus will heal him, command him to pick up his mat and walk, and then slip back into the crowd. The aspect of this event that we will concentrate on today is the reaction of the Jews, while next time we will concentrate on Jesus' response to them in vv. 16-47.

The first three verses are discussed in the introduction, however you might notice that the NIV does not have a verse four. It is contained in the footnote and omitted from the text. The King James renders verse four thusly: *"For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had."* This verse does not appear in the early manuscripts, yet in the latest ones it suddenly appears. This is considered to be the result of an early margin note giving the local explanation (myth?) that had later been incorporated into the text.

Jesus walks up to the man and asks him a simple question: "Do you want to get well?" The man's reply demonstrates that he had little hope. Not only had he been in this condition for 38 years, but the pool rules required that he be first into the pool, and only people better off than he had any chance of making it; he appears to have been demoralized. Jesus did not argue, lecture or pity, He simply gave a command without further comment: The man complied without hesitation. I wonder if we would be so bold in this man's condition! The man believed Jesus; he took Jesus at His word. There were no questions, arguments or hesitations: He followed Jesus' command. All appears to be well until verse 9... it was the Sabbath.

In verses 10-13, we cannot help but be amazed at the ridiculous reaction to this miracle: It was the Sabbath and you aren't allowed to carry your mat. Nobody said, "Wow, aren't you the guy who was crippled for 38 years... and now you are healed: Praise God!" No, there will be no rejoicing for what God has done, only condemnation because the guy picked up his stupid mat. The man told them that he had the mat because the guy who healed him had told him to pick it up, and of course they demand to know who had done that. (Conspiracy to break the Sabbath!) The man had no idea...

A curious thing happened: Jesus ran into the man later and warned him to stop sinning lest something worse happen to him and the man ran to the Jews to report who his co-conspirator was. There are several possible reasons for Jesus' words to the man although it seems to me

that the most likely meaning is to warn the man not to sin lest he receive condemnation at the final judgment. It seems unlikely that Jesus was talking about carrying the mat on the Sabbath. Notice also the lack of the man thanking Jesus for his healing, could that be the answer? In any case, the man ratted on Jesus to the Jews. Curious, don't you think? This act, of course sets up the next part in this story which we will consider tomorrow.

For today, it is interesting to consider where all of these Sabbath rules came from. Rest assured that it was not from the Law, but rather they came from the Jews' interpretation of the Law, a very strict interpretation that converted a day of rest and relaxation into more of a heavy yoke of obligation that Jesus dealt with over and over again.

Do we Christians make up rules of conduct that Jesus didn't give us and turn our faith into a heavy burden instead of its being a joy? This should make for an interesting discussion...

## Telling it Like it is

John 5:16-47

Picking up from our last text about Jesus healing the man on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders are not pleased. They aren't interested in the miracle, they could care less what has happened for the man who was crippled for over thirty years, they only care that he carried his mat on the Sabbath. In this text, we will see that Jesus makes a defense that contains within it not only His message about the gift of God, but the message of who Jesus is. It will be followed by a proof of His claims, and is clearly the sort of thing that the leaders of the day would not put up with.

Jesus explains that God works on the Sabbath and so does He, for He does what the Father does. The Jewish leaders are quick to understand what He is telling them: He is on an equal footing with God. Quite naturally, their reaction is not one of rejoicing as it should have been; instead they are anxious to kill Him!

Jesus ups the ante so to speak by going a step further. Not only is He on an equal footing with the Father, but He will also raise from the dead those whom it pleases Him to raise. This is the "gift of God" that we came across when He was talking with the woman at the well in the previous chapter.

In 22-30, Jesus goes further still telling the leaders that He will be the One to judge all men and that those who dishonor the Son also dishonor God. In short, He was telling them that He and the Father were One. We must pause here to consider the fact that by making these statements, Jesus was in violation of the Law... that is of course unless He was God Himself. He goes on to further discuss God's gift of eternal life for those who believe His Word, and with every sentence He digs His hole a little deeper in the eyes of those Jewish leaders who do not wish to hear such things. His boldness in speaking of the resurrection, a controversial topic among those very leaders, and its connection with Him personally must have driven them wild with fury and the lust for blood.

Continuing in 31-35, He begins to prove the things that He has just said, beginning with the testimony of John the Baptist. Reminding His hearers that they have heard John's testimony about who He is, He also reminds them that they were, if not supporters of John, giving credence to him for a time. In fact, they had even asked John for his views on Jesus. Jesus tells them that He is pointing this out to them so that they might be saved, that is to say so that they might believe Him.

Jesus moves on to cite further testimony to His veracity: the Scriptures themselves. Notice that He points out to them that God's Word does not reside within them, for they refuse to believe the One that God has sent. It is His contention that the Scriptures themselves testify about Him, and that they of all people should know that fact.

As He continues along this line of reasoning, Jesus adds that they would accept almost anybody who came speaking for themselves, and yet when He came speaking in God's name

as the One who had been foretold in the Scriptures, and whom they were expecting to come, they reject Him. His implication is that their rejection of Him comes from their own desire to receive praise from others, and yet they do so at the cost of receiving the only praise that is worth receiving; that praise being from God Himself.

Jesus wraps up His defense with an accusation of His own: They do not believe the Scriptures. He told them that Moses condemns them, not Jesus because it is the very Law of Moses that they make a mockery of when they go to such ridiculous lengths to *appear* to love, while at the same time, they carry with them only accusations and disdain for their people. They do not believe what Moses wrote, so they reject the One He wrote about: Ouch!

# The Bread of Life, Part 1

John 6:1-42

This chapter is divided into four sections which, when considered together paint us a twofold picture of the human condition and God's response to it. We see the human tendency to put spiritual concepts into physical categories, and we see God's response to human need as spiritual reality. We also can see the result of the clash between the two: most people will fall away from God.

## **Section One: John 6:1-15**

This is the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand. This great miracle of Jesus really gets the attention of the people because not only was it amazing to behold, but it also included a free meal. To some in the crowd, Jesus leapt out as a man they should listen to, for He had performed a miracle; He must be in good with God! To others, Jesus brought them hope that they could support their families for free; surely God was at work!

## **Section 2: John 6:16-24**

This section includes another sign that the crowd did not get to see: Jesus walking on the water. He left the place where He fed the crowd and the disciples followed Him by boat. A storm blew up on the Sea and suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the water toward them. When He got into the boat, they reached shore. Not bad for a night's work; two miracles in one. The next day, the crowd realized that Jesus was gone, and they went out to look for Him. Eventually, they got into boats and sailed for Capernaum where He had gone, and we move into the central part of the chapter...

## **Section 3: John 6:25-59**

In the third section, Jesus disappoints the crowd by telling them that He isn't giving them another free lunch, but that the true bread of life is Jesus Himself. Before getting into the particulars, we must understand that to these people, "bread" symbolizes life. If a person has bread, he will not starve this day. If he has the supplies and the ability to make bread tomorrow he will not starve then either: where there is bread there is continuation of life. Bread remains the staple aspect of Western cuisine to this day, much in the same way that rice is in the Far East.

25-27: Jesus confronts the notion of free meals right away, pointing the people instead toward the spiritual truth behind the feeding of the five thousand. The people could only see the physical, practical aspect of receiving food from Jesus. Jesus on the other hand was more concerned with the truth behind the miracle: life depends on a life-source that transcends mere biology for the true nature of life is spiritual not physical.

28-29: OK, they seem to say, what must we do? They are looking for a new rule or an activity by which they could obtain a loaf of bread that will be able to automatically replenish itself: they were making a serious category error.

29-31: The answer Jesus gave was classic: The work for you to do is to believe in Jesus. Great, say the people: give us a sign. It's hard not to laugh at this... Wasn't feeding the five thousand enough of a sign? What will Jesus need to do to convince the people, rise from the dead or something? I'd bet people wouldn't even believe Him if He did that! I know, why don't you start the manna flowing again...

32-33: Here Jesus tells them that if they want manna from God, it isn't the kind that Moses had, but rather it will be true bread (as opposed to literal bread) This true bread is Jesus Himself. Jesus gives life; it doesn't come from the grocery store, for life is a much more profound force than the continuation of a biological process in the body.

35-42: Ok fine, give us some of this bread... Jesus tells them that He is the bread of life; all life forces come from Him. If you take within the bread that is Jesus, you will have eternal life, not just your little lifetime here on earth. This starts not with just eating some whole wheat or rye, but rather when you decide to believe. If you don't decide to believe then you can go no further down the road of eternal life, but when you make this huge choice, eternal life is within your grasp, through Christ Himself. Quite naturally, the people didn't want that, for they were only looking for physical things, and they grumbled and complained as people like to do.

To be continued...

## The Bread of Life, part 2

John 6:42-71

And now, the thrill-packed conclusion:

43-52: Jesus tells them to stop grumbling amongst themselves, always a command we need to keep in mind, for while we grumble we neglect what He is teaching. He goes on to give a memorable passage in which He tells them that those who believe in Him will have eternal life, and that we must eat of Him to have life. We must eat of His flesh which He will give for the life of the world; physical bread will not give eternal life. The people, who are always stuck on the mere physicality of life are horrified! Yuk!

53-59: Since the people are determined to be stuck on the physical, Jesus gives them physical. He talks about eating His flesh and drinking His blood as though He were going to offer Himself to a bunch of cannibals. Of course the traditional Sunday school lesson will teach here that Jesus was only speaking of Communion: Laughable! Again, we only see physical things. Jesus was talking about what Communion *represents*; the reality of Communion. Communion has little to do with its physical aspects; it is all about redemption and what sustains a new life. When we eat of the bread and drink from the cup are we nourishing our bodies? Hardly...

We do this in remembrance of what He did for us; this is important. We go through an act that symbolizes taking Jesus into ourselves to sustain our lives *spiritually*. When you eat a meal food enters you body, and in due course provides energy and nourishment to your body; the elements that make up the food become one with your body on a molecular level. Thus in a sense the food becomes a part of you. When we take the Spirit within us (the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) the Spirit becomes a part of who and what we are spiritually, and grows within us when we allow it – this gives us eternal life. This gives us fellowship with God, which was God’s purpose for creating Man in the first place; and completes the cycle of redeeming and reclaiming Mankind for God.

	<b>Experience of Israel in Exodus</b>	<b>Expectations of the Crowd in John 6</b>	<b>Jesus as the Bread of Life</b>
<i>Frequency</i>	Eat manna daily	Eat bread daily	Eat Bread once
<i>Giver</i>	Moses	Prophet like Moses	God through Christ
<i>Recipients</i>	Jews	Jews	All mankind
<i>Spiritual Lesson</i>	Ate & learned nothing	Eat and learn nothing	Learn Christ
<i>Result</i>	Died	Die	Eternal Life

#### **Section 4: John 6:60-71**

Upon hearing all of this, the people following Jesus largely abandoned Him. Of course we now know that this is typical of people who cannot allow themselves to discern spiritual truth. People will often follow Jesus for a time, but when they realize that this involves more than a “get out of jail free” card, and that it will result in growing far beyond the merely physical they bail. Jesus spoke one more great line here, one that we should commit to memory: “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” This is truly something we must always keep in mind, for they are the key to unlocking the things of God.

#### **Conclusion**

It is important to note that Jesus in this discourse used *typology* in His treatment of manna and bread. The manna is the *type*, Jesus is the *antitype* or the reality that the type represents. God gave provision to the Israelites in the Wilderness with the manna; it sustained them. However this was not God’s ultimate purpose. His ultimate purpose was to redeem Mankind to Himself through Christ, thus the manna as sustenance was the type of Jesus the Redeemer and sustenance unto eternal life. A related type would be the Communion elements: they are not what redeemed us, they are the representation of the body and blood of Christ: Christ is the redeemer. Of course, the Old Testament in particular is full of typology. Moses as the leader and redeemer of the people was a type of Christ, the Promised Land is a type of Heaven, and so on...

## Jesus Speaks at Tabernacles

John 7:1-24

This chapter begins with discussions about whether or not Jesus would travel to Jerusalem to attend the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast, also known as “Festival of Booths” was a week-long celebration of God’s provision of the nation during the 40 years in the Wilderness as well as for the late summer harvest (see Lev. 23:34-43; Deut. 16:13-15). It was one of the three pilgrimage festivals to which Jewish men were expected to travel (Deut. 16:16). While at the festival, the attendees would live in temporary huts in remembrance of the way their ancestors lived during their trek through the Wilderness.

Jesus’ brothers (James, Joseph, Judas and Simon according to Mark 6:3) are encouraging Jesus to attend the Feast, and they have good worldly logic: You can’t be a public figure if you don’t show yourself to the people, and everybody will be there. They do not seem to believe in their brother at this point, and this seems a little bit like a nice brotherly taunt. We know that after Jesus’ resurrection they came to belief and were important leaders in the Jerusalem church. (Gal. 2:9)

Jesus tells His brothers that He won’t go because His time has not yet come. Notice the reference in v. 1 that there were some who were awaiting His arrival to kill Him. This statement on His part is meaning that the time for His death on the cross was still in the future for His earthly ministry was not yet completed. He also makes another interesting observation in v. 7: The world hates Him because He testifies that they do evil. Of course that isn’t what people usually enjoy hearing and His brothers are not involved in this, since they don’t believe Him anyway. They can pack up and go any time... Verses 10-13 tell of Jesus’ going later to the Feast and of the whisperings of the Jews at Jerusalem.

Jesus arrives secretly and suddenly appears at the Temple and begins teaching. Those who hear Him are amazed at the power of His teaching, and in typical worldly fashion wonder how He could teach like this without being formally trained. A similar situation today might occur if we heard great teaching from someone who hadn’t been to College; it wouldn’t occur to anyone that the Holy Spirit might be involved.

In vv. 16-19 Jesus is responding to their wonder. In vv. 16-17 He tells them that His teaching is from the Father and not from Himself. He makes an interesting comment here when He says that anyone who *chooses* to do God’s will can tell where His teaching came from. The word “chooses” is the one to focus on, for it says so much! Do we “choose” to do God’s will, or do we “choose” to do our own? If doing God’s will is a choice, then when we do not do His will that must also be a choice, and if we are not doing God’s will we cannot blame anyone or anything except ourselves, for we have chosen our path. We have made a choice even when we decide not to decide. In other words, if we choose to consider doing God’s will later... we have just chosen *not* to do His will now. I don’t know about you, but for me that’s a little bit convicting!

In 18-19, Jesus moves in another direction; one that has an interesting logic. If a man speaks for Himself, he does so to gain honor for himself, that is to say he does it so that his audience will applaud. Keep in mind that many want Him dead... He is using this obvious observation as demonstration that His teaching came from God; He certainly isn't gaining honor if everybody wants Him dead. Then He mentions the Law of Moses, saying that none of His hearers have kept the Law. (Breaking the Law carries a death sentence). This is to say that those who condemn Him are the ones who deserve to die.

If Jesus was trying to win the praise and honor of men, what He says in verses 20-24 is a poor way to go about it. The reaction to His last comment above is strong: You're nuts! Who (as if they didn't know) is trying to kill you? In 21-23 He refers to the incident that got the leaders all riled up which was His healing of the crippled man at the pool in chapter 5 on the Sabbath. He uses the example of circumcision, which must be done on the eighth day Sabbath or no as a justification of His miracle being done on that day, accusing people of making their judgments on mere appearances and not being willing to think through the actual truth of a situation. He finishes by calling on them to start making better judgments. In this, He speaks the truth plainly, so much so that He isn't likely to gain any love from those to whom it applies. This is an interesting example for us because you will notice that in this case, Jesus wasn't exactly being overly concerned about their delicate feelings...

## Who is He, and Where did He Come From?

John 7:25-52

We have been looking at Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles, and in this section, we will pick up the story at verse 25, where John shifts the narrative to focus on the “the people of Jerusalem” which are those in attendance who are “hometown” attendees. It would seem that at least some of them are aware of the plot afoot to kill Jesus.

Where the Messiah would come from is the subject of much discussion and speculation in this passage, and it is a very important question relating to the validation of Jesus in the eyes of many people. Can a Messiah come from Galilee? Would a Messiah come from anywhere in particular— or must he come from Bethlehem? After Jesus’ statement in 28-29, they want to seize Him, but are unable because His time had not yet come to die; the murmuring continues until the Chief Priest orders the temple guards to arrest Him. The question for us to ask is why? They were arguing among themselves about where the Messiah would come from; he should come from a place they don’t know about, but this guy came from Galilee; Jesus set them straight about where He really came from, and they want Him dead...?

Does that make sense?

The scene closes with Jesus’ remarks about where He will ultimately go; a place they will never be able to follow. Again the speculation rages among the Jews; again they simply can’t seem to comprehend that He is talking about Heaven which is His ultimate destination. Again, they are frustrated.

Jesus begins His discourse of the last day by telling the people about “living water” which John points out to us is a reference to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit beginning at Pentecost. This, however, is not the direction that the remaining text will take...

After Jesus spoke of living water, the text returns to the confusion amongst His hearers. They can’t seem to figure out what He is telling them; rather they are more concerned about ancillary issues.

In verses 45-52, we come face-to-face with the overwhelming desire on the part of the priests and Pharisees to disbelieve Jesus. It would appear that their only interest is in silencing Him...

It would appear that the great controversy of this passage is just who Jesus is, and that controversy is increased by the question of His origin. Jesus answered the question, giving them a place of origin that would also answer the whole Messiah question, yet it seems as though nobody was listening, for in truth, no one was. Certainly, the Jewish officials in the story should have been able to understand this riddle, for of all people, they were the experts in such things. Yet one thing is clear above all else, the Pharisees and priests didn’t want Jesus to be the Messiah, so they simply closed their minds.

I wonder if any of you can think of a parallel today.

## Caught in the Act!

### John 8:1-11

**First, An Important Note:** This section is not included in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts of this Gospel, and thus is often not covered by commentators in their works. The reasons for this are several, and although we will not take the time to analyze them, the truth is that this probably doesn't belong in John. However, it does appear to be consistent with Jesus' ministry with parallels in the Synoptics and thus it would seem to be "authentic Jesus". It is certainly instructive for our purposes in wishing to know Him better and to understand His teachings. Clearly it was highly enough regarded to have been preserved by the early church as authentic Jesus.

One day, Jesus was in the vicinity of the Temple, prepared to teach. There was a crowd of people there who were ready to hear Him, so He sat down and prepared to speak, when suddenly a bunch of teachers of the law and Pharisees burst in dragging along a woman.

*"Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"* (vv. 4-5)

A witness to this event who was sharp might quickly wonder about this surprising turn of events. Since these men mentioned the Law of Moses, and they are the authorities in such cases, why would they bring her to this "teacher" whom they despise to render sentence upon this woman? Hold on, the Law prescribes procedures for the determination for guilt: Who saw her commit this act? Were these high and mighty leaders of the people sneaking around and peering in through her windows? How do we know she's married; who is her husband? Oh, and while we're at it, who is the witness to her supposed acts? Oh yes, and one other thing, the Law requires that her partner in crime be executed too; who is he and why haven't they brought him along for judgment as well?

Jesus, now the judge, didn't ask these questions, instead He bent down and wrote something in the dirt; He doesn't seem all that concerned, but to our sharp observer of these events, it seems that there might be more afoot than an adultery case... but what?

Then Jesus renders a sentence of sorts, when He stops writing, stands up and says, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Silence fell upon the scene; Jesus bent down again and resumed writing in the dirt with his finger.

People began to leave, slowly at first, beginning with the older ones until Jesus was left alone with the woman. *Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

*"No one, sir," she said.*

*"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin"* (vv. 10-11).

Oh wait, I forget to mention something from the text:

*They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him (v. 6).*

Those men didn't care about the woman; they were trying to attack Jesus.

By the standard He set, Jesus was the only one qualified to cast a stone, but He lets the woman go. He does not send her off to continue her sinful ways, but rather He admonishes her to sin no more. What we see here is Jesus forgiving the woman for what she had done and calling her to repentance, which is also what He has done for us.

People are frequently quick to condemn others, but who among us is without sin? Can we look around and condemn our brother when we too are sinners? Condemnation is God's job; our job is to forgive and to encourage and correct with "patient endurance," not to condemn. Second, as sinners, we too deserve to die but God has forgiven us through Christ. You and I are commanded to repent of our old ways and walk in newness of life with Christ... and yet we still stumble and need forgiveness again. With that being the case, we are hardly qualified to cast stones at others. Forgiveness and repentance are key qualities in Christ's teaching for our behavior in life, and are key qualities that some seem to lack entirely.

## Valid Testimony

John 8:12-30

If we moved directly from 7:52 to this point, leaving out the story of the adulterous woman, we would have a scene change for sure, but we would still be within the context of Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles. In this passage, Jesus states that He is the light of the world, which is a reference to a portion of the Tabernacles festivities in which four great torches are erected in the court of women on the last night of the Feast. It was said that they could be seen all over the city. This makes sense when we recall that the Temple was built on top of a mountain. By doing this, Jesus had tied His claims to the two great ceremonies of the Feast, the water ceremony (7:37-38) and the light ceremony (8:12). It would also appear that Jesus was speaking either just before nightfall or after dark on the last day of the Feast.

In saying that He is “the light of the world” Jesus was making His second “I Am” statement in John’s Gospel. Light has already been used by John to signify the Word that is the true and living light in chapter 1, and again in chapter 3 as God’s truth that reveals human sinfulness and evil, things more conveniently done in darkness. Jesus here is telling the people that His followers will be freed from lives of sin with Him as the unquenchable source of God’s truth.

The scene change is complete here with the revealing that His public opponents are the Pharisees who have failed in having Him arrested and now move on to a public confrontation in which they attempt to marginalize His message by pointing out that He has no one to verify what He is teaching...

The Pharisees having made their move, Jesus now replies by going to a higher, spiritual level. His testimony is valid because He has come from the Father in Heaven. His judgments are made without human frailty because He stands with the Father who also testifies for Him. The Law allows truth to be determined by the testimony of two men. Jesus has His own testimony (1) and God’s also (2).

The exact identity of Jesus’ father will be the central point of the rest of the discussion. Jesus’ statement that they know neither He nor His Father in verse 19 is an interesting insight for it indicates that to know one of them is to know the other. Verse 20 is inserted into the dialogue to indicate that they were apparently near the Temple treasury where many guards would be stationed, yet no one moved to grab Him and silence what the Pharisees would consider blasphemy, for the time for His arrest had not yet come. John’s continual reference to His time coming or not yet having come is a reference to the fact that Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion were an integral part of God’s plan of salvation and no accident.

The discussion resumes in verses 21-24 with Jesus pointing out the difference between He and His antagonists: Jesus is from above (God/Heaven) and they are from below (world). They cannot go where He is going because of their sin. To follow Jesus is to overcome the sin of unbelief and to remain in unbelief is to die in our sins. At the end of the passage, the “I am” focus emerges more clearly.

*“Who are you?” they asked.*

*“Just what I have been telling you from the beginning,” Jesus replied. “I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is trustworthy, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.”*

*They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” Even as he spoke, many believed in him.*

John 8:25-30

Jesus' answer to their question as to His identity is classic; He tells them that He hasn't been hiding anything. As we have noted previously, they had no excuse for not knowing exactly who they were addressing. His identity would be entirely unavoidable upon His resurrection after they had Him “lifted up” and at that point John informs us that many who heard this exchange came to believe in Him. Note that the Pharisees had asked John the same question in 1:19 and that John's answer was “I am not...” in stark contrast to the claim of Jesus in this passage “I am”.

Next time, we'll continue this discussion of just who is Jesus' Father.

## Attacks, Always Attacks

John 8:31-59

*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

John 8:31-32

This section opens with Jesus turning to address those among the crowd who have believed in Him. In speaking to them, Jesus issues a new challenge: discipleship. To become His disciple, they must "hold to my teachings." The meaning of the original text is more like the rendering of the NASV: "continue in my word." This is much more than being a good Bible student, for John introduced Jesus as the Living Word (1:14) so that to "continue in my word" would require that they have a relationship with Him. In the following sentence, Jesus goes on to tell these people that they will know the truth (Jesus Himself) and that the truth will set them free. This is not a freedom from political or worldly oppression, but a freedom from spiritual oppression; freedom from slavery to sin. This is where His opponents resume their attack...

In 8:34-38 His opponents ask Jesus a question with a false premise: *We have never been slaves*. Jesus in His reply does not take the bait; He is talking about slavery to sin and they are *all* slaves to sin. He uses the metaphor of a slave's position in the family of the master to illustrate the fact that if He, God's *Son* sets them free from bondage to sin, He is doing something that it is His place to do. He goes on to mention that they have refused to "have room for my word." Notice that this is the complete opposite of the disciple who continues in His word. He ends this reply with a set-up of His own...

*I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.*

John 8:38

They object to this saying that they are not "illegitimate" being Abraham's descendants, and Jesus continues by pointing out that they are not acting like Abraham would act, instead they are following not Abraham but their own father. Now they say that their only father is God; they have fallen into His trap. Jesus tells them that if this were true they would love Him, not be plotting to murder Him. They are doing the work of their father the devil, who was a murderer and a liar from the beginning. They hate hearing the truth from Him because they are following the lead of their father "master" because they are slaves to sin (the devil). Jesus finishes this comment by telling them the obvious: If they belonged to God they would hear and comprehend His Word, but since they belong to the devil they cannot hear or comprehend.

Once again the Jews respond in a way that seeks to marginalize His words, calling Him a Samaritan and demon-possessed. Jesus calmly tells them that He is neither and says that He is honoring God, and that anyone who keeps His Word will never see death( v. 51).

This section begins with the Jews asking Him more or less just exactly who He thinks He is, and Jesus is quick to tell them in vv. 54-55 that He is God's Son. In the next verse He tells them that He knows Abraham's thoughts as well when He says that Abraham looked forward to this day and rejoices in it, It is important to note that Jesus did not say this so as to speculate on what Abraham *would have* thought, but instead He is stating it as a fact; He is acting as a witness to it.

This completely blows their minds.

Their response in verse 57 is not one of amazement but is instead ridicule; they are marginalizing Him again so as to reduce or eliminate His credibility with the rest of the people. Verse 58 is the tipping point in the discourse: Jesus claims to be God. To make the statement that Jesus made here is one that is direct, to the point and undeniable in its meaning. *"Before Abraham was born, I am!"* Jesus is telling them two things, first that He has been around since before Abraham; He isn't thirty-something, He's at least 2,000 years old. Second, notice that Jesus didn't say "before Abraham was born, I was alive" no, He said "I am". I Am is the name God used to identify Himself to Abraham, thus Jesus is telling them that He is none other than God in the flesh. They understood this, and since they knew blasphemy when they heard it, they proceeded to grab for stones with which to execute Him. Jesus slips away, for His time had not yet come to die. It is worth pointing out that for all of the reasons Jesus cited, these people did not stop to consider the possibility that He might be telling the truth. These great men of God, these teachers, lawyers and scholars were actually following the devil, and their haste to shut Jesus up when He states the greatest truth of all is a poignant reminder to all of us that we must "continue in His word" to ensure that we are recognizing the truth when it is spoken in this difficult and dark age in which we live.

## Dirt and Spit

John 9:1-12

There was a man who was born blind, reduced to beggary, and walking along one day; the disciples ask Jesus who sinned that he should be blind, he or his parents. Jesus corrects their false premise telling them that no one sinned, but this man would give glory to God through his condition. Then Jesus did an odd thing; He spit into the dirt and made a muddy paste which He rubbed on the man's eyes, then He told the man to wash his eyes off in the Pool of Siloam and he would be able to see.

Yet just before doing this odd thing, He had something else to say to the disciples:

*As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*

John 9:4-5

As we will see, John will use day and night, light and dark, to illustrate Jesus' presence or absence. As we continue to move closer and closer to the time of His arrest, Jesus will continue to say things like "while it is still day" and "the night is approaching." In fact, as we will see later in the book, Jesus describes the period from His arrest up until His resurrection as "night" or "darkness". So, at the point of this story, it is still day and there is work to be done to glorify God.

There is some very interesting imagery in this account, there must be since spit and dirt are seldom known as a restorative for sight; if they were I'd have tried them myself! When Jesus spit into the dirt, that saliva came from His mouth, as does His *Word*. Recall the Word in the beginning that was with God, and which was God, and then which became flesh and made its dwelling among us? That is what is being pictured here. As for the dirt, do you recall what God made Adam from? Ah yes, it was dirt! So the Word comes from the mouth of Jesus and is combined with the soil which represents humanity and is applied directly to the part of the man that isn't whole. Then the man, who has never seen Jesus, does what Jesus has commanded him in perfect obedience and is made whole again, in this instance receiving his sight for the first time. In fact, we wouldn't be far off track if we said here that the man had seen the light.

Did you notice verse 7? The Pool of Siloam "which means sent." Think about this for just a moment: Jesus combined His Word with humanity and then they are sent out on a mission. What happens when we receive Christ? His Word combines with our humanity and we are sent to make disciples, and when we respond in obedience, we are made whole. Now in saying this, I don't mean just that our sins have been forgiven, for that is only the first step in life's adventure with Christ. For it is within the adventure of following Him, over time you might say, that we are made entirely whole, as we see the light of His Truth at work within us... and so it was with this man.

What an amazing little story this is!

The man's neighbors had lots of questions, and so do our neighbors when they see Jesus at work in us, but unfortunately, the Pharisees are about to weigh in on this, and that is a whole different story, just as it is for us when the modern-day Pharisees get involved...

## An Investigation

John 9:13-34

Jesus healed a man who had been born blind with a curious mixture of dirt and spit in John 9:1-112, and now we reach the time when this has come to the attention of the Pharisees; an official investigation of this lawlessness has been opened.

What's that you say- what's lawless about healing a blind man?

Oh sorry, didn't I mention it? Jesus healed the guy on the Sabbath, and we know how they feel about that don't we?

Look at this text; can't you just see these Pharisees who have already decided the outcome, trying to get the answers they need to justify what they have already decided they are going to do? Those Pharisees might even make a Congressman blush!

They question the man, but not satisfied, they question his parents, after all how can they be sure he was ever really blind? The parents say he was blind and he is their son; they should know. Yet when asked who had healed their son, they are afraid to be associated with Jesus, for the corruption of their leaders is well known; they throw the question back to their son. The Pharisees question him a second time.

They ask him again to tell them who did this, only this time, they want the truth:

*He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?" (v. 27)*

This is one of those times I wish I could see their faces; would you like to become His disciple too?

*Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." (vv. 28-29)*

If you have been following along, then you will remember that it was only a couple of chapters back that the Pharisees were sure Jesus wasn't the Messiah because *they knew where He came from*; a tangled web indeed!

*The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." (vv. 30-33)*

The parents might have been afraid of the Pharisees, but this guy is on fire! If I were advising the Pharisees, I would tell them to end this interview in a hurry before they screw it up even further... and they did:

*To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.*

Like any other group of mediocre politicians, they avoided the truth by calling the guy some names and having him tossed out. After all, isn't that what you do when the issue becomes too hot to handle?

We've already seen the way that the issue of healing on the Sabbath plays out between the Pharisees and Jesus, yet the Pharisees just know they can trip Jesus up so they will have an excuse to murder Him. Their minds are closed, their hearts are hardened and their backs are turned on God, now it's just the small matter of doing away with the inconvenient truth. Does this remind you of anything today?

Next time, we'll see what Jesus has to say on all of this...

# Spiritual Blindness

John 9:35-41

Jesus heard that the Pharisees had thrown the man out who was blind from birth, for he wasn't going along with what the Pharisees wanted. When He caught up with the man, the man came to believe in Him and worshipped Him. This brings us to verse 39; why doesn't anyone ever quote it?

*Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."*

John 9:39

I would expect that if my next post was titled "Jesus Came to Judge the World" many, probably most, of you would object, but there you are in His own words! Of course He also said that He had not come to judge, as the atheists like to point out as they search for something to claim is a contradiction.

What shall we say then?

This is an unusual context, isn't it? Jesus is playing on these words to show that the Pharisees have condemned themselves by their ruthless arrogance, for they claim to know all and see all, and yet when confronted with an amazing manifestation of the power and glory of God, as they were when this poor man received his sight, all they can think of is how to downplay the whole thing so they can keep their influence. So they conjure up their little investigation into the facts of the case, but not before they have already determined its outcome, and in the end, they have kicked the once blind man out of the assembly because he had the audacity to tell the truth.

There were some Pharisees present who overheard this exchange; look at their condescension:

*Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?"  
(v. 40)*

Can you imagine having that much attitude at that precise moment? Jesus explained:

*Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. (v. 41)*

In a simple one-liner Jesus smashes any hope they might have of saving the situation. Have you ever noticed that often it is the very person or persons who should know best, who refuse to accept the obvious if it proves a threat to their position and influence? Since they admit they have the knowledge, that they should know better, they cannot claim innocence, no, not ever.

# The Good Shepherd

John 10:1-21

This passage is figurative. (John 10:6) There are 8 components of the extended metaphor in this section: The *shepherd* is the caretaker and owner of the sheep. The *sheep (flock)* are the animals that the shepherd loves and cares for. The *thief* is the one who tries to steal the sheep away from their rightful owner, the *watchman* is the one who opens the *gate* only for the shepherd, the *hired hand* watches the sheep, but lacks the dedication of the shepherd. The *wolf* is a predator that terrorizes kills and scatters the flock, and the *sheep pen* is the protective enclosure in which the flock is kept for safety during the night.

He begins in 1-6 with the thief; the thief enters the pen by any manner other than through the gate. He sneaks in by some form of subterfuge for the express purpose of stealing the sheep away from the flock. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd, who is recognized by the watchman as the legitimate shepherd. In addition, he is also recognized by the sheep who love and trust him. He calls them by name (has a deep relationship with them) and they will follow him where ever he goes. They will not follow anyone who is not the shepherd, because they are strangers to the sheep; they only follow the shepherd.

Jesus begins to make His point beginning at verse 7. Jesus Himself is the gate; no one enters the flock except through Him. If they enter the pen through Jesus, they will be saved and have life to the full. The thief on the other hand, enters the pen by a means other than Jesus; his motive is to steal, kill and destroy: The sheep do not follow such a person.

Jesus is not only the gate, but He is the Good Shepherd. He is the “good” shepherd because when all others run away, He will lay down His life for the salvation of the sheep. His caring is so great for His sheep that He will die for them.

In this final section, vv. 14-18, Jesus sets out the theology of His coming sacrifice on the cross. He will willingly lay down His life for His flock. No one will take it from Him, for His act is voluntary. It is authorized and ordained by His Father in Heaven, for it will result in the redemption of all mankind. This act will not only seal the salvation of His sheep, but redeem mankind back to fellowship with God, something that has been absent from creation ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden. This will also highlight the separation of those within the flock, and those without the flock; nothing will ever be the same again.

We find the reaction of the people in 10:19-21; the reaction of the crowd is typical. His opponents, unable to refute what He has said seek to marginalize Him with ridicule. Once again they claim He must be demon-possessed and ask “Why listen to him?” What else can they do if they insist on opposing Him? The others (v. 21) say exactly the words that their leaders fear, pointing out that Jesus is not saying things a demon-possessed person would say, and then dropping their trump card: “Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” There is nothing that the

opponents of Christ can say to that. These people who believe Jesus have had their eyes opened; now they can really see... and Jesus isn't quite finished, as we will see next time.

## He said what...?

John 10:22-42

This passage is a continuation of the discussion regarding who the Jews' father was. In that passage (9:13-34) the discussion was about the opponents of Jesus and their "father", while today's passage sets out very clearly whose Son Jesus is. It has often struck me as interesting that over the centuries people who deny the Lordship of Christ will often claim that He neither claimed to be God or the Son of God. In fact, there are groups who call themselves Christian who are confused on this point today. Here, Jesus is clear and precise about exactly who He is. Please note that while the discourse of the text follows 10:1-21, the occasion has shifted to the Feast of Dedication which is now known to us as Hanukkah, a celebration of the driving out from Judea of the Syrian Greeks. It celebrates the rededication of the Temple after it had been refurbished after that occupation, a nationalistic celebration of the (former) glory of the nation...

John sets the scene and then the dialogue begins; are you the Christ? Jesus responds by indicating that He has identified Himself by His miracles, but they have refused to believe because they are not His sheep, going back to the analogy from the previous text. Since they are not His sheep, they do not believe what He says even though He has confirmed His sayings to them. Those who are His followers (sheep) hear His voice and believe. While many have taken this to mean all kinds of things doctrinally speaking, what is very clear is that when a person decides to follow Jesus, understandings clear up considerably.

Jesus amplifies what He said in verse 10, that His sheep would have "abundant life", to add that they will have "eternal life". Eternal life would appear here to have two characteristics: First that they cannot be destroyed, i.e. that they will live forever. Second, they cannot be stolen away from the Father's hand, which is to say that no one, human or otherwise can steal eternal life from you. In verse 30, Jesus makes a statement that is theologically so significant that it cannot be overstated. "*I and the Father are one.*" This is a type of "I am" statement, only here it is "We are". In doing this, Jesus is alluding to the name of God: I AM. By placing Himself into this title, he has added a new dimension to the *Shema* of Deut. 6:4, "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God. The Lord is one." This is the monotheistic foundation of their faith and Jesus has just included Himself into it monotheistically. He is not doing this in a mystical way of somehow having achieved divinity, but as a foundational premise reminiscent of John 1:1. While doing this, He continues to maintain a distinction between the two; He did not say "I am the Father".

Quite naturally, they want to kill Him at this point.

This time, Jesus doesn't slip away; He asks them to justify their desire to kill Him. His opponents tell Him they are not doing it because they deny His miracles, but because He has committed blasphemy in claiming to be God. Isn't it odd that so many "scholars" think He never made that claim? According to the Law, these opponents had a point (Lev. 24:16), however they overlooked the possibility that He might be telling the truth. Then He added this:

*Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are "gods"'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside— what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.*

John 10:34-39

OK, let's be honest: This is a difficult passage. Jesus' quotation of Psalm 82:6, "I have said you are gods" can make you crazy if you aren't careful, and much has been written and argued about it. I prefer to take a simpler look at it... Consider the fact that it is a parenthetical side comment that is not expounded on because it isn't the main part of the argument Jesus is making. The structure of the argument made in vv. 34-38 points to a conclusion that looks like this:

- 1. In the context of Psalm 82, the term "gods" is not a term denoting divinity, but humans were referred to as "sons of the Most High" (Psalm 82:6b).*
- 2. These "mere men" received the Word of God, yet they died as mere men.*
- 3. Scripture (the Word of God they received) cannot be broken (thwarted).*
- 4. I have been sent to you as the Living Word by God.*
- 5. I am God's Son*
- 6. My true identity has been proven by the miracles I have performed*

*Therefore:*

- 1. You can only deny me by denying the truth of Scripture*
- 2. You should pay me greater honor than anyone in your history before.*
- 3. You must believe the miracles you have seen*
- 4. I am the Son of God (Messiah)*

Well dear reader, I guess that about sums up the foundational premise of all Christian Theology.

## The Resurrection and the Life

John 11:1-44

This is a famous story about the miracle that Jesus performs in raising Lazarus from the tomb, but it is much more than that. Jesus will reveal much about His own death and the hope that we will have as a result. It probably begins in Perea where Jesus went after the last attempt to stone him, and opens with the news that His dear friend Lazarus was near death. Jesus' reaction seems surprising, since one might expect Him to rush off to help, but He delays instead...

Jesus announces to His disciples that it's time to get on to Judea. Assuming that He means to return to the temple to resume his teaching, the disciples voice the concern that His safety would be in question. Jesus uses the metaphor of day and night to tell them that it is still safe for Him to go, but the implication is that the time is short. Then He tells them that they will be going to see about their friend Lazarus and corrects the misunderstanding about him being "asleep" for Lazarus is dead. Good old Thomas is optimistic as always...

Verses 17-22 set the stage for the miracle: Lazarus has been in the tomb four days, Martha comes out to meet Jesus on His way, and there were many people in town who had come because of the death and funeral who would be witnesses for what would happen. Martha, upon meeting Jesus both scolds and demonstrates great faith. Whether or not her faith extended to raising her brother from the grave is a matter of interpretation, but she was certainly disappointed that He hadn't intervened in the illness, which is a thought many of us have had at one time or another...

Clearly Martha's understanding of Jesus' assurance in v. 23 was along the lines of "funeral words" that are often spoken to give comfort to the grieving, but Jesus was talking about something else. He delivers a stunner, an "I Am" statement, double-barreled at that: "I am the resurrection and the life" (v. 25) meaning that Jesus is a living resurrection. Martha's reaction is just what Jesus was looking for; she shows that she has believed His promise of eternal life; little does she know that she was about to see it demonstrated with power.

Martha runs back to town to get Mary, who had departed so suddenly that the visitors follow to see what's up. When she reaches Jesus, her greeting is the same that Martha's had been. This time Jesus simply asks her where Lazarus was buried, and then He wept. The reaction of the onlookers is interesting, with some noting how much He loved Lazarus and others grumbling as usual.

Arriving at the tomb, Jesus orders the stone removed. There is an objection: Lazarus has been in the tomb four days and will stink; Jesus reminds all of them that he had made promises about eternal life. The stone is removed and Jesus thanks the Father in a way that demonstrates where the glory for the miracle belongs and also shows why this was all being done: So that they might believe. Lazarus is summoned, comes out and Jesus directs the burial wrappings be

removed so the man can go free; free from the grave just as all who believe will be set free from the grave.

The fact that Lazarus had been dead four days is a demonstration of God's power and a way of authenticating the miracle. He was not sleeping, nor was he in a coma; he was dead. There is no earthly way to rejuvenate someone who has been dead four days; not then, not now: Lazarus was a *dead man* and Jesus called him forth from his grave... and he came forth... and so shall we!

## It's All about Priorities

John 12:1-11

The scene for this text is set at six days before Passover when Jesus and his group reach Bethany. This is also right after he has raised Lazarus from the tomb and Lazarus, Mary and Martha are in attendance at this dinner, a Sabbath dinner at the home of Simon who is a good mutual friend, as we discover from the Synoptics. We can infer the close relationship between Simon and Lazarus, Mary and Martha from the fact that Martha is one of those serving the dinner, and it is interesting to note that the word used to describe her service in verse 2 is the word from which we get the English words “deacon” and “minister” meaning “servant” and is also used to describe Martha in Luke 10:40.

Mary suddenly begins an unusual foot treatment for Jesus by applying a large amount of nard to his feet. Nard is a highly-prized ointment imported from India that was prized by both men and women in the ancient world. It had a sweet-woody odor that was very heavy and likely to fill the entire house. The “pint” that she applied to Jesus’ feet would be worth something in the area of \$20,000.00 today. Mary held nothing back in using so much of the very expensive luxury on Jesus, even mopping up the excess with her hair, a gesture of pure humility in front of mixed company; in short this was a shocking scene, and yet it shows us that Mary was holding nothing back in her service to Jesus. I daresay that there is a lesson in this for our time, for how many of us would pour \$20,000.00 on Jesus’ feet? It seems likely that Mary understood that Jesus would soon be taken from them, and she was not going to stand by His grave and wish she had told him how much she loved him.

Judas raises what seems to be a logical objection to all of this extravagance pointing out that the money could have been put to a better use; very reasonable indeed. However John points out in the text that Judas may have had an ulterior motive for his objection as he has been known to embezzle their funds in his keeping. Notice that John does not reveal how or when they became aware of this, but it does show us a glimpse of the character of the man who would shortly turn traitor. One thing is clear; it wasn’t the poor that Judas was mourning for.

Jesus will have none of this criticism. He points out that she had saved it for His funeral, and even though the funeral hadn’t come about, it would within the week, and Mary would prize her act even more on that day. As for the poor, Jesus commented on that as well, although his comment has been misinterpreted by many since. He was not giving justification of those who would ignore those in need, but rather that there are times when service to God trumps everything else; even good works. How many Christians over the centuries have been so concerned with good social works that they have missed out on a closer relationship with the Lord! He comes first in all things, even doing good deeds.

News of the raising of Lazarus and Jesus’ arrival in Bethany reached near-by Jerusalem very quickly and many came out to see both Jesus and Lazarus. Of course amongst the curious were also their leaders who had different things in mind. Their hatred of Jesus was all the

greater for so many more were prepared to follow Him and to discontinue following their leaders. From their point of view, this had to stop for their position was being severely threatened; Lazarus must go as well as Jesus. Thus, the stage is set for the final drama of Jesus' last week and the most seminal event of all human history.

As this text comes to its close, there are two main threads to the story, and two sub-plots. The two main threads can be summed up as support for Jesus, and opposition to Jesus, and the sub-plots are holding back and murderous intent. On the side of support, we see the gathering crowds that have come to see Jesus and Lazarus, many of whom are ready to follow Jesus. On this side also is Mary, standing above all the rest, for Mary has given everything to Him, while the rest remain somewhat less committed, probably at various stages of comprehension as to what it really means to follow Jesus.

On the other hand, we have Judas, who for various reasons of his own doesn't see the value in what Mary has done. He does have a valid point; that the Nard could have been sold and many good things done with the money, not to mention a few bucks in his own pocket; Judas doesn't seem to quite comprehend what following Jesus really means. Then of course, we have the Pharisees and the other leaders of the people, who see that despite their efforts, the crowds keep growing larger, along with the threat to their positions; something must be done, and quickly.

If we take a step back from the narrative, we might also discern that not only is this is not only the climax of Jesus' ministry, it is also where we approach the climax of our own lives. On the one hand, Mary has given her all to Jesus, and in doing so has essentially thrown down the gauntlet to all of us: Will we follow her lead? On the other hand, those who prize their worldly positions have also thrown down a gauntlet: Will we join with them in their quest to stop Jesus at all costs?

Like those in the room with Jesus that day, and those gathering outside, most of us are somewhere in between the two camps, and this is where I believe that God is leading us to a decision. Is God speaking to you in this text? If so, what are you going to do about it?

## The Hour has Come

John 12:20-35

We pick up the story after Jesus has entered Jerusalem; His “Triumphal Entry”. The news of His having raised Lazarus has spread like wildfire through the region and people are flocking to Jesus like never before, some just to have a look and others in faith. The reaction of the Pharisees in verse 19 is classic: “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!” Yes, they must put a stop to this business, pronto! Our text begins with some Greeks who are present for Passover who approach Phillip asking to meet with Jesus. It would seem that they were not Greek speaking Jews, but Gentile Greeks. Notice that they approach Phillip who goes to Andrew. Phillip and Andrew are not only from Galilee like these Greeks, but they have Greek names, the only two amongst the disciples. They are “Hellenized” Jews which is to say that they have adopted Greek culture while remaining Jews. Thus, it is believed that they took Greek names and most likely are Greek in dress and hair style.

They approach Jesus with the request of a meeting and Jesus answers oddly by going straight to the subject of His impending death. Using the example of a grain of wheat, Jesus will now teach those around him that life (eternal life) comes from death. The use of the example of grain is designed to overcome the fact that this concept is entirely counter-intuitive to humans who have not seen the glories of Heaven. The message is obvious in His case, now that we know the rest of the story, but the implication for us is quite serious: Any of us who holds on to our lives in this world too selfishly will not inherit eternal life, for we will not follow Jesus at all. This idea is seen in verse 26 where Jesus equates losing or “hating” this worldly life with serving Him and thus serving God. Thus, we “lose” our life by serving God rather than serving ourselves. I cannot over emphasize the importance of this idea, for this is the Christian life!

Verses 27-28 reveal that Jesus was troubled by what He was about to face in going to the cross to die a horrible death. Remember that He is both Divine and human and had the same instincts of survival that we all have. How would you feel about things if you knew that you were soon going to be taken away for torture and death? I would be on my way out of town! Jesus has a different response, for this is the very reason He has been brought to this point. It is interesting that John tells us about this encounter that is begun with the arrival of the Greeks. Maybe Jesus was tempted to go off with them and take His message to a whole different audience to avoid His date with the cross... In any case, He will not be swayed from His purpose, and God confirms His approval with a rare vocal endorsement.

The people heard the voice and stunned, await some clarification. Jesus explains that the voice was for their benefit, so they would know that everything is going according to God’s plan. Then, He demonstrates the point in three amazing ways:

First, the time has come for “judgment on this world”. Since the Greek word rendered “judgment” is *krisis*, if we leave it un-translated, the statement would read “*Now is the crisis of this world.*” A crisis for this world would surely come when Jesus is murdered in front of

everyone when all were aware of His total innocence. This would expose the sin that has the entire world in its grip for all of its stinking rottenness. Second, it is the time when “the prince of this world will be driven out.” Satan, who has the world in his pocket through their slavery to sin, will lose his grip on those who will follow Jesus, those who will be set free from bondage to sin. Third, that Jesus will die by being “lifted up” gives His listeners the method by which all of this will be accomplished; He will die on a cross. The result of this will be that all peoples who look to the cross in faith will see not merely a method of execution, but the means by which they can be saved from sin and death.

We reach a major turning point in John’s Gospel at this point. The crowd has come to discuss national liberation from Rome, and Jesus is talking about death and redemption. They object and refer to Daniel 7:14 which teaches that the Messiah will be with them forever. Jesus doesn’t engage. He does offer one last bit of advice: Darkness is about to descend, their only hope is to believe in Jesus (“trust in the light”) which will enable them to resist the oppressive spiritual darkness, for they will become “sons of light”. With that, Jesus slips away. The rest of the Gospel will describe Jesus’ answer to the question they have posed: “Who is this Son of Man?”

# Humility Exemplified

John 13:1-17

This is the beginning of the second section of John's Gospel; there are no more scenes of Jesus teaching the crowds. The pattern of chapters 2-12 where there is a miracle or sign followed by Jesus giving an explanation are replaced by Jesus explaining the greatest sign of all, His death, burial and resurrection before it happens. These are called the "Farewell" or "Upper Room Discourses". The scene opens just before the Passover meal on the night that Jesus would be betrayed. Jesus demonstrates an act of humility that would normally be done by a slave; the washing of the feet of the dinner guests.

John uses these verses to set the scene by placing the time at the very beginning of the meal. They had not yet begun to eat, Judas had already been prompted to go astray, and yet Jesus was confident in his destiny and had received all power from God. It is particularly pointed that John mentions this fact: Jesus had received all power, had everything placed in his control and was about to return to God... when all of the sudden what did He do?

Jesus gets up from the table, takes off his clothes, grabs a towel and begins washing the feet of the disciples. It is important to note that even though the NIV adds the word "outer" to garments, there is no such indication in the Greek. Commentators rise to this and many describe Jesus as in his "undergarments". Undergarments for men were invented around the time of George Washington and were not widely worn until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; they did not exist in ancient times. If Jesus had indeed removed an outer garment, then it would have been a cloak, comparable to a modern-day coat, and obviously this is not likely. I do not join the NIV in protecting modern-day sensibilities here because it is vital that we get an accurate picture of exactly what was going on in order to get the full value of what Jesus is demonstrating in this act of humility, for it is in total and complete contradiction to what was stated in verse 3, and it actually becomes the whole point of this incident. Jesus was not only washing the feet of men who weren't qualified to carry his briefcase (so to speak) but he had utterly and totally humbled himself in the process! (Can you imagine yourself doing this?) The NIV also states that He had a towel wrapped around him, while the KJV says he "girded" himself with the towel. Was the towel providing a modesty covering, and at the same time being used to dry their feet after washing?

**HOMEWORK:** Do an experiment at home. Wrap a towel around yourself, as to cover up, get down on the floor and try to dry something also on the floor in front of you. You will discover the answer. Once you have the answer, then remember that Jesus also washed the feet of the one whom he knew was about to betray him: Now you will understand what this scene means; you will also have some real insight into the metaphor of being naked before God.

Peter seems to have understood that he was not worthy to be treated in this way by Jesus who was so much greater than he. Jesus' reply to him is also understood... sort of. Well, in that case, how about washing my hands and head too. Peter believed Jesus when he told him that

he must be “cleaned” by him, but he still didn’t quite grasp the metaphor that was playing out in that room.

Jesus’ comments in verses 10-11 refer to the fact that a person attending a dinner would bathe before leaving their house, so that when they arrived at the dinner, only their feet would have gotten dirty on the walk to the dinner venue; thus the custom of having your feet washed by a slave prior to reclining at table. Remember that dinner tables were not like the ones we use today, and the “reclining” was literal. The comment that not all were clean gives us a hint that Jesus is not really concerned about hygiene, for He knew what was afoot with Judas; His concern was that they be spiritually clean.

Jesus gets dressed and resumes His seat; then He explains what He has done. He has set for them an example, a twofold example. First, we as His servants must be willing to humble ourselves in His service. Do we dare humble ourselves as He has done? Second, our service must be to clean the filth of sin from one another, to help one another to obey all that He has commanded us, and to be willing to dirty our hands in the process. We can never do this by glorifying ourselves; we can only accomplish this mission by humbling ourselves: We are to follow His example.

## A New Command

John 13:18-38

The scene continues from last time, it is the last supper in the upper room. Jesus and His disciples are reclining at the table as Jesus continues his remarks after washing their feet. He has just said that if they follow the example that he set when he washed their feet, they would be blessed. Now he modifies that by saying that one of them would not be blessed; He will send Judas on his way shortly...

Jesus is concerned that His coming betrayal and death not be understood as His mission being thwarted. Instead he attempts to convey that everything is proceeding according to God's amazing, if counter-intuitive plan. In short, creating the community of believers, the church, was the whole point of Jesus' ministry and not an accident or a "fall back" position.

The time for Jesus to leave subtle hints and illusions has passed; He tells them plainly that one of them will betray Him; they are shocked. It would appear that Peter asked John to find out from Jesus who the traitor was and John's question and Jesus' answer was in a whisper. He indicated Judas who was next to Him on the other side from John... (vv. 21-26)

Jesus gives the bread to Judas, who accepts it. It is hard to imagine that Judas has not heard what has passed between John and Jesus... and he accepts the bread when he could have repented. So completely did Satan win out in Judas' life that John refers to it as satanic possession. Judas leaves the room immediately; it would seem that nobody other than John understands what has happened, and John keeps quiet. John ends this with a chilling sentence: "And it was night." This has much more meaning than simply noting the time of day, for Jesus has spoken of the coming night before. It was literally the beginning of the most beastly occurrence in human history, when Satan had stolen away a disciple of the Son of God to bring about the murder of the Son of God to silence the truth and darken the light once and for all. Paul noted in 1 Cor. 2:8 that if the rulers of that time and place had understood what was going on, they would never have put Jesus on that cross!

Verses 31-32 are a little confusing for their use of "glorify" so many times in quick succession together with the indefinite pronoun "him" and it requires a little sorting out. Here's a paraphrase: The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified (recall that Jesus has been using this term to describe his crucifixion all through John) So then, we would say, starting over: "The time has come for the Son to be crucified and God will be glorified in him (By completing His plan for redemption). If God is glorified in the Son by what He accomplished on the cross, then God will glorify the Son by the Son's resurrection and ascension to glory (as King of kings and Lord of lords). What comes next is inconvenient for certain end of the world theorists: "and will glorify him (the Son) at once". That is to say not at a time which has still not come.

Jesus repeats here what He has previously told the Jews, that they cannot come where He is going, referring to the right hand of the Father in heaven. This is a statement that establishes

His authority, and is followed by a new commandment: Love one another. As you might expect, the Greek word used here is *agape* which is a godly, unselfish love. It is a commitment to serve and value one another with no expectation whatsoever of anything in return. It is just what the unbelieving world will notice, for it is seldom if ever found amongst them. By this sign all will recognize the difference between the Christian and everyone else. This is the most important lesson from today's text: We must love one another. Imagine what the reaction of the rest of the world would be if they saw this kind of powerful love at work in the lives of millions of Christians: Would you like to 'change the world'? Love one another!

Peter doesn't seem to soak up the new commandment and wants to go with Jesus. The exchange leads directly to Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial of Him. I guess there's a little bit of Peter in all of us.

## The Way, the Truth and the Life

John 14:1-14

We continue today with the “Farewell Discourse” of Jesus with His disciples. This particular text is one of the most beloved in all of the Scriptures, full of love, hope and reassurance containing some of the most memorable phrases in the Bible, and indeed in all of literature. In the discussions that have come before it, there has been a challenge in the example Jesus set when He washed the disciples’ feet. There has been a betrayal and predictions of Jesus’ death and then of Peter’s denial of Jesus. Now, Jesus seeks to comfort the disciples and to help them begin to understand that the events which would soon follow are nothing less than God’s Eternal Plan coming to its climax.

This is the transitional verse that takes us from the tension and distress of the latter part of chapter 13 into a new topic. Jesus is telling the disciples to take heart because He is not going to forsake them, even though He must be returning to the Father. The key phrase here is “Trust in God; trust also in me.” It is key because it is phrased not as a suggestion or as advice but as an imperative: Trust!

Then, in verses 2-4 Jesus uses the illustration of the Father’s house to tell them that His leaving is to serve the purpose of preparing their place in God’s “house”. He uses an interesting method to tell them that He will return for them in due course so that where “I am” you also will be. This is a clear play on the words “I am” and it indicates that upon His return there will be some amount of sharing His “I am-ness” with His disciples.

Having left off in verse 4 by telling them that they know the way to where He is going, He now responds to the insistence of Thomas that they don’t even know the where, much less the how...Jesus, with evident patience tells them again what He has been telling them for a long time: He is the Way, you can only come to the Father through Jesus Himself. He is the Truth; you can know no other truth, for no other truth is genuine. He is the Life, for there is no other life that is eternal. He expands on this in verse 7 by pointing out to them that He and the Father are one. If we want to know the Father we will see Him revealed in His Son. If we want to see the Father, we will see Him in His Son.

Phillip’s reply is to innocently ask Jesus to show the Father to them in the way that a lawyer might produce a witness. All of them should know that no one has ever seen the Father (John 1:18). It was considered by the Jews impossible for a mere mortal to look directly upon the glory of God, not even Moses had looked directly at Him. Jesus explains that we see God revealed in Him through spiritual discernment. He indicates also that His miracles were revelations of God’s presence in Him. In truth, the logic is that since it isn’t possible for a mortal man to look directly at God and live to tell the story, God has been made manifest in Jesus Christ, having become a man so that direct interaction can occur, a foundational premise of Christian Theology.

Jesus mentions that those who have faith in Him will continue to do what He had been doing, and that they will do even greater things because He will grant them whatever they ask of Him in His name. This has been the source of considerable confusion and discussion in our time. Are we doing what He was doing... what was He doing anyway? The ministry of Jesus on the earth was not one designed to advance my interests, desires, wants or needs. Its purpose was to advance the redemptive plan of God. Are we living our lives to advance the redemptive plan of God? Jesus is not telling us to use the 'magic words' at the end of our prayers, "In Jesus' name Amen." He is telling His disciples, soon to become His Apostles that He will do great works through them and in fact He did; they are recorded as answered promises in Acts including many miraculous signs that were performed for the specific purpose of *confirming the Gospel message*. With that said, it is possible, even requisite that we as Christians have an active and powerful prayer life; I can't imagine how we can follow Him through life without it. However, in no way did Jesus promise anybody that He would give them a "blank check" to live selfish lives of demanding benefits from Him; this is simply inconsistent with every word of Scripture. He will give us whatever we ask for in His name to accomplish God's purposes.

# The Counselor

John 14:15-31

Today's scene is a continuation of the Farewell Discourse of Jesus. Jesus has just told the remaining disciples that anything they ask in His name will be given to them. Keep in mind that in context this was no blank check, but was all about doing the things that He had been doing. As we continue with this discussion, we now move into further elaboration of how this will all work: There will be a new Counselor. The word translated "counselor" is *parakletos* which in the ancient world meant "one who gives legal advice". Today, we often refer to a lawyer as "counsel" which comes from this meaning.

In verses 15-17 Jesus teaches us three things about the Holy Spirit. 1) The Holy Spirit is our Eternal Advocate who intercedes for us before the Father (1 John 2:1). 2) The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth that unveils for us our relationship with God and thus sets us free from sin, death and the traditions of men. 3) The Holy Spirit is within you. He cannot be taken He can only be received. Thus, this world cannot take Him away and cannot even comprehend Him for He is not compatible with the world of men. Wherever there is a Christian, there is also the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus goes further still in vv. 18-21 with the concept of His being "in the Father" and being "in you" and "you in me." By extension of course that means that we are "in the Father" through Jesus. If we have His commands and obey them, then we will be considered to love Jesus. If we love Jesus, the Father will love us. Be sure to catch the "if" here; it goes back to obey. If we obey Jesus' commands the Father will love us in a special way, and Jesus will show Himself to us. Will He literally and bodily do so? No! It's actually better than that: He will show himself through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The Judas in 22 ff. is the Thaddeus of Matthew and Mark. His question should sound familiar as it has already been asked by Jesus' own brothers in 7:3-4. Jesus will not show Himself to the world because He doesn't do things the way the world does. You will never see Jesus as a guest on *The Factor* or *Oprah* because He is not out to win the praise of men; He is doing the Father's work of redemption. Finally, He introduces another element of the Christian life: Peace. This is not merely the absence of war; it amounts to the full renewal of fellowship between Man and God. With this peace, we need not be afraid, for no matter what the world may do, we are in a place where our future is assured. The chapter concludes with the urgency of the hour. Satan is busy at work and the time for face to face discussion is very nearly over, yet there is still time for a little more yet to come when Jesus talks about vines and branches in the next chapter.

## I am the Vine, You are the Branches

John 15:1-17

Today we continue our study of Jesus' remarks to the disciples in the Upper Room. Our passage is one of the best known in all of Scripture in which Jesus uses the illustration of a vine to describe key relationships within the Christian Life. The text moves to its climax in verse 16 with the word "then" giving us a conditional statement that if our relationships are working together properly, "then" our requests will be granted.

This is the seventh and final "I Am" statement in the Gospel of John, and it is intended as an illustration of the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Church. Jesus is the vine, the Father is the gardener and the disciples are the branches. Notice that Jesus points out the fact that in a vine a branch has the function of bearing fruit, and no fruit can be borne by a branch that has been removed from the vine. His point here is that the disciples must remain in Him in order to accomplish their purpose. The Father as gardener will remove any branches that do not bear fruit, and prune the ones that do so that they may bear even more fruit... but what is "fruit"? It is easy to say that He is referring to the making of new disciples, and certainly this is part of the answer. Considering that the Father will be pruning individual branches as well as the entire vine however, there would seem to be something more involved. In this case, it would be the removal of sin from our lives so that we will not only build new disciples, but that we would live such a life of love and purity that we would produce even more disciples than before. One could say that this pruning involves God's fine-tuning of our spiritual lives so as to bring about maximum growth not only in ourselves but as a result, in the entire Christian community.

Here Jesus restates the "I Am" in verses 5-6 and adds that we must remain in Him or we cannot produce anything. Consider what happens when we attempt to produce spiritual fruit apart from Christ, entirely on our own... what is the result? Usually the result is either nothing at all or the entry point for sin and wickedness into the community of believers. One might even suggest that this is the formula for the development of cults in the extreme case. Much has been made of verse 6 in certain circles, but notice the word "like". If we do not remain in Him we are "like" branches that will be cast in the fire. It did not say that we *will be* cast in the fire; repentance is an option, and most of us have had our times of straying and then come back to living "in Him".

Verses 7-8 establish clear linkage between "remaining" and being disciples. *If* we remain in Him... we will be seen as His disciples. Remember that a disciple is one who knows what the Master knows (and my words remain in you) and who does what the Master does (bear fruit). Thus, if we are His disciples *in reality* then He will answer our requests for His purpose. It would go without saying that we wouldn't be making selfish requests.

Jesus now introduces a second analogy to illustrate this relationship, and that is the relationship between the Father and the Son. The illustration is Father/Son is the same relationship that is between Son/disciple. The Father has loved the Son, and the Son has responded with love and

obedience. Therefore, since the Son has loved us, we must respond with love and obedience. To remain in His love is to have our joy made complete.

Going one step further now in 12-13, Jesus tells us exactly what obedience looks like: "Love one another as I have loved you." This is the command He is talking about, and as we saw a few sections back, this means putting others ahead of ourselves: *always*. The Christian life has no room for self! Verse 13 goes still further when Jesus mentions that the greatest love is to lay down your life for your friends. In His case this meant the cross. In our case, who knows the future? One thing is clear however, to lay down our life of selfishness is paramount.

There is an interesting contrast between "servant" and "friend" in the last 3 verses, one that is even stronger than the NIV gives us, for the Greek word rendered "servant" (*doulos*) is the word for "slave". The contrast is clear: A slave is an *inferior* relationship while a friend is an *equal* relationship. Don't get crazy just yet, for this equality is entirely *conditional*. Go and bear fruit. Love one another. These are the conditions, and realize that the first will not happen until we accomplish the second. *Then* the Father will grant whatever we ask. This is the conditional nature of the Christian life, and the challenge before us today. As our culture continues to crumble and the church falters what will we do? We will remain in Him, love one another and bear fruit!

## Hated by the World

John 15:18-6:4

While the first 17 verses of chapter 15 discuss relationships within the Christian community, verses 18 and following discuss the relationship between the Christian community and the outside world. In the first instance, the relationship is characterized by love, but in the second it is characterized by hate. This is a new reality that the disciples must deal with, one that exists to this day. To begin to understand this phenomenon, we must remind ourselves that the world Jesus speaks of is continuing to live in rebellion against God. Jesus brought this contrast between God and Rebellion into the harsh light of day and the people didn't like it. His disciples will do the same thing with the same result. We too will make this contrast easy to see if we live according to His teachings. We will also cause some to believe and be saved, but the majority will not appreciate our work. For this reason, Christians in "tolerant" America are ridiculed in the press, movies and television, and are often singled out in the public square for derision.

Christians are not "of this world" but instead "our citizenship is in heaven." (Phil. 3:18-20) The world we live in today is "post-modern" meaning that the overriding standard of morality is what is right for me. Post-modernism doesn't allow anyone to say that something is "right" or "wrong" absolutely and calls on individuals to seek that which is right for them and demands "tolerance" from everyone else. Obviously, post-modernism is not the philosophical basis of the Bible, and as we all know many people have a hard time listening to anyone tell them differently. This entire philosophy demonstrates that most people do not wish to be reconciled to God, or as Jesus put it, to "know the One who sent me."

As a result of Jesus' ministry, the world was left "without excuse." He has spoken the truth of sin, death, right and wrong, and He topped it all off by confirming His teachings with miraculous signs so that there would be no way for anyone to claim that His teachings were simply another random philosophy: They were the very words of God. As a result, rebellious humanity in large part hated both Jesus and His Father, as the prophets had foretold.

Jesus reminds the disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Note that this is not a teaching about the Holy Spirit as much as it is teaching about what their responsibility would be. The presence of the Holy Spirit is beneficial in a great many ways, but it doesn't mean that we have no work to do; our part is to teach people about the Gospel and make disciples.

Jesus has told His disciples unpleasant facts about their future, and now in 16:1-4 He tells them why He has done so. The unpleasant future would soon begin with the arrest and senseless murder of Jesus Himself by Jewish leaders who believed that they were keeping God's Law by doing so. The book of Acts documents a reign of terror against the early church in which many were arrested and tortured or murdered by people who thought they were doing God's work in silencing God's truth. This is not only an irony but sheer madness. Jesus has told them of these things so that they would not drift away from their faith when the trials came; so that they would hold steadfast in the knowledge that God's plan was playing out. In truth, the more the

church has been persecuted, the more it has grown because of the courageous stand taken by the followers of Christ. Sadly, there have also been times when the church itself has persecuted the truth by torturing and murdering “heretics” who were teaching the truth within the church.

## About the Counselor

John 16:5-16

In 15:1-17 Jesus taught the disciples about relationships within the community of believers and instructed them it would be characterized by love. In 15:18-16:4 He taught about the relationship between the community of believers and the world, saying that it would be characterized by hate. Here he returns to giving practical instruction about the coming era that includes more specific information about the working of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 5 raises the question in the mind of the casual reader of whether or not Jesus is mistaken in saying that they have not asked Him where He was going before, for Peter had asked more or less directly, and Thomas had also done so by implication. It would seem that Jesus was not considering these instances because they were mouthed without understanding of what they were asking, for they had no clue that His journey would be a spiritual one. He explains to them that He must go away before the Holy Spirit can come to them. This is not because they cannot be there at the same time, but because He must pay the penalty for their sins on the cross before they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for this is the eternal purpose of God and His primary mission on this earth. Put another way, Jesus came to the earth to go to the cross; only then does the Counselor come to the redeemed.

In chapter 14, Jesus presented the Counselor as the defense attorney for the disciples. Here He continues the legal analogy with the Counselor being portrayed as the prosecuting attorney against the world. He portrays this in three ways: First, the Holy Spirit will convict the world of its unbelief. Second, the Spirit will convict the world concerning the righteousness of Jesus. Third, the Spirit will convict the world of its own guilt and coming judgment. Just as the "Prince of this World" is defeated and destroyed by Jesus' death and resurrection, so the world will be convicted of coming judgment because light has come but they preferred darkness.

In verses 12-15, Jesus continues to teach the disciples about the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding them in the future, here discussing three more works. First, the Spirit will guide them "into all truth." In the coming apostolic community, truth would not be determined by mere human logic or recollection, but guided by the Holy Spirit. Consider this: God has sent His Son to the earth to teach and testify to the truth. Then the Son must die on the cross for our sins. Will God trust the telling of this story and the teaching of the truth to the faulty memories of men? No, He will provide the Holy Spirit to ensure that the story of Jesus' life and recitation of His teachings are secure and accurate. Second, the Spirit will pass on "only what he hears" to the disciples (apostles). Only what comes directly from God will be given to them as the truth. Third, the Spirit will continue the work of glorifying Father and Son by revealing Jesus Christ as the Son of God. This provides a unity of purpose between Father, Son and Spirit with a strong link to God's original purpose of sending His Son to the earth, a linkage that continues into the eternal future and coincides with our purpose for being born and redeemed as well.

Verse 16 is a transition into the next section which will be our subject for next time. Jesus will shortly be arrested and crucified and they will see Him no more. It is as though He is saying to them that they should take heart and have courage, for He will be back very shortly to confirm all that He is telling them, and of course this promise is borne out by history.

## Things Will Be Different

John 16:16-24

Jesus is continuing His “Farewell Discourse” here, and today’s text is a continuation of what He was saying in our previous text. You might recall that we ended last time with verse 16 as transition from His discussion about the Holy Spirit into His discussion of the death, burial and resurrection. We will begin with verse 16 not only as transition but as the determining verse relative to the context and subject to be discussed in the remainder of chapter 16.

Although I always try to avoid discussing Greek words and grammar in these lessons, it is unavoidable here, for the English translation in the NIV (and most other English translations) does not note the fact that while we see the English word “see” twice in this verse, two different Greek verbs are used and translated “see.” We need to recognize that in English, the word “see” can mean two different things. It can mean to comprehend as in “...oh yes, I see what you mean.” Or it can mean that I physically see something as in “...do you see that house over there?” In verse 16, the first “see” is the Greek verb *theoreo* from which we get our English word *theory*. It generally means to observe or to experience visually. The second “see” is the Greek word *horaō* which means to see in a broader sense. John has used it several times already in this Gospel (1:18,34,51; 6:46; 11:40) more in the sense of ‘seeing spiritually’ or comprehending. While these two words are reasonably close synonyms, the difference here is telling; it’s as though Jesus were telling them that they soon would not be able to see him with their eyes (death, burial) but shortly they will realize who He is and what He has done (resurrection). This double meaning will continue through this passage; it will continue along the lines of He will then be taken from their sight for a time (ascension) and then will return to sight (Second Coming) where even unbelievers will “get it.”

The disciples are buzzing; they are not caught in any great eschatological debate for they still are confused about His imminent departure. Jesus doesn’t wait for the question and asks it Himself. Notice that this is the third time it is repeated in a very short span of verses; this is no coincidence, for it would appear that John is putting great emphasis on the statement. Even today we take comfort from the fact that we will see Jesus in a little while.

In verses 20-22, Jesus combines two contrasting emotions: Grief and joy. Their grief will result in a paralyzing fear that causes them to scatter and hide, but not for very long. They will then be filled with a joy that will remain with them even in times of severe trial, for they will understand His promises. Going a little further, He illustrates this by reminding them of the pain and agony that a woman endures during childbirth. Upon the arrival of the child, her grief and pain are all but forgotten, so filled with joy is she when she sees her baby.

Now in 23-24 we again have a little problem with English. This time the confusion is in the word “ask.” The first “ask” is translated from a Greek word meaning to ask a question while the second three “asks” are from a Greek word that means to make a request. In the first case, they will not ask Him questions because a) they will comprehend much more, and b) the Holy Spirit will be in place to provide understanding. In the second three cases, He is once again making reference to the fact that they will enjoy a very powerful prayer life. He also mentions

the aspect of joy, a joy that will remain with them. It is important to notice the connection between “joy” and the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

John 16:25-33

Jesus is admitting to them that He has often spoken to them figuratively, but that time is coming to an end. The Father will not answer their future prayers as a favor to Jesus, nor will they ask Jesus and Jesus will ask the Father. Their petitions will be going *directly* to the Father, for the Father loves them Himself. After Jesus is crucified and has risen from the dead, they will have a relationship with the Father. Please understand that this is a revolutionary statement. For those who respond in love to their belief in Jesus Christ, relationship with the Father is restored, thus completing the circle of Redemption History that began in the Garden of Eden. Before the Fall, Adam had fellowship with God: the redeemed in Christ have fellowship with God.

It seems from verses 29-30 that the disciples have finally understood that Jesus is in fact the Son of God, but Jesus still isn't so sure. Most translations make Jesus' statement in v. 31 a question, as does the Greek. He then once more points out that they will have a very rough time, but expresses the hope that they will find peace because of His warnings. He ends the discourse with the great statement that He has overcome the world. Theologically speaking, Jesus overcame the world because He overcame death itself. He arose from the dead, never again to die and in so doing defeated Satan. This is something that we say over and over in Sermons, books, lectures and classes... but how did this defeat Satan? Isn't Satan still very busy even now?

Here is how Jesus defeated Satan: When He died on the cross, He paid the price for our sins; so far so good, right? Then He arose from the dead... yes we all know that as well. Here's the critical point: Because He paid the price for sin and established a New Covenant between Man and God, He paved the way for us to receive the gift of eternal life. Have you entered into the New Covenant? If so, you have received the gift of eternal life which means that even though you will die one day, you will live forever because the limitations of our physical bodies will not limit our ability to live, we will simply be transformed at the point of separation from our bodies to a new kind of existence. As Paul put it: *“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”* (Philippians 1:21).

Satan maintains his influence and control over men because they fear death. When a people love God and have no reason whatever to fear death, Satan has no means by which to control them, for even if governments or empires murder and torture, they have no particular reason to change their beliefs or teachings for death has no hold on them. When I was a youth and I read the Gospel accounts, in the back of my mind was the thought that it was all well and good for Jesus to bravely endure the cross because He knew in advance how the story ended. Well, what Jesus is telling us in the last verse is that we also know how the story ends. The result is that even under persecution and death, the community of believers would grow so large and become so influential that the Roman Empire itself would be transformed to Christianity. The same is true today, for even though the world may oppose the church, it cannot destroy it because we know that the grave itself will never be able to hold us. This is how Satan's grip is

lost on Mankind; there will always be a remnant that will refuse to follow him in rebellion against God. Jesus has overcome the world, and in Him so have we.

# Jesus Prays

## John 17

This is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus in the entire New Testament. Jesus is clearly one who prays a great deal, and we can gain a great deal of insight into prayer in this chapter. For the purpose of these notes, I will attempt to resist the temptation to engage in theological discussion or analysis of what the prayer consists of or what this or that “means” from a theological point of view, instead I hope to focus more on what we can learn about prayer itself. A good point of beginning is to take notice of Jesus’ posture as He prays; note that He is not sitting quietly with bowed head and closed eyes but rather is looking heavenward with eyes wide open. In fact, He is most likely standing with the disciples, and if you take note of His language, it might seem that He is not speaking in a very quiet voice at all. Of course we might say that our traditional posture results in a contrast because Jesus is the second person of the Godhead while we are not. Might not this view overlook the fact that we are His co-heirs? Well, it’s food for thought anyway...

Jesus opens this prayer by praying for God’s purpose to be fulfilled; this is and has been the principle focus of Jesus throughout His ministry. Praying for God’s purpose to be fulfilled is entirely consistent with the idea that the fulfillment of God’s purpose is the reason for His being on the earth in the first place, and by extension is also consistent with the idea that this same purpose is our reason for being His disciples. Throughout this Gospel, Jesus has used the expression “glorify” to refer to his death and resurrection, His work of atonement on the cross, and this is not different here. Being thus “glorified” is God’s ultimate purpose for Jesus. Returning to the glory of heaven as He was before coming to this world is indicative of His having completed His work (purpose) in the world.

In 6-19, Jesus is interceding for His disciples. He will complete His work of “glorification” very shortly and return to the Father, but they will remain in this world and they will have a rough time of it here. In a way, this section reads almost like a report, for Jesus repeats three of the things that He has just taught the disciples in chapters 14-16. Keep in mind, that while we have been looking at these things over a period of weeks, and they cover the last few chapters, chapters 14-17 all occur in one place in one evening over a short span of time; a dinner. Those three things that He repeats here are: 1) the belief that Jesus came from God (16:30); 2) the promise of complete joy (16:24); and 3) the coming hate of the world (15:18). Then He prays for God to protect them as Jesus has protected them. It is instructive for us to note that this “protection” was not always to protect them from the harm that the world might inflict upon them, and the book of Acts records quite a bit of that harm. Indeed nearly all of them would be killed by the world eventually. The “protection” that was provided for them was a protection of their faith and their message, the two things that enabled them to serve God’s purpose.

Verses 20-26 are broken into two smaller sections, the first of which is vv. 20-23. In these verses, Jesus is praying for the unity of all believers so that the world may see it and believe their message. The message is the point, for it is through their message that they have received

that the gospel will be spread and the commission He left them with (Matt. 28:18-20) will be accomplished; it is the purpose of God again. The second section within these verses is vv. 24-26 where Jesus prays for all believers in their ultimate destination: eternity with Him. Note that there is a comparison in all of this: Jesus is in the world to accomplish the purpose for which God sent him, and then He returns to God's heavenly presence. The believer is in the world to accomplish the purpose for which God has placed him there and then goes to God's heavenly presence with Christ. This is our purpose, our challenge and our destiny. Jesus has taken this seriously enough to die on the cross, the Apostles took it seriously enough to suffer and die for their message: How seriously do we take it?

Jesus has taught the disciples that they will have a powerful prayer life; that anything they ask for in His name will be given them. Each time He has spoken on this point, the context has been doing God's work; serving God's purpose. You will have noticed by now that every aspect of this prayer is in this same context: God's eternal purpose. Our prayers are powerful things, how much more powerful they could be if they were for God's purpose to be accomplished rather than that we get the things we want?

## On Trial

John 18:28-40

Our story has progressed from where we left off last time. Jesus and the disciples left the upper room and went to the garden where Jesus was arrested while at prayer. His response to their demand for Him of “I am he” proved to be enlightening to the soldiers and guards who had come to take Him in, but He went along quietly in order to accomplish God’s redemptive purpose. He was taken before the Jewish leaders, roughed up and convicted of a phony charge in a joke of a trial. Peter, as Jesus had predicted, denied knowing Jesus three times, and now, early the next morning He is taken before Pilate, the ranking Roman official, for trial because only the Romans could impose capital punishment.

In vv. 28-32, the Jews approach Pilate with the request that he condemn Jesus to death. Note that Pilate doesn’t seem interested in granting them their wish. Note also the way they have approached him: First, they cannot enter the palace because they would be “unclean” and ineligible to participate in the Passover meal, so Pilate must come out to them. One might wonder what their ceremonial condition was after the role they played in putting the Son of God to death! The upshot of the exchange so far is that they need the Romans to agree to an execution, and oh by the way, Jesus had predicted the manner of his death in 3:14.

Pilate has Jesus brought to him for a few questions; one can’t help having a little sympathy for old Pilate here. Jesus, like the Jews outside isn’t all that respectful of Pilate’s predicament in His answer to Pilate’s first question about whether or not He was a king. “Is that your own idea...?” Pilate’s answer to Jesus’ question reveals that he wants nothing to do with any of this; “Am I a Jew?” The rest of his question in v. 35 is basically ‘what have you done to tick these people off?’ The answer he receives in the next verse is the crucial point of the text:

“My kingdom is not of this world.” It is from “another place.” The Jews were looking for the Messiah to bring a kingdom to the world; a worldly kingdom. It would throw the Romans out, defeat their enemies and restore the former glory of Israel, and the Jewish leaders would have tremendous power in that earthly kingdom. Jesus actually came with an entirely different kind of kingdom; a kingdom of faith and forgiveness. Forgiveness was the last thing the Jewish leaders were concerned about.

Pilate jumps on the king aspect: “You are a king then?” If Jesus were an aspiring king without the endorsement of the Roman government, then it could be asserted that He was plotting treason against Caesar. Even now, however, Pilate is troubled by this whole thing; he isn’t buying the idea that Jesus is a threat to the government. In His answer, Jesus admits to being a king, but again demonstrates that He is not an earthly king, for His reason for being born is to testify to the truth. In all likelihood, Pilate would have a hard time putting truth and kings together as treason. In fact, as we also know, kings, governments and truth are strange bedfellows. Pilate’s response to Jesus’ truth assertion shows us all we need to know about him: “What is truth?” It reveals a high level of frustration as it is one of the great unanswered

questions of worldly life. Little did Pilate know, Jesus had answered this question earlier: "I am the way, the truth and the life" The answer to the great question about truth is that Jesus is the very embodiment of Truth.

Pilate goes back outside and tries again to end the standoff with the Jewish leaders, announcing that he finds no basis for any charge against Jesus. In doing this, he of course is speaking in terms of Roman law. He reminds the people that the Romans offer an annual pardon to a Jewish prisoner at the Passover, sort of a goodwill gesture. The Jews want Jesus dead and silent; they demand a man who deserves to die for the safety of the public. Their hatred of Jesus and the truth that He has brought to them from God Himself; the truth that they should be rejoicing for, is so great that they will do anything to be rid of Him and by extension God. It is really a shocking and reprehensible thing they are doing, one that they will pay dearly for in the future. It is also an indication of how many will react to the truth of simple Christianity for centuries to come... as Jesus warned his disciples in the upper room.

Next time, we will pick up the story at this point as the drama continues...

## The Verdict

John 19:1-16

These verses comprise one of the most amazing narratives in all of world literature. They tell a terrible story of betrayal, hypocrisy, and weakness, evil and hate, yet through this quagmire of politics, dishonesty and intrigue God's great eternal purpose is assured. Irony? That would be putting it mildly! These verses tell the story of Jesus' condemnation to the cross, a story in which there are no heroes, villains aplenty and in which the system of this world is manipulated to condemn the very Son of God by the most religious of all God's people: It is shameful, penetrating and a source of great insight into the motivations of those who will oppose God.

After Pilate's attempt to free Jesus was thwarted in favor of Barabbas (18:39-40) Pilate orders Jesus flogged, a very severe application of torture that would precede crucifixion or that could be a form of punishment on its own. These verses describe briefly the treatment that Jesus suffers at the hands of his soldiers and the "fun" they have with Him, and then Pilate goes back out to the mob to once again attempt to release Jesus.

Pilate has told them he can find no basis for a charge against Jesus, and when Jesus appears he makes his fateful statement, "Behold the man" (KJV). What the crowd was "beholding" was a man broken by torture. Bleeding, beaten, bruised and in a condition fit only for the Emergency Room, there stood Jesus not looking like much of a threat to anyone. The bloodthirsty crowds led by their holy religious leaders go crazy demanding His crucifixion. It could be that Pilate thought they would be appeased by the sight; if so he was mistaken. His frustration is clearly evident when he says, "You crucify him!" The Jews will not relent; they want their Messiah dead and silenced once and for all.

In verse 7 the Jews finally tell Pilate the real reason they want Jesus dead: He has claimed to be the Son of God. In a sense they were right; making such a claim was a capital offense in the Law... unless of course Jesus was telling the truth. Pilate's reaction was one of fear, and he goes back into the Palace taking Jesus with him. It is not clear from the text exactly what the source of his fear was: Was he afraid of an insurrection, or was he afraid of Jesus? In any event, Pilate asks Jesus a surprisingly intelligent question: "Where are you from?" The turning point in Jesus' relationship with His disciples was when they finally came to realize that He had come from God, but when Pilate asks, Jesus is not going to answer. The hour for Him to die has come; it is the reason He has come to earth; everything hinges on this. Pilate points out that he has the power to have Jesus crucified, and this time Jesus does answer him. Jesus reminds Pilate that his authority is not his own, but that it came from above, in the immediate sense from his Roman superiors and in the larger sense from God. Such a reply under the circumstances is truly impressive. It is as though Jesus were trying to make Pilate feel better about his position when He pointed out that the leaders of the mob outside (the chief priests)

have the greater guilt in the situation; Pilate is a pawn in a much bigger drama between God and Satan.

Pilate wants this to end, and he wants no part in killing Jesus. The mob responds with a threat to his career, having forgotten all about their religious claim; incredible the length of disingenuousness that they will go to!

There are many opinions about Pilate's words in the final verses (13-16), but it seems to me that his frustration has turned to anger toward the Jewish leaders. He brings Jesus back out and sits in the judge's seat. Whatever he announces from here is legally binding. Pilate's reference to Jesus as "your king" in vv. 14-15 is a deliberate taunt to the crowd. Here is the pagan Roman governor sitting in judgment over the broken and bloody man they want killed and calling Him their king is incredibly insulting to a people who see God Himself as their ultimate king. Pilate is rubbing their noses in the fact that pagans rule the proud Jews; he has had enough of them!

And then it happens...

The chief priests shout back that they "have no king but Caesar!"

Now who has committed blasphemy and treachery? One can imagine the foundations of Heaven itself quaking at that moment. Pilate does what he has to do, and Jesus is taken away to save the world by shedding His precious blood on the cross.

Surely the word "perfidy" came into being to describe this scene.

Before the next lesson, carefully read what happened next in John 19:17-42; our story will pick up after that.

# The Tomb is Empty!

John 20

Last time, our lesson closed when Pilate finally sent Jesus away to be crucified. Now we pick up the story after the crucifixion has been completed, on the first day of the new week with Mary Magdalene who went to the tomb very early, while it was still dark and found that the tomb was open and the body of Jesus was gone. John has already used “darkness” in this Gospel as a metaphor for disbelief several times, and this is no different, for upon discovering the empty tomb neither Mary nor Peter and John believed that it indicated Jesus had risen from the dead, for they had not grasped this concept in advance. As the sun rose and light began to spread across the land, this would change...

The drama begins early in the morning, before sunrise when Mary Magdalene finds the tomb empty. She rushes to tell the disciples that the body has been moved or stolen and Peter and John race to the scene where they confirm that the body is gone. John completes this part of the story by pointing out in v. 9 that none of them understood *from Scripture* that Jesus would rise from the dead. I might point out that they also didn't understand this from the things that Jesus had told them. It would be beneficial for all of us to understand that we have the same problem today very frequently because we are used to thinking in earthy terms. Very few Christians today, at least in America, have what could be called a Biblical world view, instead most of us have a cultural or secular world view which inhibits our ability to see things as they really are, and we need to be aware of this to avoid misinterpreting not only Scripture but the world around us. As for Scripture in this regard, take a look at what Peter said in Acts 2:25-32: Obviously, he understood what Scripture taught on this point by the Day of Pentecost.

Mary had found the tomb empty, had run back to tell the disciples, Peter and John had come running and confirmed the tomb was empty... and had in turn gone back to their homes leaving Mary at the scene crying. Still crying, she looks into the tomb again and this time sees two angels inside; there is nothing in the text to tell us that she understood that they were angels. They ask her why she is crying, and her reply demonstrates that she has no concept of their double meaning; she is crying because someone has stolen the body. She did not comprehend the second meaning that there should be no cause for crying any longer: He has risen! She turns and sees Jesus standing there but does not recognize Him. Her lack of recognition is interesting, for it shows us that there is nothing remarkable in His appearance. That she doesn't realize who He is shouldn't be that shocking, for I cannot recall a time in my own life in which I would ever expect to see someone walking around and talking when I had gone to visit their grave. She assumes He is the gardener.

Jesus asked her why she was crying and then who she was looking for, a question He had already asked twice on the night He was arrested. She answers Him by asking about the whereabouts of the body. Jesus calls her by name; the shepherd “calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (10:3). Immediately she is “called out” of her unbelief!

Jesus says a curious thing at this point, “do not hold on to me.” A close look at this reveals that His meaning is something like: Do not try to hold me here on earth for I have to return to my Father (*go to prepare a place for you* 14:2) go and tell *my brothers* that I am going to prepare their co-inheritance. She returns and tells them these things; note that John goes to lengths to make sure we know who was the very first to give testimony about having seen the risen Christ.

The scene shifts from the tomb to a place in town where the disciples, excluding Thomas, are gathered behind closed and locked doors: Suddenly Jesus is in their midst. He simply says “shalom” and lets them see His wounds; they are thrilled!

This is no social call; Jesus is all business, giving them three pieces of vital information. First, He tells them that He is sending them out just as the Father has sent Him. They are to carry on His mission of salvation into the world, now that they have seen all that they had seen. Second, He breathed on them and told them to receive the Holy Spirit. This appears to be a foreshadowing of the Day of Pentecost. It appears to be a foreshadowing as there is no apparent reaction to this act yet, but when the Spirit is poured out in Acts 2 the reaction is dramatic. Third, He gives them an awesome charge saying that if they forgive anyone their sins they are forgiven, if not they are not forgiven. Obviously much has been written and speculated upon with regard to this, but I can’t help thinking about what Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 16:18 ff. saying that “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” I can’t help noting that it was Apostles who wrote what would be required to enter into a covenant relationship with Jesus in the New Testament...

20:24-31 is the story of “Doubting Thomas” who had stated that he wouldn’t believe that Jesus had arisen from the dead until he put his fingers into the wounds on his body. Jesus suddenly appears in the room and offers Thomas the chance, Thomas replies with a hugely significant statement of faith: “My Lord and my God.” This is of course the highest statement of faith found in the New Testament, theologically speaking, equating Jesus not only as Lord but also as God. Jesus quickly bursts his bubble by pointing out that anybody with a brain would understand that with what Thomas has seen, but many more will come to that understanding based only upon the testimony of others. John ends the chapter by telling the reader the purpose for the book: Many wonderful things were done by Jesus that are not recorded here, but what is recorded is recorded so that the reader might come to the same conclusion based upon John’s eyewitness testimony that Thomas came to by seeing Jesus after the resurrection.

## “Do You Love Me?”

John 21

Chapter 20 is John's record of events concerning the risen Christ in Jerusalem; chapter 21 is John's story from Galilee. Why the disciples had traveled there isn't given, but it makes sense that they wouldn't be staying on in Jerusalem after all of the recent events. I would imagine that the disciples weren't entirely sure what to do with themselves after following Jesus for over three years... The scene opens with a cast of seven disciples near the Sea of Galilee when Peter announces that he's going fishing.

Note that John refers to the “Sea of Tiberius” which is another name for the Sea of Galilee in those days. Tiberius is the name of a large town, which in those days was a new Roman town located on the shore of the lake. Today it is the largest city in the area. The guys all joined Peter in the boat for a night of casting the fishing net, but their results were lacking entirely, and by early morning there was a man on the shore who noticed their bad luck. John identifies this man as Jesus, although they could not yet recognize Him from the boat.

From the beach, Jesus calls out to them and recommends that they cast their net on the other side of the boat. A fishing boat of the time would normally remain close to shore and cast on the shore side to get the best catch of fish, so most likely Jesus was telling them to try the lake side instead, and what a payoff! They caught so many fish that they couldn't haul it into the boat. John realizes that it was Jesus who was on the shore, and Peter grabs his clothes and jumps into the water swimming to shore leaving the others to tow the nets to land. When they arrive, it seems that Jesus had a campfire going and was cooking breakfast. Jesus had a menu of bread and fish, something that we've seen Jesus do before, but this time, instead of the disciples rounding up fish and loaves that Jesus multiplied, Jesus has fish and loaves and the catch of the disciples will be the multiplier; Jesus has passed the torch, you might say.

John provides us with some eyewitness details in this portion of the text: there were 156 large fish in the net, Peter drags it ashore and Jesus is not only the cook, but the server. Interesting isn't it? A guy who was executed, dead and buried is putting on a fish fry! He is no ghost, for I can't recall a single time when I've ever heard of a ghost eating fish: Jesus had arisen from the grave *bodily*.

After their meal, Jesus walks off a distance with Peter and asks him three times if he loves Jesus. Each time Peter assures Him that he does, but by the third time Peter's feelings were hurt because Jesus kept asking. Much has been made of the Greek used here, but it seems to me that Greek nuance isn't the point that Jesus is making. Peter had denied Jesus three times on the night of His arrest, and Jesus asks him three times if he loves Him. Could it be that that had dawned on Peter? Could it be that Peter felt terrible guilt over his cowardly denial? Let's not forget that this is the first time that they had been off together since Jesus' death, and Jesus has some business to settle with him. Peter must learn to care for the other followers of Jesus, His “sheep,” and this means taking the charge seriously and selflessly, a lesson that must not be lost on all leaders of the church today.

In v. 18 Jesus gives Peter some insight into the manner in which he would die as a martyr for the Gospel, as John points out in v. 19, and then says: "Follow me!" This is the same imperative with which Jesus began His ministry in 1:43 and sets the tone for the conclusion.

At this point, Peter notices John following behind them and says "What about him?" Jesus is not having any of this; it would have been better if Peter had said something more like, "Yes sir!" Jesus lets Peter know that whatever He has in mind for John is none of Peter's business, for Peter's call is to follow Jesus. None of us is in a position to know what adventures we will experience in following Jesus, but we must know that our call is to follow Him, and not to question whether or not someone else might have an easier time of it, and Jesus makes this abundantly clear. Peter's imperative was to "follow" Jesus, and so is ours.

## A Final Thought

When I was a boy, I read a book about the life of Jesus, and it really got my attention. As I thought about it, and as I thought about this Jesus guy, I really had no problem believing that He was the Son of God, and it occurred to me that I should try to be more like Him, but there was one thing about Jesus that kind of bothered me: He cheated!

To my nine-year-old mind, Jesus cheated when He went to the cross because after all, He was God... and He knew how the story was going to end; that's cheating! It was almost as if it didn't count if He knew all the things that He clearly knew before He allowed Himself to be taken prisoner. Gee whiz, I would do the same thing if I knew all that stuff.

Yes, to be young again...

When I was a teen, that attitude stuck with me, in fact, I didn't really see the implication of this until I was in my 30's; yes Jesus knew how the story ended, and He went to the cross knowing that the story wasn't nearly over yet. He would suffer greatly for a time, and then...? Victory, honor, glory, reigning...

John says that he wrote the gospel so that many might come to believe in Him, and many have done so, but how deep is our belief? Ah yes, an uncomfortable question, surely, for some of us might believe like I used to, accepting the basic facts, and still holding something back.

My thinking changed one day when reality hit me like a freight train: Yes, Jesus knew how His story would end... and so do I know how my story ends; victory, honor, glory!

Jesus knew He would rise from the grave, and so will I.

Jesus knew He would ascend to Heaven, and so do will I.

Jesus knew He would suffer for a short time, and so will I.

Jesus knew He would reign as King of kings and Lord of lords, and I know that I am co-heir with Him.

Because Jesus knew these things, He did His Father's will, will I do the same?

Dear reader, this is where we come to the always inconvenient question: *Do we really believe that what we believe is really real?*

It is one thing to accept the basic facts on an academic or theoretical level, but will we allow them to affect who we are on a fundamental level? Well, will we?

We will if we really believe that what we believe is really real.

## Group Study Ideas

Since I began making these “Reflections” documents available, I’ve had a number of people use them for small group studies, and at first I had discussion questions for each lesson, which I discontinued because the larger number of users who used these as part of their personal devotions found the questions to be a bit much. If you wish to use this as a tool for small groups study, here are some ideas for you...

First, one of the best ways I have found to draw your groups into the texts is to give them each text the week in advance and have them learn it enough to tell the story it contains, you know, as though it were a movie or TV show they had seen. Isn’t it amazing how easy it is to tell someone about your favorite movie or book? Well, why shouldn’t it be just as easy to tell a narrative story about Jesus?

When the group gets together, have a participant tell the story that the text contains. Then ask the group to make any additions or corrections to the story, and then have someone read the actual text to ensure everyone has it right.

After that, as group leader, ask a series of open-ended questions about the text to really bring out the point John is making in it. Make sure that in the process of doing this; you give all of your students the opportunity to answer the most important questions:

“What is God saying to you in this story?” And, “What are you going to do about it?”

Now you may wish to put these in your own words, but any time you are studying God’s Word, these are the most important questions to ask yourself in order to make the text a part of your life. If you do so, you will not only find that your life is enhanced by it, so will your group members.

May God richly bless your efforts, and please feel free to drop me a note and give me any feedback you may have!