

Faith Foundations Study Guides

Jesus the Son of God

A Journey of Discovery in the Book of John

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How to Use This Book

Welcome to the Faith Foundations study guide on the gospel of John! Whether you are just beginning your new life with Christ, or have been a Christian for many years, this study guide is for you. It is designed to help you discover, through personal study and group discussion, the incredible riches of God's Word, and to help you grow in your walk with God by applying what you learn. This book is divided into 26 lessons, each of which contains the full NIV text of the Scripture passage, several study and discussion questions, and a verse-by-verse commentary. So, together with a Bible to look up cross-references, you have everything you need for your "journey of discovery" in John's gospel.

Why Small Groups?

These materials can be used profitably in personal study or in an adult Sunday School class. But their value will be best realized when they are used in small groups, meeting either at church during the Sunday School hour or in homes during the week. There are several reasons for this.

First, no one has perfect insight into every passage of Scripture; we can all benefit from hearing the perspectives of other believers as we seek to understand and apply the Bible. A small group gathering, using the discussion questions included in this book, is an ideal way to stimulate a sharing of observations and ideas.

Second, a small group provides a community of fellow travelers who, along with us, are seeking to follow Christ in the midst of family responsibilities, job pressures, and personal struggles. In today's fragmented and mobile society, the natural networks of neighborhoods and family no longer provide the support they once did. We need some way of making connections with others for mutual support, people with whom we can share our joys and sorrows—people who will listen, who will pray with us, who will offer a helping hand and a word of encouragement, and who will confront us in love when we've gotten off track.

Finally, a small group combines the benefits of Biblical insight and community support by keeping us accountable. If we only study the Scriptures alone, or listen to them taught in a large group, it's easy to let them go "in one ear and out the other". But when a small group of people are learning the same things at the same time, they can help one another to apply the things they are learning.

How Are the Groups Organized?

The groups should be composed of 6-14 people: if they are smaller, any absences can make it difficult to maintain the discussion; if they are larger, not everyone can participate. You can meet from two to four times a month; if the group meets less than twice a month, the members aren't spending enough time together to build relationships. Some groups find that meeting three times a month during the school year, with a break during the summer, provides a good rhythm of involvement and time off.

You may choose to include a mix of married and single, older and younger members, or you may organize your groups by age or marital status. There are benefits to homogeneous groups in which the members are going through similar life experiences, but there are also benefits of a diverse group in which the younger members can benefit from the experience of the older.

Each group needs to have a recognized leader, preferably one selected and trained by the pastor or church leadership. This person's role during the meeting is not primarily to teach (although preparation of the lesson is a must), but to guide the discussion and keep the group from getting bogged down on side issues. He or she does not need to be the host; in fact, it is preferable that group responsibilities, such as providing a home in which to meet and organizing refreshments, be shared among the members.

Finally, membership in the group should be based on three commitments: To prepare for each meeting by completing the lesson in advance, which takes from 1/2 to 2 hours (but come to the meeting even if you haven't done the lesson); to place a high priority on regular attendance and come to the meetings except in case of emergency; and to keep confidential anything of a personal nature which is shared during the meetings (except when it is necessary to communicate concerns to the pastor).

What Is the Group Meeting Like?

Each group meeting should last from 1 1/2 to 2 hours, and provide time for discussion of the lesson, prayer, and fellowship. A problem in many groups is for the lesson to take up most of the time, with only a few minutes left over for prayer and fellowship. This must be avoided for the goal of building relationships to be achieved.

Here is a suggested schedule:

15 minutes:	Gathering
30-45 minutes:	Discussion of the lesson
20-30 minutes:	Prayer
15-30 minutes:	Refreshments

As for child care, experience has shown that in order to receive the maximum benefit from time spent in the meeting, all members of the group need to be free to focus on the discussion, rather than caring for children. Therefore, with the possible exception of infants under one year, parents should make arrangements for child care during the meetings. Some options include "trading" child care with parents whose group meets on a different night, having a baby sitter care for children in another room during the meeting, or providing child care for all the groups at the church.

Introduction to John

Author

The author of this gospel does not identify himself by name, only as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn. 21:20, 24). But several factors point to John the son of Zebedee as this disciple. He was present at the last supper, which included only the twelve apostles (Jn. 13:23; Mk. 14:17-20). He was one of the seven disciples who went fishing with Peter (Jn. 21:7), making him either one of the “sons of Zebedee”—James and John—or one of the two unnamed disciples. And he cannot be James, because James was martyred in A.D. 41-44, and this gospel was written after Peter's death in A.D. 65 (see Jn. 21:18-19), when the author had lived long enough for rumors to have arisen that he would never die (Jn. 21:22-23).

In addition, the relationship between Peter and this unnamed disciple (Jn. 13:23-24; 18:15-16; 20:2-10; 21:20-21) is consistent with the close relationship between Peter and John (see Mk. 5:3; 9:2; 14:33; Acts 3-4). And it is difficult to explain why, if the author is not John, he fails to mention John at all in his gospel. Therefore, it seems best to accept the view that John avoids naming himself in order to avoid any self-glorification, and that he refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” in order to emphasize the fact that his relationship with Jesus was due completely to the undeserved love of God (see 1 Jn. 4:19).

Finally, the consistent witness of the early church, in writings dating to the end of the second century, was that John wrote this gospel.

Date and Place of Origin

It is difficult to fix the date of this book with any certainty. As noted above, a date before Peter's death in A.D. 65 is unlikely, and the writings of the early church fathers strongly favor a date late in John's life, perhaps 85-95 A.D.

The traditional view holds that John was at Ephesus when he wrote this book, and there is no compelling reason to conclude otherwise.

Purpose

John clearly states his purpose in 20:31: *“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But 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.”* Thus, John's gospel is an evangelistic work, written to elicit faith in those who read it. This does not mean that it is unprofitable for believers to study; exactly the opposite is true. But that was not John's primary purpose in writing.

In fact, John's purpose was likely even more specific. His extensive use of quotations from, and allusions to, the Old Testament, both explicit and implicit, indicate that his target audience consisted of those who would have been familiar with the Jewish Scriptures; i.e., Jews and perhaps Gentile God-fearers. The clause in his purpose statement that refers to believing that Jesus is the “Christ” (or Messiah) points to a Jewish audience.

Relationship to the Synoptics

While the “synoptic” gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) share much common material, the great majority of the material in John is unique to this gospel. So for instance, John contains no parables, no accounts of Jesus' birth, baptism, temptation by Satan, transfiguration, or ascension, and no mention of the Lord's Supper. Conversely, the synoptics do not contain the miracle of turning water into wine, Jesus' conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, or the resurrection of Lazarus. John is also the only gospel in which Jesus is explicitly identified as God (1:1, 18; 20:28; see 8:58).

So whether or not John had read the other gospels (and it is quite possible that he had), he did not make extensive use of them in writing his book. He wrote, first of all, from his own recollection of the events he recorded. It should be noted that the gospels are not intended to be complete biographies; their relative brevity would make them inadequate for this purpose (see Jn. 20:30). Rather, they contain carefully selected accounts of Jesus' words and deeds which are designed to accomplish the purposes of each author. John's unique purpose and audience have thus caused him to select and arrange his material in a way which differs from the synoptics.

Themes

Since John's theology will be treated in the notes, a simple list of some of the prominent themes of this gospel will be sufficient here:

- (1) The identity of Jesus—Word of God, Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, and God, including the “I am” statements; also, Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament;
- (2) The necessity of personal faith for salvation, and its relationship to election;
- (3) The contrast between opposites—light and darkness, life and death, above and below, true and false, sight and blindness;
- (4) Eschatology (future events), including the resurrection and judgment, and the eternal blessedness of believers; also, the tension between the present and future aspects of God's kingdom;
- (5) The person and work of the Holy Spirit;
- (6) What it means to be a part of the people of God; including the command to love one another.

Unit 1 – The Word Became Flesh

John 1:1- 42

Text

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^a it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and^b is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

¹⁹ Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders^c in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."

²¹ They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No."

²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"^d

²⁴ Now the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

²⁶ "I baptize with^e water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ 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.' ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."^f

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

³⁹ "Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter^g).

^a 5 Or understood

^b 18 Some manuscripts *but the only Son, who*

^c 19 The Greek term traditionally translated *the Jews* (hoi Ioudaioi) refers here and elsewhere in John's Gospel to those Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus; also in 5:10, 15, 16; 7:1, 11, 13; 9:22; 18:14, 28, 36; 19:7, 12, 31, 38; 20:19.

^d 23 Isaiah 40:3

^e 26 Or *in*; also in verses 31 and 33 (twice)

^f 34 See Isaiah 42:1; many manuscripts *is the Son of God*.

^g 42 *Cephas* (Aramaic) and *Peter* (Greek) both mean rock.

Open

- This is a chance to get to know the other group members better. Go around the group and have everyone briefly introduce themselves; where they grew up, what kind of work they do, and so on.

Discover

1. What facts about the “Word” can you find in verses 1-18?

2. Why do you think this gospel begins “in the beginning,” instead of at Jesus' birth?

3. What does the title of “the Word” tell us about who Jesus is?

4. What two groups failed to receive Christ? Why? (vv. 10-11; see John 3:19-21)

5. What does it mean to “receive” Christ? What is the result? (v. 12; see John 3:1-6)

6. What does the fact that the Word “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” tell us about Jesus and his work? (vs. 14; see Hebrews 2:14-18)

7. For someone familiar with the Old Testament, the title “lamb of God” brings to mind several parallels. Read the following passages and describe how the role of the “lamb” in each is similar to what Christ did.

- Genesis 22:1-19

- Exodus 12:1-13

- Leviticus 4:32-35

- Isaiah 53:7-10

Apply

Which of the characters in this passage can you most easily identify with? John the Baptist? The Pharisees? The disciples?

Which of the several titles for Jesus in this passage seems most significant to you? Why?

Commentary

vv. 1-18 This section introduces the life and ministry of Jesus Christ differently than the other gospels. Matthew and Luke begin their narratives with the story of Jesus' birth, and Mark begins with Jesus' public ministry. But John begins "in the beginning," revealing Jesus' co-existence with God the Father before the creation of the world. Jesus is the divine Word of God, the One who came into the world to reveal God in all His glory and grace.

This section also introduces other important themes of John's gospel: the conflict between light and darkness, Jesus' rejection by his own people, the necessity of belief in Jesus, and the new birth.

v. 1 **"In the beginning was"** In contrast to the world which "was made," or came into being at a point in time (vs. 3), Jesus simply "was" in the beginning. He existed before the universe was created.

"the Word" John refers to Jesus as the *logos*, or "word," emphasizing that He is God's means of self-expression and self-revelation (see vs. 18). This has parallels in Old Testament passages which refer to God acting and revealing Himself through His word (Ps. 33:6; 107:20; Isa. 38:4; 55:11).

"the Word was with God, and the Word was God" "With" implies a personal relationship between the Word and God. It also implies a distinction between the two; they are not identical, even though both are God. However, there are not two gods, but one God. The theological phrase for this relationship is "one essence in two persons." (For more references to Jesus as God, see John 1:18; 10:30; 20:28; Heb. 1:8; Rom. 9:5).

v. 3 **"Through him all things were made"** The Word was God's agent in all His work of creation (vs. 10; also Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:12).

v. 4 **"In him was life"** The spiritual life which Jesus gives to others comes from within himself, for he himself is the life (see 1:25; 5:21-26; 14:6). He is also the light, God's self-revelation to mankind (see 8:12; 9:5).

v. 5 **"The light shines in the darkness"** This "darkness" is not merely the absence of good, but active moral evil (see 3:19; also 1 John 1:5-6; 2:8-11). Jesus came into a world ruined and dominated by sin; as a result, the world did not understand or accept him (vv. 10-11; also 1 Cor. 2:14).

v. 9 **"the true light"** The light of revelation in Christ is "true," not only in the sense that it is *genuine*, but also in the sense that it is *complete*: In contrast to God's earlier, partial revelation of himself in the Old

Testament, Jesus is the full and ultimate revelation of God to man. In the same way, Jesus speaks of himself as the "true" bread, in contrast to the manna from heaven which God gave the Israelites in the desert (John 6:32-33).

"that gives light to everyone" This could refer to special revelation, or inner "enlightenment." In that case, to be consistent with mankind's rejection of Christ (vv. 10-11), the phrase "every man" would have to be understood as "every man without racial or ethnic distinction" rather than "every man without exception". However, it seems more likely that John is speaking of general revelation, the external light of truth which the message of Jesus Christ brings to all who hear it. Some accept and embrace this light, while others flee from it (see 3:19-21).

v. 10 **"the world did not recognize him"** The world (sinful mankind) did not acknowledge Jesus as Creator and Lord because they did not recognize, or know him. In contrast, his "sheep" do know him—they recognize his voice and follow him (John 10:2-5, 14).

v. 11 **"his own did not receive him"** Not only did sinful mankind in general reject Jesus, but his own people, the Jews, rejected him as well.

vv. 12-13 In general, neither the world nor the Jewish people received Jesus. But out of both groups some did in fact receive him through faith. These people received from Jesus a precious gift—the right to enter into a family relationship with God by being "born again" (John 3:1-6). This kind of birth does not depend on human ancestry or ethnic identity, but is the work of God's Spirit (see John 8:31-47; Rom. 8:9-16).

v. 14 **"The Word became flesh"** the ancient heresy of *docetism* taught that Christ was not actually a flesh-and-blood man, but only appeared to be one. John clearly denies this, both here and in his letters (see 1 John 1:1; 4:2; 2 John 7). In fact, the author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus' incarnation (literally, "enfleshment") was an essential part of his identification with mankind and victory over sin (Heb. 2:14).

"and made his dwelling among us"

This phrase "made his dwelling" could be translated "tabernacled". It is an allusion to the tent, or tabernacle, in which God traveled with Israel from the time of the Exodus to the time of king Solomon (Ex. 40:1-38; 2 Sam. 7:5-6). Just as God lived among his people in the Old Testament tabernacle, Jesus lived among his people in a "tabernacle" of flesh.

- “We have seen his glory”** Just as Old Testament worshipers could see the glory of God revealed in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34-35), those who lived with Jesus could see his glory revealed in miracles and in his death and resurrection (John 2:11; 11:4, 40; 12:23-28).
- v. 15 The “John” referred to here is John the Baptist, not the apostle John who is the author of this book.
- vv. 16-17 **“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.”**
- Verse 16 could be translated “one blessing after another”, or it could be translated (as here) “grace in place of grace already given.” In the first case, John would be referring to the fact that the grace we receive from Christ is superabundant, thus emphasizing the “fullness” of Christ’s grace. In the second case, John would be saying that the grace we receive in Christ replaces and supersedes the grace which came before, the grace which came through the law.
- Verse 17 can also be viewed in two ways. It could be interpreted as a contrast between law and grace. This would imply that there was no grace and truth in the law, that law and grace are opposites. Or it could be interpreted as a comparison. In this case, John would be saying that the grace we receive from Christ is superior to the grace revealed in the law, because the law was a partial revelation of God’s grace while Christ is the full and complete revelation of His grace (see Rom. 7:12; 10:4; Gal. 3:24; Heb. 9).
- In both verses, the first interpretation emphasizes the radical newness of what Christ did; the second interpretation emphasizes the continuity between Christ’s work and what God was doing in the Old Testament.
- v. 18 For additional references to Christ as the revelation of God, see John 12:45; 14:9; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3.
- vv. 19-28 This section contains a dialogue between John the Baptist and the Jewish leaders who came to question him about his identity. Their main concern was one of authority; what gave him the right to baptize? He responded by identifying himself as a prophet. His authority came not from himself, but from the One of whom he prophesied.
- vv. 20-21 The Christ (or “Messiah”), Elijah, and the Prophet were characters whose appearance the Jews expected would signify the coming of the end times (see Mal. 4:5; Dt. 18:15-18). In fact, Jesus stated that John the Baptist was the promised “Elijah,” even though he himself apparently did not realize this (see Matt. 12:13-14; 17:11-12; Lk. 1:17).
- v. 23 **“I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord’”** John the Baptist applies to himself the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3. As Isaiah foretold that God would come and bring His people home from their captivity in Babylon, so here John the Baptist announces that the Lord, Jesus Christ, is coming to draw his people to himself.
- vv. 24-26 One of the most significant things about John’s baptism is that it emphasized the necessity of personal repentance, rather than a reliance upon one’s race or ancestry, for forgiveness of sins (see Lk. 3:1-14).
- v. 29 **“the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** The title “lamb of God” has deep significance. It brings to mind the ram which God provided for Abraham to sacrifice in place of Isaac; the blood of the Passover lamb which protected the people of Israel from death; the Old Testament system of animal sacrifices; and Isaiah’s prophecy of the suffering servant (Gen. 22; Ex. 12; Lev. 4:32-35; Isa. 53:7-10).
- These passages share a common theme of substitution, or one dying in place of another, which is what Jesus did. He died on the cross as a substitute, in order to take away “the sin of the world”; not the world without exception, i.e. every person, but the world without distinction, i.e. people from every ethnic group, rather than Jews alone. (For a discussion of the superiority of Jesus’ sacrifice over the Old Testament sacrificial system, see Heb. 10:1-18.)
- vv. 32-33 The sign of the Spirit descending and remaining on Christ identifies him as the one of whom Isaiah spoke: the promised king from David’s line, the righteous Servant, and the anointed one of God (Is. 11:1-5; 42:1; 61:1-3; see Lk. 4:18-21).
- v. 41 **“We have found the Messiah”** In the language of the Old Testament (Hebrew), “Messiah” literally means “anointed one”. Anointing with oil was used throughout the Old Testament to set apart those who were chosen by God for special service, such as kings, priests, and prophets. Christ was each of these things, but the title here probably refers to his identity as the promised king from David’s line whose reign would never end (Is. 11:1-5; Luke 1:32). This reign of Christ began with his resurrection and ascension into heaven (Acts 2:29-36), and will be consummated when he returns to earth at the end of the present age.

Unit 2 – Jesus Changes Water Into Wine

John 1:43-2:25

Text

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

⁴⁶ "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

⁴⁸ "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

⁵⁰ Jesus said, "You believe^a because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that."⁵¹ He then added, "Very truly I tell you,^b you^c will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on'^d the Son of Man."

¹ On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there,² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴ "Woman,^e why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.^f

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so,⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside¹⁰ and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."⁹

¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

²⁰ They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

²³ Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name.^h²⁴ But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. ²⁵ He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.

^a 1:50 Or Do you believe ... ?

^b 1:51 The Greek is plural.

^c 1:51 The Greek is plural.

^d 1:51 Gen. 28:12

^e 2:4 The Greek for Woman does not denote any disrespect.

^f 2:6 Or from about 75 to about 115 liters

^g 2:17 Psalm 69:9

^h 2:23 Or in him

Open

What's the funniest or most memorable thing that you ever saw at a wedding?

If you found out some very good news, who are the first three people you would tell?

Discover

1. What was John's purpose in writing this gospel, and specifically, for including the accounts of Jesus' miracles? (John 20:30-31)

2. What do you learn about Jesus and his mother from verses 3-5?

3. What "time" is Jesus referring to when he says, "My time has not yet come"? (vs. 4; see Jn. 12:23-27; 13:1)

4. Jesus' miracle of changing water into wine revealed his power and glory to his disciples (v. 11). But it also illustrated spiritual truth concerning salvation. Answer the following questions to help you dig it out:

- What does wine represent at the last supper? (Matt. 26:27-29)

- What does the passage tell us about the kind of jars Jesus uses for this miracle? (v. 6)

- What is the "banquet-master's" evaluation of the new wine? (v. 10)

- Conclusion: what spiritual truth(s) are illustrated by the transformation Jesus made? (vv. 6-10; see also Hebrews 9:9-10, 14; 1 John 1:7)

5. Why was Jesus angry at the merchants and money-changers in the temple? (vv. 2:13-16)

6. What does Jesus' act of clearing the temple reveal about him?

Apply

Who was the "Andrew" or "Philip" who invited you to Christ?

What is your faith in Christ based on? The miracles recorded in Scripture? Answers to prayer? Or something else?

If Jesus were "cleaning house" in your life and removing everything that hinders you from fully worshiping God, where do you think he would start?

Commentary

v. 45 **“Philip found Nathanael and told him”**
This is one of several examples John gives of the importance of personal witness in bringing people to Christ: John the Baptist directed two of his own disciples to Jesus (1:35-37); Andrew brought his brother Simon Peter (1:40-42); and Philip brought Nathanael. This theme is also stressed in John's first letter (1 John 1:1-3).

“Nathanael” probably another name for the apostle Bartholomew (see Matt. 10:3).

“the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote” Christ was anticipated in the Old Testament; he himself affirmed this (Luke 24:27,44; John 5:39). “The Law” can refer to all of Moses' writings (the first five books of the Bible), not just the legal statutes. Together, “the law and the prophets” were used to refer to the whole Old Testament (see Matt. 7:12).

v. 46 **“Come and see”** The invitation which Philip gives Nathanael is also an invitation from John, the author of this gospel, to the reader. John's intention is that those who read his gospel *“may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”* (20:31).

vv. 47-49 Nathanael had been invited to come and see Jesus, but it is Jesus who “sees” him, revealing a supernatural knowledge of Nathanael's character and activities. The result is that Nathanael in turn “sees” Jesus and understands who he is.

“you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel” These two titles are closely linked. It is likely that Nathanael understood the title “Son of God” to refer to the Messiah: God had promised David that He would establish an eternal kingdom ruled over by a king from David's own line, saying “I will be his father, and he will be my son” (2 Sam. 7:14). Further, the Psalmist spoke of the relationship between God and His anointed king as that of a father and son (Ps. 2:7).

This connection is further supported by Jesus himself, who understood his sonship as essential unity with God (John 5:17-23; 10:30-39).

vv. 50-51 **“you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man”**

It seems that Jesus is here alluding to an incident in the life of Jacob (whose name was later changed to “Israel”) in which Jacob had a dream and saw a stairway connecting heaven and earth, with angels ascending and descending on it (Gen. 28:10-12). By identifying himself with Jacob's ladder, Jesus is indicating that he is the one who connects heaven and

earth: being both fully divine and fully human, he is the “one mediator between God and men” (1 Tim. 2:5).

vv. 2:1-11 This section relates Jesus' first miracle, the changing of water into wine at a wedding in Cana. He did this to reveal his glory; the result was that his disciples put their faith in him (v. 11). As we learn later in the book, John includes this and Jesus' other miraculous signs in his narrative for just this purpose—that those who learn of them might come to faith in Christ (20:30-31).

v. 3 **“Jesus' mother said to him, ‘They have no more wine’”** It is unclear exactly what Mary expected of Jesus. Possibly she was hoping for just what happened—that Jesus would miraculously provide the needed wine. She certainly knew that her son was no ordinary man (see Luke 1:26-2:52). But this explanation seems unlikely, since Jesus' was not in the habit of performing miracles: in fact, this was the first (v. 11). More likely, she was simply making Jesus aware of the situation and hoping he would do something about it.

v. 4 **“Woman, why do you involve me?”** Jesus' response to his mother is courteous, but nevertheless a rebuke. Although Mary has borne and nurtured Jesus, she has no special claim on him. She must come to him on the same basis as everyone else, as a disciple. Jesus demonstrates this when he refers to his disciples as his “brother and sister and mother” (Matt. 12:46-50). Jesus is not responsible to fulfill the expectations which others may have for him, even his own family. His only obligation is to do the will of the Father (see 5:30; 7:1-9).

“My hour has not yet come” Here, as elsewhere in John's gospel, Jesus is speaking on a spiritual level while his hearers are thinking on a physical level (i.e. his conversations with Nicodemus [3:3-4] and the woman at the well [4:7-15]; see also 4:31-34; 6:30-35; 7:33-36; 16:25). In this case, Jesus is referring to the “time” when he would glorify the Father through his death (see 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1).

How is this related to Mary's request for more wine? Perhaps Jesus means that he cannot meet this need in an open and dramatic way (see vv. 9, 11), because the time was not right for him to reveal himself through the kind of public miracle that would arouse the wrath of the Jews and lead to his death. It is also possible to see in this statement a reference to another kind of “wine,” Jesus' blood. The time for this wine to be given had not yet come; it would be poured out at his death (see 6:53-56; Matt. 26:27-28).

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- vv. 6-9 **“six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing”** If the wine represents Christ's blood, then the jars full of water represent the Old Testament Law with its regulations concerning physical washing. The external cleansing required under the law did not in itself wash away sin, since the law was only “a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves” (Heb. 10:1; see also Heb. 9:9-10). Rather, these regulations pointed forward to Christ, whose blood is alone able to cleanse from sin (Heb. 9:14, 1 John 1:7; Rev. 7:14).
- v. 10 **“you have saved the best till now”** In a physical sense, the wine Jesus provided was superior to that which had been served previously; in a symbolic sense, the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus' blood is superior to the old (Matt. 26:27-28; Heb. 8:6-13; 9:14-15).
- vv. 12-17 John reports a temple-clearing near the beginning of his gospel, while the other gospel writers report one near the end of theirs (Matt. 21:12-17; Mk. 11:15-18; Lk. 19:45-46). There are two possible explanations for this. The first is that the event happened once, near the end of Jesus' ministry, but that John reports it here instead. This would be consistent with the overall style of the gospels, which are often arranged topically, rather than chronologically. Also, verse 12 does not give us any clear idea of how much time has elapsed between miracle at Cana and the clearing of the temple. The second possibility is that Jesus cleared the temple twice, and that John reports only the first event. This second alternative seems to fit better with a natural reading of the text.
- vv. 14-16 The men selling animals were providing a service to the worshippers: the animals were to be used in the temple sacrifices, and it was convenient to be able to purchase them at the temple rather than to have to bring them from home. Also, the moneychangers were providing a needed service: they converted the different currencies of the Roman Empire into the specific coinage needed for the temple tax, required of adult Jewish males.
- Jesus' objection was not just that these men were cheating people. He objected to the fact that they were in the temple area at all. Conducting commerce in the temple not only distracted the worshippers (try to pray in a crowded barnyard sometime!), but it tended to turn the act of worship into a financial transaction, as if one could purchase God's love and forgiveness.
- v. 19 **“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”** John makes it clear that Jesus is speaking of his own death, followed three days later by his resurrection (vv. 21-22). Just as the temple was God's dwelling-place on the earth, so Jesus was indwelt by God's Holy Spirit (John 1:33).
- Jesus' identification of his body with the temple also reminds us that it was his death on the cross which rendered the temple obsolete, ending the need for animal sacrifices and opening the way into God's presence for all believers. In fact, the whole Jewish sacrificial system pointed forward to Christ, anticipating his death and resurrection and his continuing mediatorial work before God for his people (see Heb. 8:1-10:25).

Unit 3 – Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

John 3:1-36

Text

¹ Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

³ Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”^a

⁴ “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit^b gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You^c must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”^d

⁹ “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.^e ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ^f ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”^g

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the

truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

²² After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. ²³ Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized. ²⁴ (This was before John was put in prison.) ²⁵ An argument developed between some of John’s disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. ²⁶ They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.”

²⁷ To this John replied, “A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’ ²⁹ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. ³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less.”^h

³¹ The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. ³³ Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. ³⁴ For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for Godⁱ gives the Spirit without limit. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.

^a 3:3 The Greek for again also means *from above*; also in verse 7.

^b 3:6 Or *but spirit*

^c 3:7 The Greek is plural.

^d 3:8 The Greek for *Spirit* is the same as that for *wind*.

^e 3:13 Some manuscripts *Man, who is in heaven*

^f 3:14 The Greek for *lifted up* also means *exalted*.

^g 3:15 Some interpreters end the quotation with verse 21.

^h 3:30 Some interpreters end the quotation with verse 36.

ⁱ 3:34 Greek *he*

Open

- If you could interview any person from history, who would you choose, and what questions would you ask them?

Discover

1. How do each of these verses describe what it means to be “born again”? (vs. 3)

2 Corinthians 5:17

Ephesians 2:1-5

Titus 3:5

John 1:12-13

2. In what way does Nicodemus misunderstand what Jesus is talking about? (vs. 4)

3. How is the operation of the Holy Spirit in new birth similar to wind? (v. 8)

4. How is Jesus like the “snake in the desert”? (vs. 14; see Numbers 21:4-9)

5. What was God's purpose in sending Jesus into the world? (v. 17)

6. Contrast how the two groups described in verses 19-21 respond to Christ:

Group 1:	Group 2:
- Their identity	- Their identity
- Their actions	- Their actions
- Their motives	- Their motives

7. What is the point of John's metaphor about the bride and bridegroom? (vv. 29-30)

Apply

How would you describe your own search for truth before you trusted in Christ?

Was your conversion experience more like a gentle breeze, a strong wind, or a hurricane?

What convinced you that Jesus was more than just a great teacher?

Commentary

- v. 1 The Pharisees were a Jewish sect prominent during the time of Christ whose members were characterized by strict observance of the Mosaic Law. They believed that the oral traditions passed down from their forefathers had equal weight with the Scriptures. These traditions, or “Halakah,” dealt with matters such as ritual purity, fasting, tithing, and prayer. The New Testament’s view of the Pharisees is generally negative; Jesus identifies them as hypocrites because of their focus on external law-keeping rather than the heart (see Matt. 23:23-28).
- v. 2 **“He came to Jesus at night”** In this gospel, sometimes even minor details carry a symbolic meaning. Here, John notes that it was night in order to emphasize Nicodemus’ spiritual darkness, as he does later when describing Judas’ betrayal of Jesus (13:30; see 9:4; 11:10).
- “we know that you are a teacher who has come from God”** Many people today share this opinion of Jesus, that he was a “great teacher.” But if their assessment of Christ never progresses beyond this, they will die in their sins (John 8:24).
- v. 3 **“the kingdom of God”** The kingdom, or reign, of God has both present and future aspects. In the present, Christ’s reign is primarily spiritual. He rules over the hearts of his people, and manifests his authority by his ability to save (Matt. 28:18; Rom. 14:17; Col. 1:13). When Christ returns at the end of the present age, the kingdom which he received at his ascension (Acts 2:29-36) will be consummated, and his rule will have no end. This everlasting kingdom was foreseen in the Old Testament (2 Sam. 7:13-16; Isa. 9:6-7; Dan. 7:13-14, 27; Lk. 1:30-33).
- Views differ on the specifics of Christ’s future reign. *Premillennialists* believe that when Christ returns, he will rule over an earthly kingdom for one thousand years, at the end of which the present creation will be destroyed and his eternal rule over the new heavens and new earth will begin (see 1 Cor. 15:22-28; 2 Pet. 3:11-13; Rev. 11:15; 20:1-6). *Amillennialists* teach that Christ’s rule over the new heavens and new earth will begin immediately upon his return, without an intervening earthly kingdom.
- “unless they are born again”** Contrary to the dominant religious thinking of Jesus’ day, being born a Jew did not guarantee participation in the kingdom of God. Only those who had experienced the new birth could enter it. This new birth, *regeneration*, is an act of the Holy Spirit by which those who are spiritually dead are given spiritual life through union with Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1-5, 4:22-24; Col. 2:13, 3:9-10). It is not based on any human works or merit, but on the will and mercy of God (John 1:12-13; Titus 3:5-6).
- v. 5 **“born of water and the Spirit”** It is possible, but unlikely, that “water” refers to baptism. But if this were the case, Jesus’ rebuke to Nicodemus in vs. 10 would be out of place. Nicodemus could not have been expected to understand a reference to Christian baptism, which had not yet been instituted. Further, in verse 8, Jesus refers to the new birth as “of the Spirit,” omitting any mention of water. This would be unlikely if water baptism were an essential part of the new birth.
- Or, “water” could refer to the amniotic fluid of physical birth, but the parallels between verses 3 and 5 suggest that Jesus is speaking here of one (spiritual) birth rather than two births, one physical and one spiritual. This is because the word translated “again” in verse 3 can also have the meaning “from above,” as in 3:31. Thus, “born from above,” which speaks of one birth, would be parallel with “born of water and Spirit.”
- It seems best to view “water and Spirit” birth as one event, with water representing the cleansing from sin that the Spirit performs (see Titus 3:5-6). Thus, Jesus’ rebuke to Nicodemus in verse 10 makes sense, because cleansing from sin, symbolized by water, and the giving of the Spirit were foreseen in the Old Testament (see Ezk. 36:25-27).
- v. 6 **“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit”** Physical life comes from physical birth; spiritual life comes from the Holy Spirit through regeneration.
- v. 8 **“The wind blows wherever it pleases. . . . So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”** The Greek word for “wind” is the same as the word for “Spirit”. Just like the motion of the wind, the Spirit’s work in regeneration cannot be controlled or predicted. He acts sovereignly and independently, according to His own will (John 1:13).
- v. 12 **“I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?”** The “earthly things” are the present aspects of the kingdom of God; i.e., the new birth and the saving activity of the Holy Spirit during the present age. If Nicodemus does not believe in these, then he will not believe in the “heavenly things,” those matters concerning the future aspects of God’s reign.
- v. 13 **“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven”** Jesus alone has the authority to speak of heavenly matters, because he is the only one who has been there (see Jn. 3:31-34).

- vv. 14-15 **“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up”** The event Jesus refers to (Nu. 21:4-9) took place during Israel's 40 years in the desert after the exodus from Egypt. As punishment for their grumbling, God caused many of them to be bitten by snakes. When they repented, He instructed Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole; anyone who looked at it after being bitten would live. This figurine foreshadowed Christ in at least three ways: (1) It gave physical life, as Christ gives spiritual life. (2) It was lifted up on a pole; in the same way, Christ was “lifted up” on a cross (John 12:32-33) and “lifted up,” in the sense of “exalted,” through his resurrection, and ascension into heaven (Isa. 52:13; Acts 2:32-33; Phil. 2:8-9; 1 Pet. 1:21). (3) The only action required of the Israelites was to exercise faith and look at the bronze snake; the only action required of us is to “look” to Christ in faith.
- vv. 16-21 It is unclear whether these are the words of Jesus or the editorial comments of the author, John. In either case, they reflect true teaching. But the second option is more likely, since the title “one and only” is used by John in his prologue (1:14, 18), but is nowhere else used by Jesus when referring to himself.
- v. 16 **“For God so loved the world”** The greatness of God's love is shown in the merciful and gracious act it produced: sending His own son into the world to die for ungodly sinners, His own enemies (Rom. 5:6-10). But who is the object of this love? What is the “world” here? In John's writings, references to God's love typically indicate His special love toward the elect, the love by which He invariably brings to salvation those whom He has chosen (Jn. 6:44, 65). In these cases, the “world” is not all persons without exception; it is all those out of the world who believe, without distinction as to ethnic or racial identity (1:29; 4:42, 6:33; 17:9; see Rom. 5:8-10; 8:28-30; 9:10-18). However, God also has a love for mankind in general, an indiscriminate benevolence by which He seeks our good. In spite of the fact that all unrepentant persons are “deserving of wrath” (Eph. 2:3; Jn. 3:36), God still loves them and desires their salvation (see Mt. 23:37; Ezk. 33:11). An example of this is the Rich Young Ruler, whom Jesus is said to love even though he fails to believe (Mk. 10:21-22). It is this second kind of love that is in view here, the mercy and compassion of God by which He offers salvation to whoever believes, the love by which Christ promises that “whoever comes to Me I will never drive away” (Jn. 6:37).
- v. 17 **“God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world”** Jesus' purpose in coming was not condemnation, but salvation (Jn. 8:15; 12:47). However, on the last day, Jesus will act as a judge, condemning those who did not receive him (vs. 18; John 5:22-29; Rom. 2:16; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8).
- vv. 19-21 The contrast in these verses is between two kinds of people: those who hate and shun the revelation of God in Christ, and those who welcome it. Those who avoid it do so because of guilt and shame over their own sins. Those who welcome the light, however, do so out of humility, not pride in their own works. They want to bring attention to the grace of God, not to themselves. Thus, those who live by the truth are those who trust in and follow Christ, who himself is the truth (Jn. 14:6).
- vv. 26-30 These verses revolve around a dialogue between John the Baptist and some of his disciples. Apparently these disciples of John are unhappy because the “Johnny come lately,” Jesus, has begun to attract larger crowds than their master. John's response demonstrates his understanding and acceptance of his role. He was not the Messiah, only his herald.
- v. 29 **“The bride belongs to the bridegroom”** John the Baptist likens himself to the best man at a wedding, whose job it is to see that the bride and groom are united. This figure of speech was used in the Old Testament to describe the relationship between God, the bridegroom, and His people, the bride (Ho. 2:16-20). The New Testament also uses this metaphor to describe the relationship between Christ and the church (2 Cor. 11:12; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:1-2, 9).
- vv. 31-36 These verses seem to be the editorial comments of the author, John.
- vv. 31-32 The “one who comes from above” is Christ; the “one who is from the earth” is John the Baptist. Christ is superior to John the Baptist because his origin is heaven. Thus Christ is able to speak of what he has “seen and heard;” his teaching consists of eyewitness testimony.
- vv. 33-34 **“Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful”** Believing Christ is synonymous with believing God; disbelieving Christ is the same as calling God a liar (Jn. 8:28-29; 12:44-50; 1 Jn. 5:10).
- v. 36 John presents the choice very clearly: eternal life or God's wrath. There are no other alternatives.

Unit 4 – Jesus Talks With a Samaritan Woman

John 4:1-42

Text

¹ Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria.⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.^[a])

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?"¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband.¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet.²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹ "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we

worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

³¹ Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

³³ Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"

³⁴ "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.³⁵ Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.³⁶ Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.³⁷ Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true.³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days.⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴² They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

^a 4:9 Or do not use dishes Samaritans have used

Open

- "Wallet scavenger hunt"—Have everyone look through their wallet or purse and identify (a) the oldest thing, or (b) the most valuable thing they find there.

Discover

1. Read 2 Kings 17:1-41 and Ezra 4:1-5 and summarize below: (1) who the Samaritans were, and (2) why they were despised by the Jews.

2. What is significant about the fact that John describes Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman right after the encounter with Nicodemus? (see John 3:16)

3. How are Jesus' words misunderstood in this passage?

- by the Samaritan woman (vv. 11, 15)

- by the disciples (v. 33)

4. Why does Jesus talk in this way, even though he is constantly misunderstood? (see Matthew 13:10-16)

5. How is the Holy Spirit like a spring of water? (v. 14; see also John 6:63; 7:37-39)

6. In your own words, what does it mean to worship God "in spirit and truth"?

7. What other kind of worship is Jesus comparing this to? How are they different? (vs. 24; see Heb. 10:8-22)

8. How is doing God's will like physical food? (v. 34)

Apply

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> How could you use Jesus' conversation with the woman as a model for personal evangelism? | <input type="checkbox"/> Do you worship God "in spirit and truth"? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How could you apply Jesus' words about the harvest to yourself? | <input type="checkbox"/> What do you think this passage tells us about Jesus? |

Commentary

- v. 4 **“Now he had to go through Samaria”**
Geographically, this was true because the region of Samaria lay between Judea on the south and Galilee on the north. This may also refer to the fact that God's plan, which included the encounter with the woman at the well, required Jesus to travel through this region.
- v. 6 **“tired as he was from the journey”**
The fact that Jesus grew tired and thirsty shows that he was fully human (Jn. 1:14).
- v. 7 **“a Samaritan woman came to draw water”** It would be more common for women to come in groups to draw water, and to come early or late in the day when it was cool. The fact that this woman comes to the well at midday (“the sixth hour,” vs. 6), and apparently alone, testifies to her status as a social outcast. Thus, she was at the opposite extreme from Nicodemus: he was a respected and learned religious leader in Israel; she was an outcast woman from a despised people. But Jesus spoke freely with both of them, a striking illustration of the “whoever” clause of Jn. 3:16.
- v. 9 **“Jews do not associate with Samaritans”** The Samaritans' status as religious and social outcasts had a long history. According to 2 Kings 17, the Samaritans of Jesus' day were descendants of foreign colonists who settled the land of Israel after Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. These colonists were instructed in the law of Moses; however, they did not keep the law, but combined the worship of the true God with the worship of their own gods. Hostility between Jews and Samaritans began when the Jews refused to allow the Samaritans to help in rebuilding the temple after the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile in 538 B.C. (Ezra 4:1-5). At the time of Jesus, Samaritan religion differed from Judaism in several ways, including rejection of all but the first five books of the Bible, and worship which centered on Mt. Gerizim rather than in Jerusalem.
- The phrase “do not associate with” could also be translated “do not use together with,” i.e., that Jews do not share eating utensils with Samaritans, for fear of ceremonial uncleanness. This would explain the woman's disbelief when Jesus asks for a drink from her water jar.
- v. 10 **“living water”** This can mean flowing water from a spring, but Jesus is probably referring to the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7:37-39). Evidence for this interpretation is that the term “gift of God,” which Jesus uses here, is a name for the Holy Spirit in Acts 8:20; also, the word translated “welling up” in vs. 14 is used to describe the action of the Holy Spirit in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the *Septuagint*.
- vv. 11-12 The woman misunderstands Jesus, assuming that he is speaking of literal water. Her question is ironic: she does not realize that Jesus is in fact far greater than Jacob.
- vv. 13-14 Jesus now makes clear that he is speaking of a different kind of “water”. This water, the Holy Spirit, not only satisfies forever our thirst for God, but gives eternal life to all who drink of it (Jn. 6:63). These verses echo several Old Testament prophecies which speak of salvation and the outpouring of the Spirit in the messianic age (Isa. 12:2-3, 44:3, 49:10, 55:1-5).
- vv. 15-18 The woman is still fixed on her physical desire for water, but Jesus directs attention to spiritual matters by exposing her immorality. While people may focus on physical needs and desires in order to mask their pain and emptiness, an encounter with Jesus Christ often exposes their sin and spiritual need.
- v. 20 **“Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem”** Taking advantage of the fact that the man with whom she is speaking has turned out to be a prophet (and perhaps hoping to change the subject), the woman engages him in a theological discussion. Both Jews and Samaritans agreed that the place for worshipping God had been divinely selected (see Dt. 12; esp. vv. 5-6), but they disagreed as to where this was. The Jews knew that it was Jerusalem, because the temple which Solomon built there was endorsed by God (1 Ki. 8:10-20; 9:1-3). But Samaritans only accepted the first five books of the Bible, and thus rejected this evidence. Instead, they chose Mt. Gerizim, where the blessings of the covenant were proclaimed to Israel after entering the promised land (Dt. 11:29; Jos. 8:33).
- v. 21 **“a time is coming”** Jesus doesn't respond to the woman's question directly. Instead, he tells her that the location God selected for temple worship would soon be irrelevant. This is because access to God would be mediated through Christ, rather than through priests and the temple-based sacrificial system. The “time” Jesus refers to is the time of his death. At this time, the curtain in the temple which separated the holy place from the most holy place was torn in two, signifying that Christ had opened the way of access to God (Mark 23:45; Heb. 9:7-8; 10:19-20).

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- v. 22 ***“You Samaritans worship what you do not know”*** The Samaritans' rejection of most of the Old Testament meant that their ideas about God were incomplete and erroneous. They worshiped God in name only, being ignorant of his person or works. The same might be said of those in churches today who have the complete Scriptures but do not read or study them.
- “salvation is from the Jews”*** Not only did the Savior, Jesus Christ, come from the Jewish race, but all of God's saving activity from Abraham through Christ was mediated through the nation of Israel (Rom. 3:2; 9:4-5). Even now, believers in Christ are being “grafted in” to the “root” of Israel (Rom. 11:17-18).
- vv. 23-24 ***“A time is coming and has now come”*** The phrase “is coming” tells us that the day when temple worship would be fully replaced by worship through Christ was still future; but the phrase “and has now come” emphasizes that in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, that day was already dawning. This verse brings out the point that, although the cross was the critical dividing line between the old and new covenants, the whole earthly ministry of Jesus was a time of transition from the old to the new.
- “the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth”*** True worship does not consist of mere ritual or external religious practices; it is a matter of the heart. This kind of worship flows from the spiritual life which the Holy Spirit gives to believers (Jn. 6:63). It is “true” because it is based on the true revelation of God in Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:18; 14:6).
- v. 26 ***“I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”*** When speaking publicly, Jesus does not clearly identify himself, lest the political expectations which the Jews had of the Messiah interfere with his purposes (Jn. 6:15; 10:24). But speaking alone to a Samaritan woman, he is free to do so.
- vv. 28-30 The woman's haste in leaving her water jar behind, and her willingness to risk ridicule by speaking to the people about Jesus, show how excited she was about him. But even in her excitement, she does not dare to state boldly that Jesus is the Christ, in spite of his own clear statement to that effect. Perhaps she fears that the people would reject such an assertion coming from her. Instead, she invites them to come and judge for themselves.
- vv. 32-33 ***“I have food to eat that you know nothing about”*** Could someone have brought him food? Here again, Jesus is speaking metaphorically, but his listeners misunderstand him, interpreting his words literally.
- v. 34 ***“My food . . . is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work”*** These words echo Dt. 8:3, “man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (see also Mt. 4:4). Jesus is not speaking here of physical sustenance, but of spiritual nourishment. It is through faith that we grow and remain spiritually strong, and obedience to God's will is the outward expression of that faith.
- v. 35 ***“It's still four months until harvest”*** This was probably just a proverbial saying in Jesus' day, meaning something like, “be patient; it takes time to see the results of your labors.” But in contrast to this saying, Jesus states that the wait for the harvest has now ended.
- The “harvest” Jesus is speaking of is a harvest of souls (v. 36; see also Mt. 9:37-38). It is very possible that when he told the disciples to “look at the fields” which were ripe for harvest, he was referring to the Samaritans streaming out of the city and making their way toward them. Many of these Samaritans did in fact believe (vv. 41-42).
- v. 36 ***“so that the sower and reaper may be glad together”*** The harvest is not a time for the reapers only to rejoice, but for those who have prepared the soil and planted the seed of God's word to rejoice as well (see 1 Cor. 3:6-8).
- v. 38 ***“Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor”*** The “others” Jesus refers to are the prophets and others of past ages who have prepared the way for the Messiah. They died without seeing the results of their labor, but rejoiced in anticipation of it (Mt. 13:16-17; Jn. 8:56; Heb. 11:13).
- v. 42 ***“Savior of the world”*** This statement is a fitting conclusion to the passage; Jesus is Savior, not of Jews only, but of the whole world, including even Samaritans (see notes on Jn. 3:16).

Unit 5 – Jesus Heals the Official’s Son and the Invalid at Bethesda

John 4:43-5:15

Text

⁴³ After the two days he left for Galilee.
⁴⁴ (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.)
⁴⁵ When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, for they also had been there.
⁴⁶ Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷ When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.
⁴⁸ “Unless you people see signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.”
⁴⁹ The royal official said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”
⁵⁰ “Go,” Jesus replied, “your son will live.”
The man took Jesus at his word and departed. ⁵¹ While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. ⁵² When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him.”
⁵³ Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and his whole household believed.
⁵⁴ This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

¹ Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda^a and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the

blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ^{4 b} ⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.
⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

⁷ “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

⁸ Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” ⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, ¹⁰ and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

¹¹ But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

¹² So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

¹³ The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

¹⁴ Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

^a 5:2 Some manuscripts Bethzatha; other manuscripts Bethsaida

^b 5:4 Some manuscripts include here, wholly or in part, paralyzed—and they waited for the moving of the waters. ⁴ From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had.

Open

- Was there ever a time when you attempted something difficult because someone you respected thought you could do it? What was the result?

Discover

1. Why did the Galileans welcome Christ? (v. 4:45; see also John 2:23)

2. How does this compare to why the Samaritans received him? (v. 4:39-42)

3. How can Jesus' statement in v. 4:44 be reconciled with his welcome by the Galileans?

4. What misconceptions does the royal official have about Jesus? (v. 4:47, 49; compare Matthew 8:5-13)

Does this change? How do we know?

5. What does the miracle of healing the official's son "sign"-ify about Jesus?

6. Describe the circumstances of Jesus' healing of the invalid at Bethesda, and beside each one describe how it illustrates the circumstances of our salvation (see Ephesians 2:1-3, 2:8-9).

The man's physical condition

The part the man played in his healing

Who took the initiative

The man's 'worthiness' to be healed

7. How does the way in which the invalid refers to Jesus differ from the way in which the Jewish authorities refer to him? How do you explain this? (vv. 5:11, 12)

Apply

- In what ways do people today come to Jesus seeking something other than salvation?
- Do you find it easy or difficult to rest on God's word when circumstances seem to contradict it? When have you done so and how did it turn out?

- In light of the circumstances behind the healing of the invalid, how would you evaluate this view of salvation: "We do our best and God does the rest."

Commentary

- vv. 4:43-54 This passage contains the second of Jesus' miraculous signs, which were intended not only to display Jesus' power, but also to communicate spiritual truth about his identity and mission. In this case, we have a demonstration of his power to give physical life, which points to his ability to give spiritual life as well. An indication that this is the significance of the miracle is found in the content of Jesus' monologue in Jn. 5:19-29. The passage also presents a case study of the development of faith through the person of the royal official.
- v. 44 **"a prophet has no honor in his own country"** There is an implied contrast in this verse between Samaria, a Gentile region in which Jesus has just been received as the "Savior of the world," and Galilee, where his reception is rather lukewarm (see Matt. 13:53-58; Jn. 6:42). This illustrates the truth of the statement that "he came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (Jn. 1:11).
- v. 45 **"the Galileans welcomed him"** This would seem to contradict Jesus' statement in the previous verse. However, the "welcome" of the Galileans is superficial. They do not receive Jesus as a prophet, but only as a miracle-worker. They do not welcome him because of his words, as the Samaritans did (Jn. 4:41-42), but because of the miraculous signs he performed in Jerusalem (Jn. 2:23; 4:48). Later, when Jesus makes statements they cannot accept, they do not honor him, but grumble and depart from him (Jn. 6:41-42, 66).
- v. 47 At this point, the official's faith is at a superficial level: he has heard that a miracle-worker is in town, and goes to him to seek help for his son. Note that the official asks Jesus to "come" and heal his son; unlike the centurion of Matt. 8:5-13, he does not yet have faith in Jesus' power to heal through his word alone.
- v. 48 **"Unless you people see signs and wonders . . . you will never believe"** Jesus rebukes the Galileans because their faith is dependent on "signs and wonders," rather than the truth of his words. (Jesus may also be referring to the Jews in general; see Jn. 2:18; 6:30; 12:18). Although this verse implies that such "faith" is rather superficial (see Jn. 2:23-25; 6:66), it may serve as a first step toward a more mature faith, as in the case of the royal official (vs. 53; see also Jn. 10:38; 14:11).
- vv. 5:1-14 Here we have another healing miracle. In this case, it is abundantly clear that the person healed is completely helpless; John tells us that he has been an invalid for thirty-eight years. This miracle illustrates the fact that all men are helpless to do anything to help themselves spiritually; we are by nature spiritual invalids. Only Christ can give healing from sin, and he does so by his grace, not as a result of our own efforts (Eph. 2:1-3, 8-9).
- v. 4 This verse is not contained in any of the early Greek manuscripts of John. It reflects a traditional explanation of the cause and significance of the stirring of the waters, and was most likely inserted by a copyist trying to be helpful.
- v. 6 **"When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time"** The word "learned," which implies that Jesus was told this information, could also be rendered "knew," thus indicating that Jesus' knowledge of the man's condition was supernatural (see Jn. 2:25). Note that no reason is given as to why this one man is selected for healing out of the "great number" who were lying there (vs. 3). This event is thus an example of God's sovereign independence in choosing the recipients of his grace (see Rom. 9:14-18). Note also that it is Jesus who takes the initiative in approaching the man, rather than vice versa, giving us an example of God's grace in seeking out those who were not seeking Him (see Rom. 10:20).
- v. 7 Evidently, the man believed that the first person into the pool after it was stirred up would be healed.
- v. 8 **"Get up! Pick up your mat and walk"** Jesus does not give the man a choice, but simply commands him to get up and walk. His words are both a command and an enablement, for immediately the man is healed (v. 9).
- vv. 9-10 **"the law forbids you to carry your mat"** The man was in violation of *Mishnah*, or Jewish oral law, which considered carrying a mat as a kind of "work" prohibited by the fourth commandment (Dt. 5:12-15). The "Jews" referred to here are the Jewish authorities, not the people in general.
- vv. 11-13 Note that the man who was healed refers to Jesus as "the man who made me well," but the Jews refer to him as "this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk". Their focus on enforcing the law blinds them to the fact that a miracle has taken place.

v. 14 ***“Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you”*** Jesus warns the man that if he continues to sin without repenting, something worse than thirty-eight years of paralysis and suffering will happen to him—the final judgment (Jn. 5:28-29).

Does this mean that the illness of which the man had been healed was due to some personal sin? We cannot answer this with certainty, because Jesus' warning concerns the consequences of his future sin, not the cause of his past suffering. On the one hand, there are clearly cases in Scripture where illness or death are the result of personal sin; for example, Miriam (Num. 12:1-15), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), Herod (Acts 12:21-23), and those who took the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner (1 Cor. 11:29-30). On the other hand, there are cases where illness is not the result of personal sin; for example, the man born blind (Jn. 9:1-3), and Lazarus (Jn. 11:1-4). In the case of the paralytic, Jesus' words do seem to imply that his affliction was due to his sin.

Having said this, some additional points should be mentioned. First, if every illness or death is not the result of personal sin, then what causes them? Ultimately, the root cause of all illness and death is the sin of Adam (Rom. 5:12). We suffer because we live in a world which is now “under the control of the evil one” (1 Jn. 5:19), although God is ultimately in control of all things (Rom. 8:28). Second, the fact that some people experience judgment in this life does not mean that they are more sinful than others (Lk. 13:1-5; Rom. 3:23). Third, we cannot discern when illness or death may be a result of personal sin; only God knows this (Jn. 9:1-3).

Finally, and most important, there is a fundamental difference in the purposes for which God allows suffering. For the unbeliever, it represents God's punishment and wrath (Jn. 3:36; Rom. 1:18). For the believer, it constitutes God's loving discipline and is designed to correct, not punish (see 1 Cor. 11:31-32; Heb. 12:5-11; Rev. 3:19).

Unit 6 – Life Through the Son

John 5:16-47

Text

¹⁶ So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. ¹⁷ In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” ¹⁸ For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

¹⁹ Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. ²¹ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. ²² Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

²⁴ “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. ²⁵ Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

²⁸ “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. ³⁰ By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear,

and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

³¹ “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true.

³³ “You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. ³⁴ Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. ³⁵ John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

³⁶ “I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, ³⁸ nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. ³⁹ You study^a the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

⁴¹ “I do not accept glory from human beings, ⁴² but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. ⁴³ I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God^b?

⁴⁵ “But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”

^a 5:39 Or ³⁹ Study

^b 5:44 Some early manuscripts the Only One

Open

- Ask each person to tell four “facts” about themselves, but actually only tell the truth about three. Then have the other group members try to guess which one isn’t true.

Discover

1. How do the religious leaders respond to Jesus’ healing of the man in John 5:1-15? What does this reveal about them?

2. What gave Jesus the authority to heal on the Sabbath? (v. 17)

3. How does Jesus describe his relationship with the Father?

v. 19

v. 20

v. 23

v. 26

vv. 27, 30

v. 36

4. How do these verses compare with John 1:1 and 1:18?

5. Case study: a friend of yours thinks she is going to heaven because she believes in God and prays, yet she does not believe that Jesus is God. How might you respond? (v. 23; see also 1 John 2:23, 5:9-10).

6. How would you state the promise of verse 24 in your own words?

7. In what ways does the Father verify the truthfulness of Jesus' statements about himself?

v. 33

v. 36

v. 37

v. 39

8. Why did the Jewish religious leaders refuse to come to Jesus for salvation? (vv. 37-47)

9. What was wrong with their approach to Bible study? (vv. 39-40, 45-47)

Apply

What does this passage tell us about the relationship between God the Father and God the Son?

How do your motivations for Bible study compare with those of the religious leaders in this passage?

If someone other than God made the claims about himself which Jesus makes here, would he be a great moral teacher? Or something else?

Commentary

- v. 17 ***“My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working”*** Here Jesus answers the charge that he was breaking the Sabbath by healing and doing other works (see Ex. 20:8-11). In similar disputes, Jesus argues that the law against working on the Sabbath, properly understood, does not prohibit doing acts of mercy (Matt. 12:12; Jn. 7:22-23). Jesus also asserts his own supremacy over Sabbath regulations, calling himself “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:8). However, in this passage, Jesus’ defense is based on his relationship to God. Even the Jews agreed that God Himself works on the Sabbath, otherwise the whole world would cease to operate. Therefore, since God works continuously, Jesus is only following his Father’s example by doing these things. In other words, whatever factors justify God in working on the Sabbath also justify Jesus in doing so. By using this argument, Jesus is in effect claiming the rights and privileges of deity. The Jews understand this, and seek to kill him as a result (v. 18; see also Jn. 10:30-33).
- It is interesting to note that several of Jesus’ healing miracles occur on the Sabbath, perhaps to emphasize the fact that those whom Christ heals from sin find a “Sabbath-rest” from their works in him (Heb. 4:9-10).
- v. 19 ***“the Son can do nothing by himself”*** Although Jesus is equal with God (Jn. 1:1; Phil. 2:6), he subordinates his own will to that of the Father. He does nothing on his own initiative but follows the Father’s example in everything. As a result, there is a perfect agreement of purpose and action between the Father and Son (see also Jn. 5:30, 8:42; 12:49).
- v. 20 ***“For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does”*** Jesus explains how he is able to obey and imitate the Father in every way: the Father, because of His love for the Son, reveals to him everything He is doing. As a result, Jesus reveals God perfectly by everything he does (Jn. 1:18, 14:9; Heb. 1:3).
- “he will show him even greater works than these”*** The “greater works” are the power to give life to the dead and to pronounce final judgment (vv. 21-22).
- vv. 21-22 Although Jesus acts in perfect agreement with the will of the Father, he is more than merely God’s agent. God has entrusted everything into his hands (Jn. 3:35), including the power to give life and to judge (see vv. 26-27). The “life” Christ gives is both spiritual life and bodily resurrection (vv. 24, 28-29). The “judgment” is that which he will execute on the last day (Rom. 2:5-16; Rev. 20:11-15).
- Note that Jesus gives life “to whom he is pleased to give it.” In other words, God sovereignly chooses the recipients of His mercy, independently of what we may do or not do (see Rom. 9:11-18; Eph. 1:4-11).
- v. 23 ***“that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father”*** The Father has entrusted the Son with authority to give life and execute judgment, so that all may honor the Son in the same way as they honor the Father (see Phil. 2:9-11). This statement speaks strongly of Jesus’ equality with God the Father. Since God refuses to share his glory with another (Isa. 42:8), the one with whom He does share his glory is not “another,” but God.
- “Whoever who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him”*** It is impossible to honor and worship God the Father without honoring and worshiping God the Son, because they are one in being and activity. There is no possibility of finding acceptance with God apart from Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:6-7; Acts 14:6; 1 Jn. 2:23).
- v. 24 ***“whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life”*** This verse teaches several important truths. First, believing Jesus’ words and believing God are the same thing, because Jesus speaks only what God has commanded him to say (Jn. 12:49-50). Second, the final destiny of the believer is secure and certain; this person “has” eternal life, “will not” be judged, and “has crossed over” from death to life (see Jn. 6:39, 10:27-29; 1 Jn. 5:11-13). Third, the believer need not fear God’s judgment, for the judge himself, Jesus Christ, has already assured us that we will not be condemned.
- v. 25 ***“a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live”*** Jesus is speaking here of two kinds of life, signified by two “times”. The time which “has now come” is the present age, when those who are spiritually dead are given spiritual life through faith in Christ (v. 24; see notes on Jn. 3:3). The time which “is coming” is when “all who are in their graves” will be resurrected (vv. 28-29; see 1 Cor. 15:22-24; Rev. 20:4-5).
- v. 29 ***“those who have done what is good will rise to live”*** Jesus is not saying that these people have earned life by their actions. Their good deeds are the fruit of the spiritual life which they have received through faith in Christ (see Jn. 3:21; 1 Jn. 2:3-6).

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- vv. 31-32 ***“If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true”*** Jesus is not saying that his own statements about himself are false; rather, he is referring to his complete dependence on the Father. Since he has claimed to do only what the Father communicates to him (vv. 19, 30), his words would be false unless they were verified by the Father. The Father has provided this verification in four ways: through the testimony of John the Baptist (v. 33); through Jesus' ministry (v. 36); through the Father's own witness (v. 37), and through the Scriptures (v. 39).
- v. 35 ***“John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light”*** This is likely an allusion to one of the Messianic Psalms, in which God promises to place David's descendant on his throne and to “set up a lamp for my anointed one” (Ps. 132:17). John the Baptist testified to Jesus as the promised Messiah, and the Jews rejoiced in this message, but only “for a time.” When Jesus actually appeared on the scene and did not fulfill the political expectations they had of the Messiah, they rejected him.
- v. 36 ***“For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me.”*** This “works” encompass all of Jesus' earthly ministry, including the signs he performed and ultimately, his death on the cross (Jn. 19:30). These “testify” to Jesus' identity by fulfilling the Old Testament and revealing his divine origin (Lk. 7:21-22; Jn. 10:30-38). All of these works were part of the mission given to him by the Father, to “seek and to save the lost” (Lk. 19:10).
- vv. 37-38 ***“the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me”*** The second testimony is the personal witness of the Father himself. Jesus does not state whether he is referring to the voice of God at his baptism (Mk. 1:9-11), the inner witness of the Spirit in the heart of the believer (1 Jn. 5:9-10), or more generally, to all of God's word and witness concerning the Son.
- “nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent”*** Not only do the Jews not believe Jesus, they do not believe their own Bible. For if they had truly understood and believed the Old Testament Scriptures, they would have recognized Jesus as the one to whom those Scriptures pointed.
- vv. 39-40 ***“You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life”*** The Jews' failure to accept Christ as their Messiah was not due to a lack of study or lack of knowledge of the Scriptures. On the contrary, they were diligent Bible scholars. But their study was not motivated by faith; rather, it was an attempt to gain eternal life through their own works. All such attempts at self-righteousness are rooted in pride and are worthless (Eph. 2:8-9). As a result, like Nicodemus, they did not “know the Scriptures or the power of God” (Mk. 12:24). In all their studies, they had missed the central focus of the Old Testament: Jesus Christ. Studying the Scriptures has value only as it produces faith in, and obedience to, him.
- “These are the very Scriptures that testify about me”*** Several passages in John reveal that the Old Testament Scriptures testify to Christ (Jn. 1:45; 2:22; 3:10; 5:46; 20:9). As D. A. Carson remarks in his commentary on John, “By predictive prophecy, by type, by revelatory event and by anticipatory statue, what we call the Old Testament is understood to point to Christ, his ministry, his teaching, his death and resurrection.” In other words, not only the prophecies concerning the Messiah, but also the law, and even some of the people and events of the Old Testament point forward to Christ (see Jn. 3:14).
- v. 41 ***“I do not accept glory from human beings”*** Jesus was so fixed on obeying the commission he had received from the Father that the praise of men meant nothing to him.
- v. 43 ***“I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him”*** God created us as beings who are driven to worship, and if people refuse to worship Him, they will worship something else. If they refuse to follow the true Messiah, they will end up following a false one.
- v. 44 ***“How can you believe since you accept glory from one another, but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God”*** Seeking the praise of men is inconsistent with faith, because it is motivated by pride. We cannot serve both Self and God. As Paul writes, “If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10; see Phil. 3:7-9).
- vv. 45-47 ***“Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set”*** The Jews had failed to receive the one of whom Moses wrote, thus proving that they had not understood or believed Moses. They thought that their law-keeping would earn them salvation, but the law could never fulfill this purpose (Rom. 3:20, 28; 8:3, Gal. 2:16). Those who seek to be justified through the law will be judged by that law and found guilty (Rom. 2:12).

Unit 7 – Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

John 6:1-34

Text

¹ Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.

⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages^a to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, ⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there).

¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴ After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷ where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. ¹⁸ A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, ^b they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and

they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, “It is I; don’t be afraid.” ²¹ Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

²² The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. ²³ Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

²⁶ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

²⁸ Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

²⁹ Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

³⁰ So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?” ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’^c

³² Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

^a 6:7 Greek take two hundred denarii

^b 6:19 Or about 5 or 6 kilometers

^c 6:31 Exodus 16:4; Neh. 9:15; Psalm 78:24,25

Open

What food did you refuse to eat as a child? Do you eat it now?

If you were stranded on a desert island with an unlimited supply of one food, what would it be?

Discover

1. What kind of ‘test’ was Jesus conducting when he asked Philip where to buy bread (vv. 5-6)?

2. How do you think Philip and Andrew did on this test?

Philip:

Andrew:

3. What does the miracle of feeding the five thousand signify about Jesus? (see vv. 26-27 and vv. 32-35)

4. What is the significance of the fact that after everyone had eaten 'as much as they wanted,' there were still twelve baskets full of leftovers? (vs. 13; see John 10:10)

5. Why did Jesus withdraw from the crowd (v. 15; see John 18:36)

6. Why did the crowd follow Jesus to Capernaum? (v. 26) What does this say in general about their motives for following Jesus?

7. What is the 'work' that God requires of people in order for them to be saved? (v. 29) How is this different from 'salvation by works'? (see Ephesians 2:8-9)

8. Read the story of the manna in Exodus 16:1-36. In what way(s) did God's provision of the manna foreshadow Christ? In other words, how was the manna like Christ? (vv. 30-33)

9. What does it mean to say that Jesus "gives life to the world"? (v. 33) What is meant by "the world"?

Apply

When have you seen God take what you offered Him, even if it was very small, and multiply it beyond what you could ever have expected? How might you need to trust Him to do this now?

How can the story of Jesus walking on the water help you to deal with the storms in your own life?

Commentary

- vv. 1-13 The miraculous feeding of the multitude has an Old Testament parallel; the feeding of a hundred men with twenty small barley cakes by the prophet Elisha (2 Ki. 4:42-44). Jesus, however, feeds five thousand men, and uses only five barley cakes, demonstrating that he is greater than Elisha.
- v.4 **“The Jewish Passover Festival was near”**
The Passover festival commemorated the time during Israel's slavery in Egypt when God killed the first-born of every Egyptian family, but “passed over” the Jews, who had applied the blood of a freshly slaughtered lamb to the door frames of their houses as a sign (Ex. 12:1-30). The meal eaten on that night, and annually in the feast, consisted of herbs, bread and the lamb. The significance of the Passover is that the bread (Mt. 26:26) and the lamb (Jn. 1:29, 36; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:19) point forward to Jesus and his sacrificial death on the cross. Thus, the elements of the Passover meal were *types*, historical parallels which anticipated Christ.
John mentions the Passover in order to emphasize that the feeding of the multitude, and Jesus' references to himself as the “living bread” which men must eat to gain life (v. 51), point to the same truth as did the Passover. Both illustrate that Jesus, by virtue of his atoning death on the cross, gives life to all who trust in him. It is by feeding on Christ through faith that we gain eternal life and are passed over by God's wrath (1 Thess. 1:10).
- vv. 5-6 Jesus' question exposes the disciples' inability to meet the needs of the people from their own resources. They need to understand that their only sufficiency for ministry is in Christ (Jn. 15:5; 2 Cor. 3:5-6).
- vv. 7-9 Philip understands his own insufficiency; in fact, he has already calculated the size of the crowd and the cost of providing each one with a bite of bread! But he does not think of Christ as being able to meet the need. Andrew, however, demonstrates a tentative faith. He sees the great need and his own inadequacy; but although he is not certain of how or whether Christ can meet the need, he nevertheless offers to Christ what he does have.
- v. 11 **“Jesus . . . distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted”**
Just as the bread which Jesus distributed was not merely sufficient, but abundant, so also the life which he gives is abundant (see Jn. 6:35; 10:10).
- vv. 14-15 **“Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world”** The prophet which the crowd has in mind is the one foretold by Moses (Dt. 18:15-19). Although they were correct in their limited understanding of Jesus' identity, they misunderstood his mission. He did not come to establish the kind of political kingdom they expected, but one which was primarily spiritual in character (Jn. 18:36; see notes on Jn. 3:3).
- vv. 16-21 At first glance, it may seem unclear how this account fits into the narrative after the feeding of the five thousand. But if the feeding miracle is linked with the Passover (see notes on v. 4), then Jesus' walking on the water can be linked with an event which took place immediately after the Passover: God's parting of the Red Sea for Israel to pass through in their escape from Egypt (Ex. 14:13-31; Ps. 77:19-20; Isa. 51:10). This implies that God, who demonstrated his authority over creation by parting the sea, and Jesus, who demonstrates the same authority by walking on the sea, are one (see Matt. 8:24-27; also Ps. 65:7; 89:9; 107:23-30). Further evidence for this interpretation comes from Jesus' words in verse 20, *ego eimi*, translated “It is I.” This is the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament name for God; *Yahweh*, or “I am” (see Jn. 8:58).
Another aspect of this event is that the sea is often viewed in the Old Testament as representative of evil and chaos. When God brought order out of chaos in the creation, he established boundaries for the sea (Gen. 1:6-10; Job. 38:8-11), and when God judged the earth in the days of Noah, it was these waters which covered the earth and extinguished all life (Gen. 7:17-23). Thus, God's miracle of parting the sea, and Jesus' miracle of walking on the sea, both symbolize God's power to defeat the forces of evil and save His people (see Col. 2:15).
- v. 26 **“you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill”** Jesus exposes the true motives of these people: they were not following him because they understood the significance of the miracle he had performed, but only because he had fed them. Their view of Jesus' ministry and of his kingdom (vs. 15) were wholly materialistic; they were seeking food for their stomachs, not their souls. A little later, Jesus explicitly declares that they “do not believe” (v. 36).
People may “follow” Christ for many reasons, but not all of those reasons spring from faith.

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- v. 27 **“food that endures to eternal life”**
The “food” is Jesus; in other words, not only does he give the food, but he himself is the food. While physical food can sustain life for only a short while, the life which Christ gives lasts forever, for he himself sustains it.
- vv. 28-29 **“What must we do to do the works God requires?”** The crowd has misunderstood Jesus’ reference to “work”. He does not mean that they should attempt to earn the “food that endures to eternal life” (Eph. 2:8-9). Rather, they should seek this food by believing in Christ (v. 29); this is what God requires.
- vv. 30-31 **“What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?”** If Jesus is claiming to have God’s approval (v. 27) and to be sent from God (v. 29), and if he claims to be able to dispense eternal life (v. 27), then the crowd expects that they have the right to demand a miracle along the lines of those which Moses performed. Perhaps their recent experience with Jesus’ ability to provide bread made them think of the manna in the desert (see Ex. 16:1-36). In other words, they are saying, “You’ll have to do better than this, Jesus. Feeding five thousand with a few loaves of bread is one thing, but it’s not as spectacular as raining down manna from heaven. Let’s see you do something like that. Then we’ll believe.”
- v. 32 **“it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven”** Rather than glorifying Moses, Jesus implies that his hearers ought to be glorifying God, for God was the ultimate sender of both the manna and the one whom the manna anticipated, Jesus Christ the “true bread from heaven”.
The manna pointed forward to Christ in at least three ways: (1) It came down from heaven (v. 33; Ex. 16:15). (2) It sustained physical life (Ex. 16:35), just as Christ sustains spiritual life (v. 35). (3) The supply did not depend on human effort. Regardless of how much or how little one gathered, it came out the same (Ex. 16:16-20). Similarly, the salvation we receive from Christ does not depend upon our own effort. We need only to receive what he freely offers us.
- v. 33 **“the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world”**
This is another case in which “world” cannot mean “everyone in the world,” or else everyone would have life. But only the one who “looks to the Son and believes in him” has life (v. 40). Note that Jesus does not say he “gives potential life to the world” or that he “offers life to the world.” If he had said something like this, then “world” could refer here to every person. But instead he says that he actually “gives life to the world,” and we know that the only ones who have life are believers. Thus, “world” means “people from out of the whole world, without distinction as to race or nationality” (see Rev. 5:9; 7:9)

Unit 8 – Jesus the Bread of Life

John 6:35-71

Text

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷ All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

⁴¹ At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴² They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”

⁴³ “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. ⁴⁴ “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ ⁴⁶ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. ⁴⁷ No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁸ Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

⁵² Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

⁵³ Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹ He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

⁶⁰ On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

⁶¹ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit^[b] and life. ⁶⁴ Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵ He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”

⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

⁶⁷ “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

⁷⁰ Then Jesus replied, “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” ⁷¹ (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

^a 6:45 Isaiah 54:13

^b 6:64 Or are Spirit; or are spirit

Open

- Which person or persons do you feel have had a great influence on your Christian life?

Discover

1. How does Jesus explain the fact that these people did not believe in him, even though they had seen him perform a miracle? (vv. 37, 44, 64-65; see also John 10:25-26)

2. According to Jesus, is it possible to lose one's salvation? Why or why not? (vv. 35-40; see also John 10:27-29)

3. What mission did God the Father give to Jesus when he sent him into the world? (vv. 37-40)

4. How does Jesus describe what it means to be "drawn" to him by the Father? (vv. 44-45)

5. What do the Jews not understand about Jesus' personal history? (vv. 41-42; see Matthew 1:18-25)

6. What does it mean to "eat" Jesus' flesh and "drink" his blood? (vv. 47-58; also compare verses 40 and 54)

7. What critical difference does Jesus identify between himself and the manna? (vv. 49-51, 58)

8. Which of Jesus' statements might have offended the crowd (give verse references)? (v. 60)

9. If Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray him, why did he choose him to be one of the Twelve?

Apply

How do you feel about the statements Jesus makes concerning God's control over people coming to Christ?

How did God "draw" you to Christ?

Have you ever felt like turning back from following Jesus? What kept you from doing so?

Commentary

v. 35 ***“I am the bread of life”*** The crowd has not understood Jesus' reference to the “bread of God,” so now he makes himself perfectly clear: the bread is Jesus himself. He is the bread which gives life, the bread which is sent by God and comes down from heaven (v. 33)

“Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” Jesus emphasizes here, as he does with the woman at the well (Jn. 4:13-14), that his gift of life does not need to be repeated. Once received, it is sufficient for now and for eternity (see Rev. 7:14-16).

His words recall Isa. 55:1, in which God offers salvation free of charge to all who will come to Him:

*“Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.”*

v. 36 ***“you have seen me and still you do not believe”*** The Galileans saw the works Jesus performed, but did not understand or accept what those signs revealed about him.

v. 37 ***“All those the Father gives me will come to me”*** This verse explains how the Galileans could see the mighty works performed by Jesus and yet not believe. They had not been “given” to Jesus; they had not been chosen by God for salvation. Thus, their failure to believe did not indicate that Jesus' mission had failed. On the contrary, he would surely be successful, because his purpose was to save the *elect* (or “chosen ones”), and all of them would certainly come to him (see Jn. 10:25-29, 17:2; Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:3-6).

“whoever comes to me I will never drive away” This phrase is sometimes misunderstood as qualifying, or “softening” the predestination of the first half of the verse, as if Jesus were leaving the door open for some who are not “given” to be saved. But this is not the case, since no one can come to Christ unless God draws him (vs. 44). Rather, while the first half of the verse emphasizes the “giving” and “coming” of the elect, the second half emphasizes the divine preservation, or “keeping,” of the elect. Once they come to Christ, he will never reject them or allow them to be lost (see vs. 39; Jn. 10:28-29).

vv. 38-40 ***“For I have come down from heaven . . . to do the will of him who sent me”***

Jesus explains why he is unwaveringly committed to saving the elect: it is the Father's will that he do so, and he is always obedient to his Father's will (Jn. 5:19). In fact, this was his very purpose in coming into the world, to save those whom the Father had given him (v. 39). Thus we see the cooperation between the members of the Godhead in salvation: God the Father chooses the elect, gives them to the Son, and calls them to the Son; God the Son preserves them in faith and raises them up on the last day.

Note the parallel structure of verses 39 and 40: both begin with a reference to the Father's will and end with a reference to being raised up at the last day. The center clauses in both verses, “*I shall lose none of all that he has given me,*” and “*everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life,*” are also parallel. Both phrases refer to the same group of people, the elect. In the first phrase, it is the faithfulness of Christ in carrying out God's will that is emphasized; in the second, it is the faith of the elect which is emphasized. In both cases, the result is the same: none of the elect will be lost; all of them will have eternal life and will be raised up at the last day.

vv. 41-42 ***“At this the Jews there began to grumble about him”*** The response of the religious leaders to Jesus' words confirms his observation that no prophet is honored in his own country (Jn. 4:44). Specifically, they are offended that he claims to come down from heaven, when they know (or think they know) that he had a human father and mother. They do not realize that Jesus was born of a virgin, and was conceived by the Holy Spirit rather than a human father (Mt. 1:18-25).

v. 44 ***“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them”*** This verse is the counterpart to Jesus' statement in v. 37, “all that the Father gives me will come to me.” There are no ambiguities, no uncertainties, no “loose threads” in God's saving activity: all those whom He draws to Christ will come, and none of those whom He does not draw will come (see also v. 65).

- v. 45 ***“It is written in the prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God’***“ This is Jesus’ description of what it means to be “drawn” by God. It is not being forced to yield to Christ against our will, but rather it is a wooing that makes us willing. It is an inner illumination, an opening of our minds to understand the beauty and glory of Christ, and to comprehend the great love of God for us. In short, it is a revelation of something so wonderful, so glorious, that no one can, or would ever desire to, resist. God does not force us to Christ against our will; rather He makes us willing by whispering to our hearts, “I love you.”
- This inner illumination is what the prophet Jeremiah was referring to when he wrote of a time when God would put his law on the hearts and minds of his people, a time when:
- “No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,”*
(Jer. 31:34; see Heb. 8:1-13; 10:11-18)
- v. 46 ***“No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God”*** It is only through Christ that we receive this illumination, because Christ is the one who reveals God and the one through whom God speaks (Heb. 1:1-2).
- vv. 47-51 The key difference between the manna and Christ is that the manna could only sustain physical life temporarily. But those who “eat” Christ’s “flesh,” those who by faith in Christ receive the benefits of his bodily sacrifice on the cross, gain life everlasting.
- v. 51 ***“This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”*** Jesus is referring to his death on the cross, which secured eternal life for all who believe; people from “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9).
- vv. 53-54 ***“. . . unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life”*** These two verses present the same thought in two ways, the first negative and the second positive. In both cases, obtaining eternal life is conditional on “eating” Christ’s “flesh” and “drinking” his “blood.” What does this mean?
- One possibility is that Jesus is speaking of eating the eucharist, or the Lord’s Supper (see Mt. 26:26-28). The main problem with this view is that it would make the eating of the Lord’s Supper a saving act in itself. This would contradict Jesus’ earlier statements which identify faith in him as the requirement for salvation (vv. 29, 40, 47).
- One clear indicator of the meaning from the context is the parallel structure of verse 40, “everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day,” and verse 54, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” From these verses we conclude that eating Jesus’ flesh and drinking his blood are metaphorical language for “looking and believing,” i.e., for exercising faith in Christ and in his atoning death on the cross.
- v. 56 ***“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them”*** The idea here is similar to v. 39, “I shall lose none of all that he has given me.” Those who have received eternal life through faith will continue in a saving relationship with Christ, and Christ will continue to indwell them through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:23-26).
- v. 60 ***“On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’”*** It is necessary to note here that a “disciple” is not necessarily the same thing as a Christian. This word may refer to one of the twelve apostles, to believers, or more generally, to members of the crowd who followed Jesus around and listened to his teaching. The fact that some of these “disciples” did not believe (v. 64) and stopped following Jesus (v. 66) demonstrates that they were of the third type (see Jn. 8:31; 1 Jn. 2:19).
- The remark “This is a hard teaching,” does not mean that it was hard to understand, but hard to accept. This was the attitude Mark Twain expressed when he said, “I’m not bothered by the things in the Bible I don’t understand as much as I am by the things I do understand.”
- v. 63 ***“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing”*** In referring to eating his flesh and drinking his blood, Jesus has been speaking figuratively. It is not his physical body which they must ingest to obtain life, but the Holy Spirit, which he gives to those who trust in him. Moreover, Jesus’ words are that which, when heard and believed, produce this faith (Jn. 5:24).
- v. 70 ***“Have I not chosen you, the Twelve?”*** Although the twelve disciples had chosen to follow Jesus, their choice of him only confirmed the choice he had already made of them (Jn. 15:16). In the same way, our choice to follow Jesus is the result of God first choosing us (see vv. 37, 44, 65; also Eph. 1:3-6; 1 Jn. 4:19).

Unit 9 – Jesus Goes to the Feast of Tabernacles

John 7:1-52

Text

¹ After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want^a to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him.² But when the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was near,³ Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do."⁴ No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world."⁵ For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

⁶ Therefore Jesus told them, "My time is not yet here; for you any time will do."⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil.⁸ You go to the festival. I am not^b going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come."⁹ After he had said this, he stayed in Galilee.

¹⁰ However, after his brothers had left for the festival, he went also, not publicly, but in secret.

¹¹ Now at the festival the Jewish leaders were watching for Jesus and asking, "Where is he?"

¹² Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people."¹³ But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders.

¹⁴ Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach.¹⁵ The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?"

¹⁶ Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me.

¹⁷ Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own."¹⁸ Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.¹⁹ Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

²⁰ "You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?"

²¹ Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed."²² Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath.²³ Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath?²⁴ Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

²⁵ At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?"²⁶ Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah?²⁷ But we know where this man is

from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from."

²⁸ Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him,²⁹ but I know him because I am from him and he sent me."

³⁰ At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.³¹ Still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, "When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?"

³² The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

³³ Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me."³⁴ You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."

³⁵ The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?"

³⁶ What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?"

³⁷ On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink."³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."^c³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

⁴⁰ On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."⁴¹ Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee?"⁴² Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?"⁴³ Thus the people were divided because of Jesus.⁴⁴ Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

⁴⁵ Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?"⁴⁶ "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards replied.⁴⁷ "You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted.⁴⁸ "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?"⁴⁹ No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them."

⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked,

⁵¹ "Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?"

⁵² They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee."

^a 7:1 Some manuscripts *not have authority*
^b 7:8 Some manuscripts *not yet*

^c 7:38 Or *me. And let anyone drink³⁸ who believes in me.* As Scripture has said, "Out of him (or them) will flow rivers of living water."

Discover

1. Why do Jesus' brothers want him to go to Judea? (vv. 2-5) Why does he refuse? (vv. 6-9)

2. How does Jesus expect He will be received by the "world"? (vv. 6-8) Why?

3. What is the basic qualification for correctly evaluating Jesus' teaching? (v. 17) Who meets this requirement? (see 1 Cor. 2:14)

4. What error(s) were the Jews making when they condemned healing on the Sabbath? (v. 24; see also Matt. 22:34-40)

5. What answers do the people give to the question: "Who is Jesus"?

v. 12	v. 20
v. 26	v. 40
v. 41	

6. What (mistaken) reasons do people give for concluding that Jesus is not the Christ (Messiah)?

v. 27	vv. 41-42
v. 48	v. 52

7. In what sense does the crowd know Jesus? In what sense do they not know him? (vv. 27-28, 42, 52)

8. Why are the people and the chief priests and Pharisees unsuccessful when they try to seize Jesus? (vv. 30, 32, 44-46)

Apply

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> What reasons do people give today for rejecting Jesus? | <input type="checkbox"/> What does this passage tell us about Jesus? About his opponents? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have you ever been unable to do what was expected of you because of the words of Christ, as the guards were? | <input type="checkbox"/> What temptations do you think Jesus faced throughout this passage? When have you faced similar temptations in your own life? |

Commentary

- v. 1 ***“He did not want a to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him.”*** John tells us again that the Jewish leaders were attempting to kill Jesus (see 5:18). But he did not avoid them out of fear. He was waiting for the proper time to surrender himself to them, after his work had been completed (see vv. 6-8; also 10:17-18).
- v. 2 The Feast of Tabernacles lasted a full week, and was celebrated in the seventh month of the Jewish year, our September/October (see Lev. 23:33-43). It was celebrated the gathering of the grape and olive crops, and also commemorated the time when Israel lived in booths, or “tabernacles,” during the forty years in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt. During this feast, the whole population lived in temporary shelters constructed out of branches and leaves (Lev. 23:42-43).
- vv. 3-5 Jesus' brothers encourage him to travel to Jerusalem to demonstrate his miracle-working powers. Not only would there be thousands of religiously observant Jews in the city for the feast, but Jerusalem was the center of Jewish political and religious life. From a human point of view, there could be no better time or place for Jesus to establish his reputation. However, their advice was not motivated by faith. Although they believed Jesus had the power to perform miracles, they did not yet understand the significance of those miracles; they did not accept his identity as the divine Messiah, as they later would (see Acts 1:14).
- v. 6 ***“Jesus told them, “My time is not yet here”*** Jesus rejects the temptation to glorify himself by displaying his powers, just as he rejected a similar temptation by Satan (Matt. 4:5-7). He does this for two reasons. First, it was not Jesus' place to glorify himself, but rather to receive glory from the Father (Jn. 8:54; 16:14; 17:1). Second, the means of his glorification would not be public miracle-working, but his death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. The right time for him to go up to Jerusalem and be glorified in this way had not yet come (see v. 30; also Jn. 12:23-33; 13:31-32).
- v. 7 ***“The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil”*** Jesus is using the term “world” in a negative sense to refer to sinful mankind, the world of Satan's domain in opposition to the kingdom of God (see 1:10; 14:17; 15:18-19; 17:9, 14). The people of this “world” would not welcome Jesus in Jerusalem; on the contrary, they hated Jesus with an intensity that would eventually cause them to murder him, because they could not bear to have their sin exposed (see Jn. 3:19-20; 7:19; 8:31-59).
- vv. 8-10 ***“I am not going up to this festival”*** Jesus does not mean that he will avoid the Feast altogether, but that he will not go in the manner, and for the purpose, that his brothers intend.
- v. 14 The fact that Jesus does go to Jerusalem, and even goes to the temple and preaches publicly, show that his intention was not to avoid being recognized. His purpose for going to Jerusalem secretly was to avoid provoking the crowd into actions which would have given the authorities an excuse to arrest him, such as attempting to make him their king (see Jn. 6:14-15). Not until Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem did he allow himself to be openly proclaimed as King (Jn. 12:12-19).
- v. 16 ***“My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me”*** Jesus' teaching did in fact come from another source—not from training in a rabbinical school, but from God Himself.
- v. 17 ***“Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”*** The basic qualification for evaluating Jesus' teaching is a spiritual one. Only those who are willing to do what God requires can know whether the words of Jesus are true. This willingness, however, does not spring unaided from the human heart; it comes only through God's grace. This is because what God requires of us first and foremost is faith in Christ (Jn. 6:29), and such faith is only possible by the enabling work of God (Jn. 6:65). Therefore, the truth of Jesus' teaching can only be known by those who have believed in him (see 1 Cor. 1:18; 2:14).
- v. 18 Someone speaking on his own behalf, presenting his own accomplishments or ideas to others, may be tempted to shade the truth for his own advantage. But when someone is working for the glory of another, he has no such mixed motives. Therefore, since Jesus is working for the glory of God the Father rather than his own glory, his words should be trusted.
- v. 19 ***“Why are you trying to kill me?”*** The attempts by the Jewish authorities to kill Jesus violated the commandment against murder (Ex. 20:13). This reveals their rebellion against God, and explains their inability to correctly evaluate Jesus' teaching (vs. 17).
- vv. 21-24 Jesus argues that if the standards being used to condemn him were applied to his opponents, they would be guilty of law-breaking themselves. Their judgment of him is invalid: it is based on a superficial interpretation of the law which considers only external behavior rather than the heart (see Mt. 22:35-40).

- vv. 22-23 **“you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath”** The Jews' own practices showed that they recognized exceptions to the law of the Sabbath: for example, the law of circumcision took precedence over the law against working on the Sabbath. So their condemnation of healing, which was based on an absolute prohibition against working on the Sabbath, was inconsistent. Jesus' argument is that healing should also be regarded as an exception to the law of the Sabbath, because circumcision and healing both represent God's work of purification through the removal of sin (see Col. 2:11).
- v. 25 Although many in the crowd did not know of the plot to kill Jesus (v. 20), the residents of the capital city did (see 5:16-18; 7:1).
- v. 27 **“when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from”** The people mistakenly expected the Messiah to be someone unknown to the public until his sudden appearance as a political-military deliverer; therefore, they concluded that Jesus could not be the Messiah.
- vv. 28-29 **“you know me, and you know where I am from”** It appears that Jesus is speaking with some irony. On a human level, they do know who he is—a carpenter and traveling teacher, the son of Mary and Joseph, a native of Nazareth. But their knowledge of Jesus' human background has blinded them to his divine origin, the fact that he came down from heaven and was sent by God (Jn. 1:14; 5:36-38; 6:33-51; 7:16; 8:14, 42; 16:28).
- “You do not know him”** The Jews prided themselves on knowing the one true God, in contrast to the pagan cultures which worshiped false gods. The fact that God had given them His law convinced them of their special relationship with Him (Rom. 2:17-20). But their rejection of Jesus demonstrated that they did not know God and did not believe the law; if they had, they would have recognized Jesus as God incarnate, the one anticipated by the law (Jn. 1:10-11, 45; 5:23, 37-47; 8:19, 42).
- vv. 30-31 **“no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come”** The death of Christ was part of God's plan from the beginning, and its timing was under his sovereign control (Jn. 10:17-18; 12:23-33; Eph. 1:3-12; 1 Pet. 1:18-20; Rev. 13:8).
- “still, many in the crowd believed in him”** The truth about Christ divides those who hear it into two groups: those who accept it and those who reject it (see Jn. 1:11-12; 3:18-21; 2 Cor. 2:15-16).
- vv. 33-34 The arrest and execution of Jesus by the Jewish leaders was no evidence of their power over him; they had no authority except that which God had given them (19:10-11). Their inability to follow Jesus into heaven reveals their powerlessness and their sin (8:21).
- vv. 37-39 It is significant that Jesus' statements about the giving of the Spirit occur during the Feast of Tabernacles. By tradition, on every morning of the feast the priests filled a pitcher of water from the pool of Siloam and carried it to the temple. There it was poured out as an offering to God, along with the daily offering of wine. This commemorated God's provision of water during Israel's forty years in the desert (Ex. 17:6), and also anticipated the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days (Joel 2:28-29). But since Christ was the one who provided water in the desert (1 Cor. 10:1-4), and since he is also the one who gives the Spirit (Jn. 1:33; 4:10-14; 14:16-17; 20:22), he was the fulfillment of everything that the water-pouring ceremony stood for.
- v. 38 **“rivers of living water will flow from within them”** There is some question here as to whether “him” refers to Christ or to the believer. In either case, the ultimate source of the living water is Christ, who gives the Spirit. But if “him” refers to the believer, this verse would parallel Jn. 4:14, “the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”
- v. 39 **“Up to that time the Spirit had not been given”** The Spirit did not come to indwell believers until after Christ's ascension into heaven (Jn. 14:16-17; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; 2:16-17; Rom. 8:9).
- vv. 40-44 Some believe Jesus to be the prophet-like-Moses promised in Dt. 18:15-18, perhaps because his claim to provide living water reminded them of Moses giving water to the Israelites (Ex. 17:6; Num. 20:11). Some believe him to be the Christ, or Messiah; but others reject this because the Messiah must be descended from David (2 Sa. 7:12) and come from Bethlehem (Mi. 5:2), and they do not realize that Jesus meets both of these criteria (Rom. 1:3; Mt. 2:1).
- vv. 45-52 The great learning of the Jewish leaders, instead of giving understanding, has produced in them pride and arrogance, which has blinded them to the truth; they don't even believe their own Scriptures (5:45-46). Thus, those who are most learned in the Old Testament are unable to see in Jesus its fulfillment, while some among those whom they despise as “this mob that knows nothing of the law” have come to faith in Christ. This illustrates Paul's statement that God often chooses the foolish, rather than the wise, for his kingdom (1 Cor. 1:18-29).

Unit 10 – The Validity of Jesus’ Testimony

John 7:53-8:30

Text

[The earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53—8:11. A few manuscripts include these verses, wholly or in part, after John 7:36, John 21:25, Luke 21:38 or Luke 24:53.]

⁵³ Then they all went home, **8** ¹ but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

² At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

¹¹ “No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

¹² When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

¹³ The Pharisees challenged him, “Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.”

¹⁴ Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know

where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. ¹⁶ But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. ¹⁷ In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. ¹⁸ I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.”

¹⁹ Then they asked him, “Where is your father?”

“You do not know me or my Father,” Jesus replied. “If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” ²⁰ He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his hour had not yet come.

²¹ Once more Jesus said to them, “I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.”

²² This made the Jews ask, “Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, ‘Where I go, you cannot come?’”

²³ But he continued, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.”

²⁵ “Who are you?” they asked.

“Just what I have been telling you from the beginning,” Jesus replied. ²⁶ “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.”

²⁷ They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up ^a 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. ²⁹ The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” ³⁰ Even as he spoke, many believed in him.

^a 8:28 The Greek for *lifted up* also means *exalted*.

Open

What would you like to be doing five years from now? Fifteen years?

Discover

1. How do you think the scribes and Pharisees expected Jesus to respond to their question? How was the question a trap for Jesus? (vv. 5-6)

2. What was the purpose of Jesus' command in verse 7? How do you explain the crowd's reaction?

3. How does Jesus view the relationship between his forgiveness of the woman and her changed life? (v. 11)

4. Look up these Old Testament passages and write down who or what Jesus is alluding to when he refers to himself as "the light of the world" (v. 12)

Exodus 13:17-22

Psalm 119:105

Psalm 27:1

Isaiah 42:1-8

5. What does it mean to "walk in darkness"? How is Jesus like light? (v. 12)

6. How does Jesus contrast himself with the Pharisees?

His origin (vv. 23, 42)	Their origin (v. 23)
His destiny (vv. 21, 28)	Their destiny (vv. 21, 24)
His Father (vv. 26-27, 54)	Their father (vv. 41-44)

7. How do the Pharisees misunderstand Jesus in verse 19? What does this reveal about their relationship with God? (see John 5:37-47; 14:7)

8. What is the significance of the fact that Jesus refers to himself as "I am"? (vv. 24, 28, 58; see Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 41:4; 48:12)

Apply

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> How does the story of the woman caught in adultery make you feel about your own sin? | <input type="checkbox"/> Why is Jesus' identity so critically important? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How has Christ been a "light" to you? | |

Commentary

- vv. 1-11 This section, which contains the story of the woman caught in adultery, does not occur in the earliest copies of the gospel of John, and is judged by most scholars not to have been originally a part of the book. Therefore, we cannot accept it as the authoritative word of God, and any lessons we draw from it must be confirmed by other Scripture. However, it represents a traditional account of an event which, although not recorded by John, probably did actually happen.
- vv. 3-6 **“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery”** The way in which the scribes and Pharisees present their case makes it obvious that they were not in the least concerned that justice be done. They cared even less about the woman herself. Their only purpose was to publicly discredit Jesus and retain their power over people’s lives as the sole authoritative interpreters of God’s law.
- Their hypocrisy is revealed by the fact that they did not bring with them the woman’s partner in immorality. If they were truly concerned with justice, they would have brought him along also. Apparently they allowed him to escape, perhaps because they only needed one sinner to exhibit when they challenged Jesus.
- vv. 5-6 **“In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”** The purpose of this question is to put Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. The scribes and Pharisees are familiar with Jesus’ reputation for forgiveness and compassion, which was in keeping with the purpose for which he came (Jn. 12:47). And if he were to condemn the woman to death, Jesus could get in trouble with the Roman authorities, who did not allow the Jews to execute capital punishment. So apparently, they expected that he would tell them to let the woman go, contrary to the Law (Dt. 22:22-24). They would then have a basis for denouncing him as a lawless heretic. This would also appear to contradict Jesus’ own statements about the Law (Mt. 5:17-19; Lk. 16:17).
- There are other examples in which Jesus’ opponents present him with a difficult theological problem in order to “stump” him or to force him to take a stand on a controversial issue (Mt. 12:10; 22:15-40; Mk. 10:2-9). These attempts to discredit him reveal a foolish pride in their own cleverness and supposed insight into the Law; the same pride that blinded them to the fact that the law was being fulfilled before their very eyes (Jn. 5:39-47).
- v. 6 **“But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground”** There have been many suggestions over the centuries as to what Jesus wrote, but there is really no way to know. Perhaps it was a verse from Scripture which convicted them of their sin, or perhaps it was nothing significant, and the act of writing was just a delaying tactic.
- v. 7 **“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”** Jesus is not stating a general principle that only those who are perfectly sinless may render judgment or punish; if that were true, then church discipline and even civil government would be impossible, because no one meets this criteria. Rather, his words are calculated to expose the sin of those he is dealing with. They had focused on the woman’s moral failure, and in self-righteous zeal demanded that she be punished. But they lacked an essential ingredient for righteous judgment: an acknowledgment of their own sinfulness (see Gal. 6:1). Jesus forced them to look at their own guilt, and when they did, they were unable to carry out the sentence. The sentence was righteous, but their motives for carrying it out were not.
- v. 11 **“Then neither do I condemn you”** Jesus, being God, had the right to forgive sins (Mt. 9:2-6). Note that Jesus, the only one present who was truly qualified to condemn the woman, chose not to do so.
- “Go now and leave your life of sin”** The order of events here is important. The woman did nothing to earn forgiveness; in fact she had done just the opposite. Her obedience was to be a response to the forgiveness she had already received; it was not a condition she had to meet in order for forgiveness to be granted (Jn. 14:15, 21, 23; 1 Jn. 2:3-5).
- v. 12 **“I am the light of the world”** This statement is rich in symbolism, connecting Jesus with Old Testament passages which refer to God and His word as “light” (see Ps. 27:1; 119:105). In Exodus, God appeared to the people of Israel in a pillar of fire, giving them light to lead them during their forty years in the desert (Ex. 13:21-22). The presence of God also produced a glorious light in the tabernacle and later in the temple (Ex. 40:34-38; 2 Ch. 7:1-3).
- In Isaiah, the metaphor of light is used to refer to God’s coming Servant, whom He would appoint:
- “ . . . a light for the Gentiles
To open eyes that are blind,
To free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon
those who sit in darkness.”*
- (Isa. 42:6-7; see Isa. 49:6, Lk. 2:32)

- Therefore, when Jesus refers to himself as the light, he is not only claiming to be the source of revelation, knowledge, and wisdom; he is identifying himself with God, the word of God, and the Servant of God foretold in Isaiah (see also Jn. 1:4-9). Note that Jesus does not offer to lead people to the light; rather, he states that he is the light and invites people to come to him. Note also that Jesus does not refer to himself as “a” light, but as “the” light; there is no true light but Jesus Christ (see Jn. 14:6).
- v. 13 **“Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid”**
The Pharisees attempt to use Jesus' own statements against him in order to invalidate his claim to be the “light of the world”. But they have taken his words out of context. The point of Jesus' prior statement was not the legal admissibility of his testimony in a court of law, but the fact that his claims concerning himself must agree with the witness of the Father in order to be valid (see notes on 5:31). As usual, Jesus' opponents are concerned with legal technicalities, while Jesus is concerned with the law's true purpose. Here, his opponents are concerned that the legal requirements for valid testimony be met, while Jesus is concerned with the truth of the testimony itself.
- v. 14 **“Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going.”**
In order to speak the truth about Jesus' identity, one would have to know his origin and destination. Jesus knew both about himself. The Pharisees knew neither, because they did not believe that he had come from God and would return to Him (Jn. 9:29; 16:28).
- vv. 15-16 **“I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone.”** The apparent contradiction in Jesus' words is caused by two different meanings of the term “judge”. The first meaning is to “condemn,” and Jesus did not come to condemn, but to save (Jn. 3:17; 12:47). In this sense, he passed judgment on no one during his earthly ministry; he will not execute this kind of judgment until after the resurrection (Jn. 5:22, 25-29). However, although the purpose of Jesus' first coming was not to condemn, he does provoke self-condemnation among those who reject him (Jn. 3:18; 9:39). The second meaning is to “evaluate,” and in this sense Jesus does judge (see v. 26). Whenever Jesus evaluates a person or situation, his judgment inevitably proves to be correct, because it is in harmony with that of the Father. Therefore, Jesus' judgment of himself is true (v. 18).
- vv. 17-18 Even with regard to legal technicalities, the testimony of Jesus is valid, because the Father satisfies the requirement of a corroborating second witness (see Dt. 19:15).
- v. 19 **“You do not know me or my Father . . . If you knew me, you would know my Father also”** This verse complements 5:37-38, which states that if they had known the Father, they would have received His Son. Here he states that if they knew the Son, they would know the Father. Jesus and the Father are one in being and purpose; to know either of them is to know the other as well (Jn. 14:7-11).
- vv. 21-22 In these verses, we have essentially a repetition of 7:33-36. In both, Jesus states that he is going away, referring to his death, and predicts that the Jews would look for him but not find him. This most likely means that they would continue seeking the Messiah after Jesus had ascended into heaven, never realizing that in him the Messiah had already come and gone. As a result, they would die in their sin (v. 22; see 7:34). This “sin” is the sin of unbelief, which causes their other “sins” to be unforgiven as well (see v. 24; 3:18).
- v. 23 **“You are of this world; I am not of this world”** Jesus' true home is not this sinful world in rebellion against its Creator, but heaven. In the same way, his disciples are “in” the world, but not “of” it (Jn. 17:16). They are no longer subject to Satan, the ruler of this world (Jn. 12:31, 16:11; Eph. 2:2, 6:12), but have been transferred into Christ's kingdom (Col. 1:13).
- v. 24 **“if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins”** The phrase “I am” (Greek *egō eimi*) is an allusion to God's self-identification in Ex. 3:14 and Isaiah (Isa. 41:4; 43:10-13; 48:12), where the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, uses the same phrase (*egō eimi*) for God's “I am”. In other words, Jesus is claiming to be God, and one must believe that he is God in order to be saved. The fact that this is what Jesus is saying, even though his hearers do not understand him (v. 25), is evident from the way they react when he makes his meaning more clear in v. 58, “Before Abraham was born, I am!” There, they attempt to stone him for what they judge to be blasphemy.

Unit 11 – The Children of Abraham

John 8:31-59

Text

³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

³³ They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”

³⁴ Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷ I know that you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸ I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.”^a

³⁹ “Abraham is our father,” they answered. “If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would^b do what Abraham did. ⁴⁰ As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. ⁴¹ You are doing the works of your own father.”

“We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. “The only Father we have is God himself.”

⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. ⁴³ Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. ⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ Yet because I tell the

truth, you do not believe me! ⁴⁶ Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, “Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?”

⁴⁹ “I am not possessed by a demon,” said Jesus, “but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹ Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.”

⁵² At this they exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”

⁵⁴ Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. ⁵⁵ Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”

⁵⁷ “You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!”

⁵⁸ “Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”⁵⁹ At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

^a 8:38 Or presence. Therefore do what you have heard from the Father.

^b 8:39 Some early manuscripts “If you are Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then

Open

What do you value most of all the things you received from your parents?

If you could pass on one value or conviction to your children, what would it be?

Discover

1. How does Jesus describe his opponents in this passage?

v. 34

v. 40

v. 44

vv. 43, 45

vv. 47, 55

2. How do you reconcile this with the statement that they “had believed him”? (v. 31)

3. What is the evidence that one is a disciple of Jesus Christ? (v. 31; see Hebrews 3:14; 2 John 1:8-9)

4. How can we be confident that we will be able to continue trusting Christ?

John 10:27-30

John 17:11-12

1 Corinthians 1:8-9

Jude 1:24-25

5. What does it mean to be a “slave to sin”? What kind of freedom is Jesus promising? (vv. 31-36; see also Rom. 6:1-14)

6. What makes a person a true son (or daughter) of Abraham? (see Romans 2:28-29; 4:16-17; 9:6-8)

7. What is the evidence that one is a true child of Abraham? (vv. 37-42)

8. What shows that Jesus' opponents have more in common with Satan than Abraham? (vv. 40-41, 44-45)

9. Why did Jesus' opponents find it so difficult to grasp what he was talking about? (vv. 43, 47; see also 1 Corinthians 2:14)

10. How do the Jews misunderstand Jesus in verse 52?

11. Why do the Jews attempt to stone Jesus? (vv. 58-59)

Apply

Why do you think Jesus speaks so harshly to his Jewish opponents?

What is the key issue in this passage?

Case study: Your friend has put off trusting in Christ because she's afraid she won't be able to maintain her faith without falling away. What do you tell her?

Commentary

v. 31 ***“To the Jews who had believed him”***

It is apparent that these people do not possess genuine faith: they are still slaves of sin (vv. 32, 34); they reject Jesus' word (vv. 37, 43, 45-46); they are ready to kill him (vv. 37, 40, 59); they are not the spiritual heirs of Abraham, but are sons of the devil (vv. 38-44); they do not love Jesus (v. 42); and they do not belong to God or know Him (vv. 47, 55).

They had “believed” Jesus in the sense that they believed his teaching; they believed certain things *about* him. But mere agreement with the facts about Jesus, or intellectual assent to the truth, is not sufficient for salvation (see Jas. 2:19). Genuine faith involves repentance and trust. This is not to say that the content of our faith is unimportant: there are some facts we must believe about Jesus in order to have faith in him (see 8:24; 20:31). But a change of heart is also necessary.

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples” The Greek word translated “hold to” carries the idea of “abide in,” or “remain”. Genuine faith is faith which *perseveres*, or continues on through one's life (Heb. 3:6, 14; 1 Jn. 2:19; 2 Jn. 9; Rev. 2:26). Several things should be noted about this doctrine. *First*, perseverance is not a condition of salvation; we are saved eternally at the moment we believe. Perseverance follows salvation and testifies to its reality. *Second*, perseverance does not imply sinlessness. Rather, it means that although believers may fall into sin, they will not abandon the faith. *Finally*, the strength to persevere comes from God and not ourselves; He is the one who ensures that those who have trusted in Christ will endure to the end (Jn. 10:27-30; 17:11-12, 15; Rom. 8:35-39; 1 Cor. 1:7-9; 10:13; Phil. 1:6; 2 Tim. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; Jude 1, 24-25).

v. 32 ***“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”*** The truth Jesus is speaking of is truth about God. This truth comes through Jesus Christ, because he alone is the true revelation of God (Jn. 1:14, 18; 14:6-11; Heb. 1:1-3), and this truth can be known only by genuine disciples of Christ (v. 31; see notes on 7:17).

v. 33 ***“We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone”*** It is possible that the Jews are referring to political freedom, for although the nation of Israel had been in subjection to many kingdoms throughout its history, at that time they lived under a Roman government which allowed them a great deal of independence and religious freedom. However, from their reference to Abraham, it seems more likely that they are referring to the special status they

enjoyed as members of God's chosen people (see Dt. 7:6-10). Since they belonged to the One who was king over all the earth, then in a spiritual sense they were rulers, not slaves.

v. 34 ***“everyone who sins is a slave to sin”*** Jesus makes clear that the kind of slavery he is talking about is not political, but spiritual; it is slavery to sin.

vv. 35-36 ***“Now a slave has no permanent place in the family”*** The Jews thought they were guaranteed God's favor because they were sons of Abraham. However, those who rejected Christ were not true sons of Abraham, but slaves to sin, whose position of privilege in God's household could be revoked at any time (see Matt. 8:11-12; 21:33-43; 22:1-14).

“but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” Jesus possesses the privileges of a first-born son over all of creation, including the right to free slaves (see Jn. 3:35; Col. 1:15). The result is true freedom from sin's power and authority (Rom. 6:1-23; 8:2; Gal. 5:1).v. 37

“I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word” Jesus acknowledges that his opponents are descended from Abraham in a physical sense. But their behavior demonstrates that they are not the spiritual heirs of Abraham; if they were, they would not respond to God's word by trying to kill the one who reveals it to them (vv. 39-40). Abraham's true offspring are not those who have his blood in their veins but those who have his faith in their hearts (Rom. 2:28-29; 4:16-17; 9:6-8; Gal. 3:16; 5:21-31).

v. 38 ***“I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father”*** The principle of “like father, like son” applies both to Jesus and his opponents. His words and deeds were always in perfect agreement with those of his Father (Jn. 5:19; 12:49-50); while the deeds of his opponents were in harmony with those of their father the devil (vv. 41, 44; see 1 Jn. 3:7-10).

v. 41 ***“We are not illegitimate children The only Father we have is God himself”*** By their claim not to be illegitimate, these Jews may be alluding to Jesus' own (supposed) illegitimacy, since his mother, Mary, became pregnant by the Holy Spirit before she and Joseph were married. This would make Jesus a bastard in the eyes of those who did not know of, or did not believe, Mary's account of the conception (see Mt. 1:18-25).

- The Jews' claim to have God as their Father is based on several passages which speak of God as the Father of Israel (Ex. 4:22; Dt. 32:6; Isa. 64:8; Jer. 31:9). But those Scriptures do not apply, because these Jews are not true sons of Abraham.
- v. 42 ***"If God were your Father, you would love me"*** It is impossible to know God as one's Father and not love Christ (1 Jn. 5:1).
- v. 43 ***"Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say"*** By "hear," Jesus means not only "understand," but also "accept and obey." The communication problem between Jesus and his opponents is not due to Jesus' inability to speak clearly; it is due to their inability to receive spiritual truth. This inability is not primarily intellectual, but moral and spiritual: they do not "hear" Jesus' words, and indeed they cannot hear them, because they do not belong to God (v. 47; see 1 Cor. 2:14).
Because of this spiritual blindness, which is common to all men, it is impossible for anyone to accept Christ as Savior unless God by his grace enables him to "hear" and accept the gospel (Jn. 6:44, 65).
- vv. 44-47 Jesus identifies two ways in which his opponents' behavior is in harmony with the devil's desires. First, "He was a murderer from the beginning" It was Satan who tempted Adam and Eve into sin and thus caused their deaths and the death of the whole human race (Gen. 3:1-24; Rom. 5:12). The Jews' desire to kill Jesus (v. 40) shows their likeness to the devil in this area.
Second, ***"there is no truth in him . . . he is a liar and the father of lies"*** The devil has always been a liar, beginning with Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:4), and there is no truth in him. In the same way, these Jews do not possess the truth, because they have rejected it in the person of Jesus Christ (vv. 45-46).
- v. 45 ***"Because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!"*** The Jews do not reject Jesus' words in spite of their truth, but because they are true. In other words, they would gladly accept lies, but the truth they could not accept.
- v. 46 ***"Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?"*** The implied challenge in Jesus' statement is this: if they could not prove him to be a sinner (as they could not), then they ought to be willing to accept his words as true. Jesus' perfect holiness is demonstrated, not only by his opponents' silence in response to this challenge, but by his boldness in issuing it (see 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 Jn. 3:5).
- v. 48 ***"you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed"*** Since they cannot win their argument with Jesus, the Jews resort to name-calling. In doing this, they are guilty of blasphemy (Mk. 3:22-30), the same sin for which they attempt to stone Jesus (vv. 58-59).
- v. 51 ***"whoever obeys my word will never see death"*** To keep Jesus' word does not imply sinless perfection, but rather a fundamental belief and faith in his word, which produces a life characterized by obedience (see v. 31; 1 Jn. 1:5-2:6). Obedience does not earn life; rather, obedience and life are both the results of a change which God makes in the believer, a change which is both permanent and completely by grace.
The promise in this verse refers to escape, not from physical death, but from spiritual death (see Jn. 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-26). However, the Jews, in their typical pattern, interpret it in a purely literal and physical way (v. 52).
- v. 53 ***"Are you greater than our father Abraham?"*** They expect a negative answer, but ironically, they are actually testifying to the truth, for Jesus was far greater than Abraham (Jn. 4:12).
- v. 56 ***"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day"*** The specific incident being referred to is not clear; perhaps when Abraham rejoiced over the birth of his son Isaac (Gen. 21:6) he looked forward to the time when God would bless all the nations of the earth through him, a promise which was fulfilled in Christ (Gal. 3:8). Or perhaps Jesus is not referring to any passage in Scripture, but to his own knowledge of Abraham's hope in the coming of the messianic age (Heb. 11:11-16).
- v. 58 ***"Before Abraham was born, I am"*** Note that Jesus does not say, "before Abraham was born, I was," which would only imply that he came into existence before Abraham was born. Rather, he makes a direct claim to deity, identifying himself with Yahweh, the "I am" of the Old Testament (Ex. 3:14; Isa. 41:4; 43:10-13; 48:12; notes on 8:24).
- v. 59 Until this point, the Jews have managed to interpret Jesus' statements in a way which would not force them to deal directly with his claims to divine sonship, but they can do so no longer. Clearly understanding Jesus' claim to deity, they pick up stones to stone him for blasphemy. The only other option would be to repent of their sin and fall down at his feet in worship, and they would rather die (literally) than do that.

Unit 12 – Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

John 9:1-41

Text

¹ As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

³ “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

⁶ After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. ⁷ “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

⁸ His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some claimed that he was.

Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”

But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”

¹⁰ “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.

¹¹ He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

¹² “Where is this man?” they asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said.

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.”

¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.”

But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So they were divided.

¹⁷ Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.”

The man replied, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸ They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents. ¹⁹ “Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?”

²⁰ “We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. ²¹ But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age;

he will speak for himself.” ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”

²⁵ He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

²⁶ Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

²⁷ 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?”

²⁸ Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.”

³⁰ The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. ³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

³⁴ To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

³⁶ “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

³⁷ Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

³⁸ Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

³⁹ Jesus said,^[a] “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”

⁴¹ Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.”

^a 9:39 Some early manuscripts do not have *Then the man said ...* ³⁹ Jesus said.

Open

- If you could change something about your physical abilities, what would it be?

Discover

1. The miracles in the book of John not only reveal Jesus' power over nature, they also illustrate spiritual truth. What spiritual truth is represented by the following:

The man's physical blindness (v. 1)

The fact that he had been blind from birth (v. 1)

The fact that Jesus healed his physical blindness (vv. 5-7; see Jn. 8:12)

The fact that no one else had ever healed a man born blind from birth (v. 32)

2. What do the disciples assume about the cause of the man's blindness? What was the real cause? (vv. 2-3)

3. How does this miracle fulfill prophecy? What does it tell us about Christ? (Isaiah 35:5; 42:7; Matt. 11:1-5)

4. Why do you think Jesus had the man go and wash, instead of just healing him immediately?

5. What is the Pharisees' true spiritual condition? (vv. 39-41) How do they demonstrate this? How does this contrast with their view of themselves?

6. How do you explain the fact that the highly educated Pharisees did not receive Jesus, even after this miracle, while the uneducated blind man did receive him? (see Jn. 6:44; 1 Cor. 1:18-31)

7. What principle is illustrated by the fact that the blind man, after being identified as a disciple of Christ, is thrown out of the synagogue? (vv. 26-28; see Jn. 15:20; Hebrews 13:13)

8. What was Jesus' two-part purpose in coming into the world? (v. 39; see also Mark 4:11-12; John 12:37-40; Romans 9:18).

Apply

- What do you think about the fact that God allowed the man in this story to be born blind and to suffer many years, in order that Jesus would have someone to heal? What difficult circumstances in your life may have a purpose which only God understands?

Commentary

- v. 1 **“blind from birth”** This detail points to the fact that all men are spiritually blind from birth, since in this passage physical blindness is symbolic of spiritual blindness (see vv. 34, 39-41). It also emphasizes the fact that the man's blindness was not partial, but absolute. In the same way, we would be completely “blind,” unable to understand and accept spiritual truth, unless God had opened our eyes (Jn. 6:44; Acts 26:17-18; 1 Cor. 2:12-14).
- v. 2 **“who sinned, this man or his parents”** The disciples wrongly assume that the man's suffering must be the direct result of personal sin. Although this sometimes is the case (Num. 12:1-15; Acts 5:1-11; 12:21-23; 1 Cor. 11:27-31), it is not always true (Job 1:1-22; Jn. 11:1-4; 2 Cor. 12:7) [see notes on Jn. 5:14].
- v. 3 **“this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him”** Jesus reveals that the man's blindness was not due to his own or his parent's sin. Rather, he had been born blind, in the sovereignty of God, so that God might demonstrate His power through him (see Jn. 11:4). While in this case God glorified Himself through healing, at other times He glorifies Himself by giving grace to persevere in the midst of suffering (2 Cor. 12:7; Jas. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7).
- v. 4 **“Night is coming, when no one can work.”** This likely refers to the time of spiritual darkness between Jesus' ascension into heaven and the day of Pentecost (see Jn. 12:35). During this time, the disciples could not work, but could only wait for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).
- vv. 5-7 The healing does more than demonstrate Jesus' miraculous powers; it illustrates the fact that Jesus is the “light of the world” (Jn. 8:12), who gives spiritual illumination to those who trust in him. His unique ability to heal a man born blind points to the fact that he alone can open men's eyes to the truth and free them from their inborn spiritual blindness (see v. 32). Not only that, but the receiving of sight by the blind is one of the prophesied signs of the dawning of the messianic age (Is. 35:5; 42:7; see Mt. 11:1-5).
Note that, as in the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda (Jn. 5:1-15), the initiative rests completely with Jesus. John does not even record that any conversation takes place between Jesus and the man before Jesus applies the paste to his eyes. His only action was to obey Jesus' command to go and wash.
- v. 7 **“wash in the Pool of Siloam (this word means ‘Sent’)”** It seems likely that John inserts this explanation in order to draw a connection between the physical healing which this man received from washing in the pool, and the spiritual healing which believers receive through Jesus Christ, who was “sent” by God (v. 4).
- vv. 10-11 When asked about his healing, the man can only give the bare facts of the case. At this point, he does not appear to possess any insight into Jesus' identity or the source of his healing powers.
- v. 13 **“They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind”** This introduces the dialogue between the Pharisees and the man whom Jesus had healed. Note that during this dialogue the Pharisees, who believed themselves to have great insight into spiritual matters, become increasingly “blind” to the truth; while the man who had been blind becomes more and more convinced that Jesus is from God (see vs. 39).
- v. 16 **“Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath’”** Once again Jesus and the Pharisees come into conflict over the Sabbath (see Jn. 5:9-18; 7:19-24). Some of the Pharisees reject Jesus because the manner in which he performed his miracle conflicts with the *Mishnah*, their oral interpretation of the Law of Moses. In this case, they consider healing to be a violation of the law against working on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11; Dt. 5:12-15). They also may have viewed making a mud paste as a kind of kneading, which was considered to be forbidden on the Sabbath.
When they discuss whether Jesus is “from God,” they are not considering whether he came down from heaven; they are only referring to whether he is a prophet, i.e. whether his power and message come from God.
- “How can a sinner perform such signs?”**
Their assumption, that no one could perform miracles except by the power of God, is false. Although Jesus did point to miracles as supporting his claim to deity (Jn. 10:38; 14:11), miracles in and of themselves are not sufficient evidence of divine blessing. Not all supernatural power is from God; there are other spiritual powers at work in the world. The critical issue is whether the life and message of the miracle-worker is in harmony with the Scriptures (Dt. 13:1-5; Mt. 7:21-23, 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9; 1 Jn. 4:1-3).

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- v. 17 ***“The man replied, ‘He is a prophet’”***
The contrast here between the unschooled beggar, who understands at least that Jesus is a prophet, and the highly educated Pharisees, who reject Jesus, is a vivid illustration of the principle that it is not natural intelligence or wisdom that draws one to Christ, but the sovereign call of God (Jn. 6:44; 1 Cor. 1:18-31).
- vv. 18-19 The Pharisees summon the man's parents in hopes of finding holes in his testimony which will allow them to reject the evidence for the miracle. Their stubborn refusal to believe his testimony (see vv. 26-27) demonstrates that their blindness is not only natural, but voluntary. They are both unable and unwilling to see the truth (see Jn. 5:40; 7:17).
- vv. 20-23 The Pharisees' questioning puts the parents in a difficult position. They cannot deny that their son has been healed, and they are most likely aware of how it happened. But to affirm Jesus' miraculous powers would put them in danger of being excommunicated from the synagogue (as their son later was, vs. 34). So they plead ignorance and refer the Pharisees back to their son.
- v. 24 ***“Give glory to God”*** This means something like, “Before God, tell the truth about what happened” (see Josh. 7:19). The Pharisees cannot believe that Jesus, whom they consider to be a sinner, has performed a miracle. So they urge the man to admit that he has either lied or has withheld some critical piece of information from them.
- “We know this man is a sinner”*** The Pharisees are not merely saying that Jesus is less than perfect. “Sinner” in this case is equivalent to “ungodly”. They consider Jesus to be someone who openly flouts the law of Moses; someone whose sin is greater than that of other men. This is the opposite of the truth (see Jn. 8:46; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 Jn. 3:5).
- v. 25 ***“One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”*** The theological arguments of the religious leaders cannot shake the man's conviction that he has experienced a healing miracle.
- vv. 26-27 The Pharisees ask the man to repeat his story, hoping that he will contradict himself or say something that will permit them to disregard the miracle. By now, it is obvious that they have no interest in an unbiased examination of the evidence. Their only interest is in discrediting the man's testimony. His response to their hypocrisy is to become sarcastic and defiant.
- v. 28 ***“We are disciples of Moses!”*** The Pharisees claim to be followers of Moses, but they are not; if they truly were followers of Moses, they would have believed Jesus (see Jn. 5:46).
- v. 31 ***“We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will”*** In general, this is true (see Ps. 66:18; Pr. 15:29; 1 Pet. 3:7; 1 Jn. 3:21-22). This is not because we earn God's favor through our obedience. We offer our prayers, and God hears them, because of Christ's atoning sacrifice and continuing intercession on our behalf (see Heb. 4:14-16). But God responds to faith, and obedience is the outward expression of faith (Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn. 2:3).
- v. 35 ***“and when he found him”*** Jesus seeks the man out in order to lead him to a more complete understanding of, and faith in, Himself. In this scene, we have an illustration of the principle that following Christ means joining Him “outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:13). As the world rejected Christ, it will reject his followers (Jn. 15:20).
- vv. 37-38 In response to the man's request that he identify who the “Son of Man” is, Jesus reveals his identity. Immediately the man expresses faith and worships him (literally, bows down before him). It is difficult to know precisely what the man understood at this point, but his act of worship indicates that he understood something of Jesus' divine nature. In addition, the title “Son of Man” points to Jesus' identity as the one who reveals God to man and redeems man.
- v. 39 ***“For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind”***
Jesus reveals the two-pronged nature of his ministry: to open the eyes of those who acknowledge their own spiritual need, and to confirm the blindness of those who think they see, who falsely consider themselves to be spiritually self-sufficient. In other words, the purpose for which Jesus came was not only to open eyes, but to close them (see Mk. 4:11-12; Jn. 12:37-40; Rom. 9:18). By its very nature, the truth divides; the same light attracts some and repels others (Jn. 3:19-21; 2 Cor. 2:16).
- v. 41 ***“If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains”*** If the Pharisees had recognized their own spiritual blindness, they would not have committed the sin of rejecting Christ; but their spiritual arrogance has blinded them to the truth, and thus they do not seek or receive forgiveness.

Unit 13 – The Shepherd and His Flock

John 10:1-42

Text

¹ “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. ^a They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

¹⁹ The Jews who heard these words were again divided. ²⁰ Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”

²¹ But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

²² Then came the Festival of Dedication ^b at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon’s Colonnade.

²⁴ The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

²⁵ Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they shall follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all ^c; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

³¹ Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, ³² but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”

³³ “We are not stoning you for any good work,” they replied, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are “gods”’? ³⁵ If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside— ³⁶ 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’? ³⁷ Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. ³⁸ 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.” ³⁹ Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.

⁴⁰ Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. There he stayed, ⁴¹ and many people came to him. They said, “Though John never performed a sign, all that John said about this man was true.” ⁴² And in that place many believed in Jesus.

^a 10:9 Or kept safe
^b 10:22 That is, Hanukkah
^c 10:29 Many early manuscripts What my Father has given me is greater than all
^d 10:34 Psalm 82:6

Open

- What gives you a sense of safety and security?

Discover

1. In verses 1-3, who are the thieves and robbers, the sheep, and the shepherd?

2. Who does Jesus call? What is the result? (vv. 3-4; see John 6:37; Romans 8:28-30)

3. What can you observe about the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd from verses 3-6 and 11-15? How do these things illustrate the relationship between Christ and his people?

Relationship between sheep and shepherd

Relationship between Christ and his people

4. For whom does Jesus lay down his life? (v. 11; see Eph. 5:25)

5. Who are the "other sheep" in verse 16? What is the "sheep pen"?

6. What is Jesus going to do with the "other sheep"? (vs. 16; see John 11:51-52; Ephesians 2:19-22)

7. What does Jesus emphasize about his death in verses 17-18?

8. How had Jesus already 'told' the Jews who he was? (vv. 25-26; see 5:36; 10:38) Why hadn't they believed what Jesus had 'told' them? (v. 26; see 6:44; 12:37-40)

9. According to verses 28-29, is it possible for someone who has trusted in Christ to lose their salvation? Why or why not? (see also John 6:39-40)

10. What does Jesus mean by his statement that 'I and the Father are one?' (v. 30; see vv. 27-29)

Apply

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> How would you describe what it means to have life to the full (v. 10)? | <input type="checkbox"/> Why is the doctrine of eternal security, or perseverance, important to one's Christian life? How could this doctrine be misused? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> After reading this passage, how do you feel about being one of Jesus' sheep? | <input type="checkbox"/> Why is it important that Jesus and the Father are "one"? |

Commentary

vs. 1 ***“anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.”***

These thieves and robbers are the religious authorities who refuse to accept Jesus as the Messiah, and who exploit and abuse their people instead of caring for them (see 9:34, 39-41). This echoes several Old Testament passages in which God rebukes unfaithful religious leaders in similar terms (Ezk. 34:1-4; Isa. 56:10-12; Jer. 10:21; 23:1; 25:34-36; 50:6-7).

v. 2 ***“The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep”*** In this chapter, Jesus identifies himself as the true shepherd of his people (vs. 11). This metaphor has Old Testament parallels:

“I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. . . . I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them.” (Ezk. 34:15-6, 23-24; see Ps. 23; Isa. 40:11).

Thus, Christ is identifying himself with Yahweh, the shepherd of His people, and also with the “David” whom He promised to send; the shepherd prince who would gather, guide, protect, and nourish the people of God.

v. 3-6 These verses present a beautiful picture of God's *effectual* call; the process by which the Holy Spirit draws to Christ those whom the Father has chosen for salvation (see Jn. 6:44; Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 1:9; Gal. 1:15; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 2:9; 2 Pet. 1:3).

Several things can be noted about the sheep and the shepherd. First, the sheep are referred to as the shepherd's “own sheep,” implying that they have already been identified as belonging to him before he calls them. In the same way, those who respond in faith to God's call have already been chosen by Him, “before the creation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). Second, the shepherd calls his sheep by name. In the same way, God's election and call are specific; He chooses us and draws us to himself as individuals (see Jn. 6:37-39, 44).

Finally, the shepherd's own sheep are identified by the fact that they recognize and listen to his voice and flee from strangers. In the same way, God's chosen (“elect”) people hear and respond to His words; they are not deceived by false saviors (v. 8; see Mt. 24:24). But those who do not belong to God do not “hear,” i.e. do not understand and respond to, God's words (see notes on Jn. 8:43; also Jn. 8:47; 1 Cor. 2:14).

vv. 7-10 ***“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved”*** Jesus here changes metaphors. Instead of the shepherd, he is now the gate of the sheep pen. As the gate is the only way for the sheep to enter the sheep pen, so Christ is the only way for us to enter the kingdom of God. Note that Jesus does not claim to be “a” gate, but “the” gate; there is no other (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12).

“They will come in and go out, and find pasture I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” The gate allows the sheep to freely enjoy both the protection of the sheep pen and the provision of the pasture. In the same way, Jesus is our protection and provision. The “pasture” represents the fullness of life which we possess as believers. This does not consist of having an abundance of worldly goods (Lk. 12:15), but in having the things in which true life consists: peace, hope, joy, love, fellowship, and other spiritual blessings.

“All who have come before me are thieves and robbers” This may refer to the unfaithful religious leaders; or it may refer to those who came before Jesus falsely claiming to be the Messiah. Such false shepherds make a pretense of caring for the God's people, but they ultimately have only one purpose: to “steal and kill and destroy.”

vv. 11-13 ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”*** The hired man works only for a paycheck, cares little for the sheep, and abandons them at any sign of danger. In contrast, Jesus is the faithful and good shepherd. He cares for his people, not in order to gain something for himself, but because he loves them. While the hired man puts his own safety above that of the sheep, Jesus sacrifices even his own life in order to save his people from God's judgment and wrath. Note that the ones for whom Jesus lays down his life are his sheep, the chosen people of God (see vv. 14-15; also Rom. 8:32-34; Eph. 5:25).

v. 16 ***“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen”*** The “other sheep” are the elect Gentiles, who are not from the “sheep pen” of the Jewish race. Jesus' purpose is to draw to himself all those whom God has given him (Jn. 6:38-39), both Jew and Gentile, and to form them into one people of God, “one flock and one shepherd” (see Jn. 11:51-52; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-22, 4:3-6).

v. 18 ***“No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord”*** Jesus' death was not an accident, but was part of God's plan from the beginning (Mt. 26:53-54; Jn. 19:10-11; Acts. 4:23-28).

- vv. 22-23 **“the Festival of Dedication”** This is the eight-day celebration which we know as Hanukkah, also called the Festival of Lights because it is observed by the lighting of candles. It has its origin in the history of the Jews during the period between the Old and New testaments. In 164 B.C., under the leadership of Judas Maccabaeus, a band of Jewish guerrilla fighters defeated their Syrian ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes. This brutal king had attempted to eliminate the Jewish religion, forbidding religious observances and ordering all copies of the Scriptures destroyed. He also defiled the temple, offering sacrifices of swine's flesh on an altar of the pagan god Zeus, which he set up over the altar of Yahweh. When he was overthrown, the people rededicated the temple and celebrated for eight days.
- v. 24 **“If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly”** These are not honest truth-seekers who hope that the Messiah will reveal himself so that they may follow him; they merely want a better target for their attacks. But Jesus does not oblige them. In fact, he never makes a public statement to a Jewish audience clearly identifying himself as the Messiah, because the Jews' expectations of the Messiah as a political and military deliverer would have interfered with his true purpose (see notes on 6:14-15). Instead, he reveals himself privately (see 4:26; 9:37; Mt. 6:13-20).
- vv. 25-26 **“I did tell you, but you do not believe”** Here is another reason why Jesus does not yield to their request to identify himself: it would have done no good. Their refusal to believe is not due to insufficient information, since his works speak clearly of who he is (see Jn. 5:36; 10:38; 14:11). Rather, they do not, and cannot, believe in him because they are not his “sheep”; God has not chosen them and drawn them to Himself (see Jn. 6:44, 65; 12:37-40; notes on 10:3-6). Therefore, their hearts remain hardened against him.
- vv. 28-29 These verses teach the doctrine of eternal security, or perseverance. Those who trust in Christ are kept secure in the faith by God Himself and can never be lost (see notes on 8:31; also Rom. 8:35-39; 1 Cor. 1:7-9, 10:13; Phil. 1:6; 2 Tim. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; Jude 1, 24-25). This is shown by what we possess: “eternal life”. Life that could be lost would not be “eternal,” but temporary (see 6:58). Consider the absolute terms Jesus uses: “they shall never perish” (vs. 28) and “will never see death” (8:51; see 11:26). Most important, our security does not depend on us, but on Christ's commitment to us and his ability to protect us: “no one will snatch them out of my hand” (vs. 28). He will lose “none” of those whom the Father has given him (6:39). Our security is also guaranteed by God the Father, since “no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand” (vs. 29; see Jn. 17:11-12). Thus, the sovereign will and power of God assure that none of his people will be lost.
- vv. 30-31 **“I and the Father are one.”** This refers to the perfect unity of purpose and activity between the Father and Son, expressed in their joint work of protecting and preserving the elect (vv. 28-29; see 5:19). But a unity of will implies an ontological union as well, a unity of being between God the Father and God the Son. Although they are two unique persons, they are both of one divine essence (v. 38; notes on Jn. 1:1). The Jews understood Jesus to be making a claim to deity, as shown by their reaction: they “picked up stones to stone him,” which was the method of execution prescribed for blasphemy (Lv. 24:16; see Jn. 5:18; 8:58-59).
- vv. 34-36 **“Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'?”** The word “Law” is often used to refer to the whole Old Testament (Jn. 15:25; 1 Cor. 14:21); here, Jesus quotes from Psalm 82:6. His basic argument is simple: if God can refer to others as 'gods,' then the Jews should not object when Jesus claims this title for himself. But is this just a clever twist of rabbinic interpretation designed to confuse his opponents? Or is there more? To answer this, we need to understand to whom the Psalm was addressed. It may have been addressed to angelic beings, who had been unjust in exercising their delegated authority over the nations. In this view, Jesus is stressing his superiority over angels (see Heb. 1-2). Or, it may have been addressed to the judges of Israel, called 'gods' because they execute the godlike function of judging (see Dt. 1:17). Finally, it may have been addressed to the nation of Israel, called 'gods' because they are Yahweh's children (Ezk. 20:21). In this view, the curse in Ps. 82:7, “you will die like mere mortals, you will fall like every other ruler,” refers to the fact that the generation who received the law at Sinai died in the wilderness due to unbelief. In the last two cases, the logic would be thus: If those who merely received God's Word (whether judges or the nation of Israel) were called 'gods,' how much more is this title deserved by Jesus, who is himself the Word of God (see Jn. 1:1-18)!
- v. 36 **“What about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?”** This seems to be an allusion to the Feast of Dedication (v. 22). As the Jews celebrated the dedication of the temple to God, so also Jesus, the one to whom the temple pointed, was set apart and dedicated to God by God Himself.

Unit 14 – Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

John 11:1-44

Text

¹ Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷ and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

⁸ “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

⁹ Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. ¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

¹² His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” ¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

¹⁶ Then Thomas (also known as Didymus^[a]) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles^[b] from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

^a 11:16 Thomas (Aramaic) and Didymus (Greek) both mean twin.

^b 11:18 Or about 3 kilometers

Open

How would you like your epitaph to read?

Discover

1. Why didn't Jesus immediately go to Lazarus when he heard of his illness? (v. 6; see vv. 15, 25-27, 42, 45)

2. What is the significance of the fact that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days? (vv. 17, 39)

3. What does Jesus want Martha to understand in verses 24-27?

4. Why do you think that John records the statements of three separate people saying that Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying? (vv. 21, 32, 37)

5. How does Jesus react when he arrives at the tomb? What does this tell us about him? (vv. 33-38)

6. What event is anticipated by Jesus calling Lazarus forth from the tomb? (vv. 43-44; see John 5:25-29)

7. The raising of Lazarus is the last of the seven major signs of the book of John. Identify each of these signs and their "significance: what do each of these miraculous works reveal about Christ?"

Sign	Significance
John 2:1-12	
John 4:43-54	
John 5:2-16	
John 6:1-14	
John 6:16-21	
John 9:1-41	
John 11:1-44	

Apply

Have you ever been angry with God for failing to prevent suffering, in your life or the life of someone close to you? How can this passage help us to deal with such situations?

Have you ever boldly taken a risk to follow Christ, as Thomas did? What was the result?

Commentary

- v. 3 **“Lord, the one you love is sick”** The term “Lord” (Gr. *kyrie*) is a respectful form of address, roughly equivalent to “sir.” It does not necessarily indicate a recognition of Jesus’ deity (also v. 21)
- v. 4 **“This sickness will not end in death”** Jesus does not mean that Lazarus will not die, but that his death will not be the end: he will be raised from the dead and given new life. Similarly, for those who trust in Christ, physical death is not the end, but a prelude to a glorious resurrection (Jn. 6:39-40, 44-51; 1 Cor. 15).
- “it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it”** The idea here is similar to 9:3, where the man is said to have been born blind “so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.” Note that this is both for “God’s glory,” and also “so that God’s Son may be glorified.” Jesus’ works were the means by which he revealed, and thus glorified, the Father (17:4), and through which he received glory from the Father (8:50, 54). This mutual glorification of the Father and Son was seen ultimately in Jesus’ death and resurrection (12:23; 13:31-32; 17:1, 5).
- vv. 5-6 **“Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard . . . he stayed where he was”** Jesus’ failure to respond by going to Lazarus immediately was not due to a lack of concern. On the contrary, it was because of his love that he waited to leave until Lazarus had died. By raising Lazarus from the dead, rather than merely healing him, Jesus was able to reveal himself as “the resurrection and the life,” and to lead the disciples, Martha, and many others, to faith (vv. 15, 25-27, 45).
- vv. 7-8 When Jesus suggests to his disciples that they go to Judea, where Lazarus is, they are astonished. Only a short time ago the Jews in that region had attempted to take his life (10:31); if he returns, they might well succeed!
- vv. 9-10 **“Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light”** The point of this statement seems to be that there is a certain period of time, predetermined by God, in which Jesus is to do his work. As long as that time has not elapsed, Jesus will be safe to carry out his ministry. Another application to the disciples is also possible: as long as they are being led by Jesus, the light of the world, they will have the insight they need to avoid “stumbling,” or falling prey to the evil one (see Jn. 9:4-5; 1 Tim. 3:7, 2 Tim. 2:26; 1 Pet. 5:8).
- vv. 11-13 **“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up”** The use of “sleep” as a metaphor for death occurs several places in the New Testament (Mt. 9:24, 27:52; Acts 13:36; 1 Cor. 11:30, 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Th. 4:13-15). It emphasizes the hope of the resurrection: just as those who sleep will awaken, those who have died in Christ will be resurrected to new life. It does not imply that those who have died are unconscious, as the false doctrine of “soul sleep” teaches. The Scriptures make it clear that during the time between death and the resurrection, those who have trusted in Christ are conscious and in God’s presence (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8; see also Lk. 16:19-31, 23:43).
- v. 16 **“Let us also go, that we may die with him”** Thomas did not grasp the assurance of Jesus’ words in v. 9, nor did he understand the kind of death that Jesus would ultimately suffer. Nevertheless, he is a model of courage and devotion to us as believers, we who have died with Christ (Rom. 6:1-11) and who are called to take up our cross and follow him (Mk. 8:34).
- v. 17 **“Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days”** After three days the corpse would have begun to decompose (see v. 39). There may have been a popular superstition in Jesus’ time that the soul of the deceased hovered over the body for the first three days; at any rate, the four days’ lapse of time emphasizes that Lazarus was dead beyond any doubt and beyond any natural hope of recovery.
- vv. 21-22 **“if you had been here, my brother would not have died”** Martha’s words are not a rebuke; she is not blaming Jesus for failing to come in time. Rather, she is assuring him that she has no doubt of Jesus’ love, or of his willingness to heal her brother, had he been present. Her statement that “even now God will give you whatever you ask” is not a hint that Jesus should raise Lazarus from the dead; her faith does not yet extend this far (see v. 39). She is merely assuring Jesus that her confidence in him has not wavered.
- vv. 23-24 Martha answered, **“I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day”** Martha, along with most Jews of her day, including the Pharisees (Acts 23:8), believed in the resurrection of the dead; she assumes that Jesus is trying to console her by reminding her of this.

- vv. 25-26 Jesus invites Martha to advance beyond an abstract belief in the resurrection to a personal faith in him, the one by whose power and authority the resurrection will be accomplished (see Jn. 5:21-29; 6:39-40). Note that each of the two parts of Jesus' "I am" statement are further explained by one of the clauses in the next sentence. Thus, "**I am the resurrection,**" is amplified by "**The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.**" The one who believes in Christ will come to life again, even though they experience bodily death. Likewise, "**I am . . . the life,**" is amplified by "**whoever lives by believing in me will never die.**" The one who "lives," i.e. who has eternal life, and who therefore believes in Christ, possesses a kind of life which does not end at the grave; such a person will never truly see death (Jn. 8:51).
- v. 27 Martha responds to Jesus' question with an expression of her deepening faith; she believes that he is both the Christ, or Messiah, and also that he is the Son of God (see notes on 1:41, 49; 3:3; 6:14).
- v. 32 "**Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died**" Mary echoes her sister's remark (vs. 21), and it is quite possible that John includes it in order to emphasize the point that Jesus could have intervened to prevent Lazarus' death, but chose not to do so (see also vv. 6, 37).
So then, if Jesus' inaction was not due to inability, was it due to apathy? Perhaps he was not really concerned about Lazarus. But John takes pains to inform us that this was not so: Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters (vv. 3, 5, 36), and was deeply moved when he saw their suffering (vv. 33-35, 38). Why then did he not act? And for that matter, why does he not always act today in similar situations?
The answer is that Jesus' purpose in coming was not to eliminate all the sufferings of his sheep; that must await the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21:4). Rather, his purpose was to glorify God, and that purpose, as difficult as it may be for us to accept, involves suffering, both for him and for us (Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:3-7; Phil. 1:29, 3:10; Col. 1:24; 2 Thess. 3:10-12; 2 Tim. 1:8, 2:3; 1 Pet. 4:13).
- v. 33 "**he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled**" As D.A. Carson notes in his commentary, a better translation might be, "he was outraged in spirit, and troubled." In other words, Jesus was not merely moved with compassion for those who were mourning; he was also furious at the sin, evil, and death which had taken the life of his friend Lazarus, angry at the "powers of this dark world" (Eph. 6:12).
- v. 37 "**Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?**" The confusion of these observers is due to their erroneous assumption that if Jesus had the power to heal Lazarus, he would necessarily have done so. They do not understand that Jesus had a higher purpose in view (see v. 4).
- vv. 39-40 "**But, Lord, . . . by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days**" Martha, although having faith in Jesus as the source of resurrection life (vv. 25-27), does not understand that he intends to raise her brother immediately, and thus does not grasp the reason for his seemingly strange request.
"Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"
The text does not record that Jesus had previously made this promise; John may have simply omitted it from his narrative, or it may have been intended as a summary of Jesus' conversation with Martha in vv. 20-27. Note that the "glory of God" here does not consist of a revelation of God's person, such as Moses saw (Ex. 33:18-23; see Lk. 2:9) but a manifestation of God's power.
- vv. 41-42 By praying in this way, Jesus highlights the fact that his authority comes from the Father and that he does nothing on his own initiative (see 5:19, 30). While he elsewhere condemns public prayers which have self-glorification as their object (Mt. 6:5), his purpose here is to glorify the Father, not himself.
- vv. 43-44 The command, "**Lazarus, come out,**" foreshadows of the day on which "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (5:25; see 5:28-29). Note that, technically speaking, this was not a resurrection, but a resuscitation or restoration to life; Lazarus did not rise with an imperishable, glorious, immortal, spiritual body; a body in the likeness of Christ's resurrection body (see 1 Cor. 15:35-53). He was raised with his natural, mortal body, and presumably he eventually died again.
This miracle is also a dramatic picture of what happens when someone comes to faith in Christ. Just as Lazarus, being dead, was unable to do anything to gain life, so also those who do not know God are "dead in . . . transgressions and sins" (Eph. 2:1; see Col. 2:13). They are unable to contribute anything to their salvation. Apart from the enabling grace of God, they cannot even believe (Jn. 6:44). But God's call to his elect carries with it the power to respond, just as it did for Lazarus.

Unit 15 – The Plot to Kill Jesus

John 11:45-12:19

Text

⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

“What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.”

⁴⁹ Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰ You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”

⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, ⁵² and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. ⁵³ So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

⁵⁴ Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea. Instead he withdrew to a region near the wilderness, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.

⁵⁵ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. ⁵⁶ They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple courts they asked one another, “What do you think? Isn’t he coming to the festival at all?” ⁵⁷ But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.

¹ Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint^a of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴ But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages. ⁶” He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷ “Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you,^c but you will not always have me.”

⁹ Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, ¹¹ for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

¹² The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!^d”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”^e

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

¹⁵ “Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”^f

¹⁶ At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

¹⁷ Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. ¹⁸ Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”

^a 12:3 Or about 0.5 liter

^b 12:5 Greek three hundred denarii

^c 12:8 See Deut. 15:11.

^d 12:13 A Hebrew expression meaning “Save!” which became an exclamation of praise

^e 12:13 Psalm 118:25,26

^f 12:15 Zech. 9:9

Open

- What is the most valuable material gift you have ever received? What did this gift communicate to you?

Discover

1. What was the reaction of the Jewish religious leaders to the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection? What does this tell us about the cause of their unbelief? (vv. 47-48, 53)

2. What meaning did Caiaphas intend by his statement in verse 50? (paraphrase in your own words)

3. What was the unintended meaning of his statement? (vv. 51-52)

4. What does this reveal about the sovereignty of God in this situation? (see Acts 2:22-23)

5. What aspects of Mary's anointing of Jesus do you consider significant? Why? (12:1-8)

6. What was Judas' stated reason for objecting to Mary's action? What was the real reason? (12:4-6)

7. What is the point of Jesus' response to Judas? (12:7-8)

8. How does the crowd react to Jesus as he enters Jerusalem? (12:12-13)

9. What is the significance of the fact that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey? (12:14-15)

Apply

- How is your relationship with Christ like or unlike Mary's? Would you like it to be different?
- What was it about Lazarus that made him such an effective evangelist?

Commentary

vv. 45-46 **“Therefore many of the Jews . . . believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done”** Here again, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ divides those who witness it (see 7:11-12, 30-31, 40-43). This reminds us, the readers of this gospel, that we must likewise make a decision: who do we say that Jesus is? What will be *our* response to him? (see Mt. 16:13-16). Heaven and hell depend on the answer.

vv. 47-48 **“Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin”** Under Roman rule, the Jewish people enjoyed a limited right of self-government. Their supreme authority, in both the religious and civil realms, was the *Sanhedrin*. This body was composed of the chief priests, most of whom belonged to the party of the Sadducees, the Pharisees, most of whom were scribes, and the elders.

“Here is this man performing many signs” It is important to understand that the unbelief of these men was not due to a lack of evidence. If that were so, then the raising of someone from the dead would surely have convinced them! But their response demonstrates that nothing they could have witnessed would have brought them to faith (see Lk. 16:30). Thus, even as they acknowledge the fact of Jesus' miracles, they are preparing to kill him, unwilling and unable to believe that he is who his deeds plainly reveal him to be: “the Christ, the Son of God” (11:27).

“If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation” Incredibly, the response of these religious leaders to the resurrection of Lazarus was to consider, not its spiritual significance, but its political impact! Their concern was that Jesus would incite the people to rise up against Rome (see Jn. 6:14-15), and that the Roman authorities would then destroy the temple (see Jer. 7:14; Acts 6:14) and revoke their privilege of self-government. The references to “our” temple and “our” nation show that their primary concern was not the welfare of the people, but their own positions of power and privilege.

vv. 50-53 **“it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish”** Caiaphas intends his words in a purely political sense: it is better for the members of the Sanhedrin for Jesus' life to be sacrificed, rather than allowing the Romans to be provoked into destroying their nation. But he was also unwittingly uttering a prophecy; God was speaking through him in a way he did not intend or

understand. Jesus would indeed die a sacrificial death, but not to preserve the political life of the nation. His death was a sacrifice for sins, and the salvation it accomplished was spiritual, not political.

Not only did Jesus die for Jews, but he also died for those of every “*nation, tribe, people, and language*” (Rev. 7:9). These “*scattered children of God*” (v. 52) are the elect Gentiles, the sheep “*not of this sheep pen*” which Jesus, the chief shepherd, is bringing together with Jewish believers to create one flock, one people of God, one holy nation (see notes on Jn. 10:16; also Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-22, 4:3-6; 1 Pet. 2:9). (Historically, the killing of Jesus did not avert the catastrophe which the Sanhedrin feared: the Romans destroyed the temple in A.D. 70.)

v. 12:1 **“Six days before the Passover”** This mention of the Passover is an example of literary *foreshadowing*. It reminds the reader that in a few short days Jesus will himself become the Passover lamb; he will perform the one supreme act of sacrifice which the Passover ceremony had been anticipating for fifteen centuries (see notes on 1:29; Ex. 12:1-13). In the same vein, the reference to Lazarus as the one “**whom Jesus had raised from the dead**” foreshadows Jesus' own imminent death and resurrection.

v. 3 **“Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair”** Mary's act of love, so simple and guileless, yet at the same time so profound and moving, has stood as an example of humble devotion for almost two millennia (see Mt. 26:13). At least two things should be noted about it. First, the great sacrifice involved: John notes that it was “*an expensive perfume,*” but Judas is more specific—it was worth “*a year's wages*” (v. 5); or, in today's terms, several thousand dollars. Second, Mary's deep humility: not only did she wash Jesus' feet, a very menial task (see Jn. 13:1-17), but in order to do so she let down her hair publicly in the presence of men, something which respectable women in her culture did not normally do.

vv. 4-5 **“Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?”** The actions of someone who is fully devoted to Christ may seem illogical and irresponsible to those who do not understand. It is easy to fall into the trap of carefully calculating and measuring out our giving, worship, and devotion. Perhaps we need to emulate Mary more, to be less self-conscious in showing our love for Christ, even to the point of being extravagant at times.

In fact, this is the kind of love which Christ demonstrates toward us. By no standard of measurement could the lives of sinful humans be judged equal in value to the life of the Son of God—yet he gave his life in exchange for ours, a wildly extravagant gift by any means. May we be less concerned with tithing “mint, and dill, and cummin” (Mt. 23:23), and more concerned with giving ourselves wholeheartedly to the one who gave himself for us.

v. 6 **“He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief”** Judas' loud protests of concern for the poor are only a cover for his own self-serving greed. Such self-interest (even in ourselves!) is often cloaked under a mask of superficial piety. Perhaps this example should make us wary of those who boast of their own sensitivity toward the poor in order to persuade us to part with our money.

vv. 7-8 **“Leave her alone . . . It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial”** Jesus comes to Mary's defense, revealing that her act of devotion has been in fact a preparation for Jesus' upcoming burial. There is no evidence that Mary had this in mind, but in the sovereignty of God her actions had a significance beyond what she knew.

“You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.” Jesus is not advocating that we display a callous indifference to the poor and needy; in fact, he states elsewhere that our treatment of such is evidence of the genuineness of our faith (Mt. 25:31-46). But he is asserting that he is worthy to receive Mary's gift. His response reminds us that acts of service do not necessarily take precedence over acts of pure worship (see Lk. 10:41-42). There will always be enough human needs for us to justify our failure to worship Christ, on the grounds that all of our time and resources are being expended in serving people. But this betrays an attitude which devalues not only worship, but also the worthiness of our Savior (Rev. 4:11; 5:12-14).

v. 11 **“on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him”** The greatest testimony for the Christian faith has always been the evidence of new life in those whom Jesus has transformed. It is not our words alone, but the resurrection life of Jesus Christ which others see in us, that attracts them to the Savior.

vv. 12-13 In Hebrew, Hosanna literally meant “save us now,” but over time it had become a general term of praise. The cry, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” is taken from Psalm 118:25-26. It was a part of the Hallel (Ps.

113-118), which was sung every year during the Feasts of Tabernacles, Dedication and Passover. In fact, even the waving of branches during the singing of the “Hosanna” had become traditional, similar to our tradition of standing during the singing of the Hallelujah chorus.

Clearly, the crowd is applying the Psalm to Jesus in a Messianic sense, as the next sentence reveals, “Blessed is the king of Israel!” Just as in 6:15, and just as the Sanhedrin had feared (11:48), Jesus was being received by acclamation as the promised Messiah, the God-anointed king from the line of David (see notes on 1:41).

vv. 14-15 **“Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it”** The fact that Jesus chooses a donkey, a symbol of humility and peace, for his mount indicates that he does not accept the political and military expectations which the crowd has of the Messiah, i.e., that he would immediately lead them in a military victory against their Roman oppressors. It also identifies him as the Messianic king, “righteous and having salvation,” who was prophesied in Zech. 9:9. Concerning this king, Zechariah goes on to prophesy:

*He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of
the earth.*

*As for you, because of the blood of my
covenant with you,
I will free your prisoners from the
waterless pit.*

(Zech. 9:10-11)

The reign of Jesus was inaugurated at his resurrection (Acts 2:29-36), and will be consummated when he returns to earth again; this time as a conquering warrior who will rout the forces of the enemy and establish an everlasting and universal kingdom of peace (Isa. 9:7).

v. 16 **“At first his disciples did not understand all this”** John reminds us again (see 2:22) that the full significance of Jesus' words and actions was not understood by even his closest companions until after the resurrection.

v. 19 **“Look how the whole world has gone after him!”** This is another case in which the characters in this gospel speak better than they know. The Pharisees mean “the whole world” as a hyperbole, i.e. a huge number of people. But in fact Jesus did come to save the whole world, i.e. people from out of the whole world, without distinction as to racial or ethnic identity (see notes on 3:16).

Unit 16 – Jesus Predicts His Death

John 12:20-50

Text

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

²³ Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

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

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

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

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

³⁵ Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. ³⁶ Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

³⁷ Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not

believe in him. ³⁸ This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet:

“Lord, who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord
been revealed?”^b

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

⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their hearts,
so they can neither see with their eyes,
nor understand with their hearts,
nor turn—and I would heal them.”^c

⁴¹ Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him.

⁴² Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved human praise more than praise from God.

⁴⁴ Then Jesus cried out, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. ⁴⁵ The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

⁴⁷ “If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. ⁴⁸ There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. ⁴⁹ For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. ⁵⁰ I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”

^a 12:32 The Greek for *lifted up* also means *exalted*.

^b 12:38 Isaiah 53:1

^c 12:40 Isaiah 6:10

Open

- What is one thing you would attempt if you knew you could not fail?

Discover

1. How does the request of the Greeks to see Jesus signal a turning point in his ministry? (vv. 20-24; see also Romans 11:11-12).

2. What is the principle Jesus is expressing in his statement concerning the kernel of wheat? (v. 24)

3. How does this principle apply to Jesus?

4. How does it apply to Jesus' followers? (v. 25)

5. What was the purpose for which Jesus became a man? (v. 27)

6. What was the effect of Jesus' death and resurrection on Satan and his kingdom?

John 12:31

John 16:11

Colossians 1:13

Colossians 2:15

7. What two reasons does John give to explain the widespread unbelief of the Jewish people?

vv. 37-38

vv. 39-41 (see also Romans 11:7-8)

8. Some respond to the doctrine of God's sovereignty in salvation by claiming that God is unfair to save some and not others. How does the apostle Paul answer this charge in Romans 9:14-21?

Apply

Give some examples of what it means to "love" and to "hate" your life in this world. What benefits have you seen from "hating" your life?

How should the knowledge that Satan is a defeated foe affect us?

Have you ever been tempted to hide your faith, as some of the leaders did? (v. 42) Why?

Commentary

- v. 20 **“Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival”** These are not necessarily natives of Greece; the term “Greeks” in the New Testament can refer to any Gentiles from the Greek-speaking world. They may have been converts to Judaism, or they may have been uncircumcised God-fearers (as Cornelius; Acts 10). The fact that they are seeking Christ demonstrates that indeed the “whole world” is going after him (v. 19); both Jews (v. 11) and Gentiles (see also 1 Cor. 1:24, 12:13; Gal. 3:28).
- v. 23 **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”** Jesus' response shows that he views this event as a turning point; a signal that the final countdown to his death and resurrection has begun. For it will be Jesus' death on the cross, the final expression of his rejection by the Jewish nation, which will open the way for Gentiles such as these to become children of God (see Acts 13:46; Rom. 11).
The fact that the Gentiles are now seeking him, while the Jews are intensifying their efforts to kill him, indicates that the time during which his ministry is to be directed only to the Jews has ceased (Mt. 10:5-6, 15:24). His gaze is now fixed on the cross, after which there will be “no Gentile or Jew . . . but Christ [who] is all and is in all” (Col. 3:11; see 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Gal. 3:28).
- v. 24 **“unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds”** Jesus' words reveal that the death he will soon suffer is not optional, but necessary. There is no other way for him to multiply his life, no other path to fruitfulness than that which leads through the graveyard (see Mt. 26:39; Mk. 8:31; Lk. 9:22; 24:7, 26; Jn. 3:14-15). Just as a grain of wheat must be buried and undergo decomposition in order to germinate and produce a stalk of wheat bearing multiple new grains, so also Jesus must give his own life in order to bring “many sons to glory” (Heb. 2:10).
- v. 25 **“Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life”** The principle that life must be obtained through death applies as well to those who would follow Christ. Only those who deny themselves and “take up [their] cross” (Mk. 8:34), those who voluntarily give up their rights and who regard what this sinful world can offer as “garbage” (Phil. 3:7-11) will receive eternal life (see Rom. 6:1-14). In contrast, those whose overriding goal is to gain for themselves what this world calls life—wealth, power, and pleasure—will in the end lose everything (see Lk. 12:13-21).
- v. 27 **“Now my soul is troubled”** The word used here (Gr. *tarassō*, as in 11:33) indicates a deep agony of spirit; Jesus is repelled and horrified as he contemplates the kind of death that he must experience. Thus, it may be that the next sentence should be read, not as a hypothetical prayer, but as a real one: “*Father, save me from this hour!*” In any case, the possibility of avoiding the cross is immediately rejected by Jesus as he yields himself to the Father's will (see 6:38; Mk. 14:36).
“It was for this very reason I came to this hour” Jesus' death on the cross was the primary purpose for his coming; it did not happen because God's plan had failed, but because it had succeeded. Without a substitutionary sacrifice for sins, nothing else in Jesus' life and ministry would have any saving benefit, for “*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*” (Heb. 9:22).
- v. 28 **“I have glorified it, and will glorify it again”** The Father had glorified Jesus through the miracles he performed, and would glorify it again through his death and resurrection (see notes on 1:14, 11:4).
- vv. 29-30 **The crowd . . . said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine”** This presents a problem: if the crowd did not understand what they heard, how could it have been for their benefit? First, although they did not understand the message, at least part of the crowd grasped that something supernatural was happening. This should have alerted them to pay special attention. Second, the benefit was not necessarily immediate. The message would be of great help after the crucifixion, assuring Jesus' followers and others that his death was not a defeat but a divinely-ordained glorification.
- v. 31 **“Now is the time for judgment on this world”** The final judgment will take place in the future (Jn. 3:18-21; 5:22-30). But there is also a sense in which God has already judged the world, by allowing men to fully express their rebellion and crucify the “Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8), thus filling up the full measure of their sins and storing up wrath for themselves (see Rom. 1:21-24, 2:5; 1 Th. 2:16).
Jesus' resurrection also represents another kind of judgment—the defeat of the spiritual forces controlling this world: “*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*” (Col. 2:15). Thus, the “prince of this world” (Satan) was “driven out”. His power over mankind, the power of sin and death, was broken, and he now stands condemned (Jn. 16:11; Rom. 16:20).

However, although he is a defeated foe and has no authority over those who belong to Christ (Eph. 2:1-2; Col. 1:13), Satan continues to war against believers (Eph. 6:11-18). He remains active, under the restraint of the Holy Spirit, until Christ returns and full consequences of the victory won at the cross are realized (see 2 Thess. 2:1-10).

- v. 32 ***“I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself”*** Jesus will be “lifted up,” both in the physical sense of being hung on a cross and in the spiritual sense of being exalted or glorified. In fact, the two senses are related, because the crucifixion itself will be the means of his glorification (Phil. 2:8-9; see Isa. 52:13).
When Jesus’ suffering and exaltation have taken place, then he will draw “all men” to himself. “All people” in this case means “both Jews and Gentiles”, i.e., all men without racial or ethnic distinction. This can be seen from the context, in that Jesus’ monologue in vv. 23-32 is a response to the fact that the Gentiles are now coming to him (v. 20). [See also Jn. 6:44.]
- v. 34 ***“We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up?’”*** The crowd is having difficulty reconciling Jesus’ talk of death with their expectation that the Messianic king and kingdom would be eternal (Ps. 72:17, 89:35-37; Isa. 9:7; Ez. 37:25). They have not yet made the connection between the Messiah as a reigning monarch and as a suffering servant (Isa. 52:13-53:12).
- v. 36 ***“Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light”*** The phrase “children of” is an expression meaning “emulating the qualities of.” Thus, the children of light are those who by faith take on the qualities of the light of the world, Jesus Christ (see 1 Thess. 5:5; Eph. 5:8).
- vv. 37-38 ***“Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet:”*** If Jesus really is the promised Messiah, how can the wide-scale unbelief of the Jewish people be explained? John’s answer is that God was not surprised by their response; in fact, it was part of His plan, revealed beforehand. God had foretold, through the prophet Isaiah, that the message would be rejected; thus, a response of unbelief was necessary to fulfill prophecy (Isa. 53:1; see Rom. 10:16). From the point of view of God’s sovereignty, they could not have done otherwise (see v. 39).

- vv. 39-40 ***“For this reason they could not believe”*** If vv. 37-38 explain the unbelief of the Jews in terms of prophetic fulfillment, vv. 39-40 explain it in terms of moral inability. The Jews do not believe because they cannot believe, and they cannot believe because God has “blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts” (referring to Isa. 6:10; see also Dt. 29:3-4; Mt. 13:13-15; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10; Acts 28:25-27; Rom. 9:14-21, 11:7-8).

It is important to note that God’s sovereignty in salvation does not in any way diminish man’s responsibility. While it is true that all men in their natural condition are morally unable to repent and believe, it is also true that those who reject Christ willfully choose to do so; they are not only unable, but also unwilling to believe. It is not as though God is preventing those who wish to come to Christ from doing so; for, apart from the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, men do not desire to repent and believe (Rom. 3:9-12).

- v. 41 ***“Isaiah . . . saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him”*** It is not clear what is meant by the statement that Isaiah saw Jesus’ (literally, “his”) glory; it may mean that the vision of Isa. 6:1-13 was a theophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of the second person of the Trinity. In any case, it indicates that Isaiah’s prophecy had a dual fulfillment, first in his own ministry, and later in the ministry of Jesus Christ, of which Isaiah’s ministry was a type (see notes on 5:39-40).
- vv. 44-45 ***“Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me”*** This repeats one of the major themes of John’s gospel; that Jesus, in his person and works, is the supreme revelation of God, so that belief in him and belief in God are one and the same (see also Mt. 10:40; Mk. 9:37; Lk. 10:16; Jn. 1:14, 18; 5:23, 37-38; 13:20; 14:9; 15:21).
- vv. 47-48 ***“If anyone hears my words but does not keep them . . . the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.”*** Jesus is referring to those who, after hearing the words of Christ, reject him. Such persons will be condemned based on the light which they had, but rejected (see 3:19-20).
- vv. 49-50 ***“For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken”*** The reason why Jesus’ words must be taken seriously, and why disregarding them leads to condemnation, is that they are the very words of God (see 5:19; 14:31).

Unit 17 – Jesus Washes His Disciples’ Feet

John 13:1-38

Text

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

²The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

⁷Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

⁸“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

⁹“Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”

¹⁰Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” ¹¹For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

¹²When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. ¹³“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

¹⁸“I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: ‘He who shared my bread has turned ^aagainst me.’^b

¹⁹“I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. ²⁰Very truly I tell you, whoever

accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.”

²¹After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, “Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.”

²²His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. ²³One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. ²⁴Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, “Ask him which one he means.”

²⁵Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?”

²⁶Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

So Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” ²⁸But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. ²⁹Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. ³⁰As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

³¹When he was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³²If God is glorified in him, ^cGod will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

³³“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

³⁴“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

³⁶Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where are you going?”

Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.”

³⁷Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”

³⁸Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!

^a 13:18 Greek *has lifted up his heel*

^b 13:18 Psalm 41:9

^c 13:32 Many early manuscripts do not have *If God is glorified in him*.

Open

Which of your household chores do you dislike the most?

Who does the majority of the unpleasant chores in your household?

Discover

1. How did Jesus show his disciples the “full extent of his love”? (v. 1)

2. What principle of leadership is illustrated by Jesus washing the disciples' feet? (see Mark 10:24-25)

3. What does Jesus mean by the statement, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me”? (v. 8)

4. How does Peter misunderstand? (v. 9)

5. What do you understand Jesus to be commanding in vv. 12-17? What reason does he give?

6. In what way is Judas' betrayal of Jesus a (typological) fulfillment of Psalm 41:9? (see commentary)

7. What does Jesus' command to Judas (v. 27) reveal about who is really in control? (see 10:18)

8. How does Jesus' death glorify God? (vv. 31-32; see 17:4-5; Philippians 2:8)

9. According to Jesus, what should be the distinguishing mark of his followers? (vv. 34-35)

Apply

How is your relationship with Christ like or unlike John's? (see vv. 23-25)

How do you intend to follow Christ's example (v. 15) or obey his command (v. 43) this week?

In light of the fact that all believers have been commissioned as Christ's representatives (John 17:18; see Matthew 28:19-20), how do you react to Jesus' statement in verse 20?

Commentary

- v. 1 ***“It was just before the Passover Festival”*** The fact that the washing of the disciples' feet takes place as the Passover meal is about to begin points to the common significance of the two events. Just as the Passover represents the work of Jesus, the true Passover lamb, who “takes away the sin of the world” by his death on the cross (1:29; see notes on 6:4, 12:1), so also the foot-washing represents the washing away of sins (see vv. 6-9).
- v. 2 ***“the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot . . . to betray Jesus”*** The humility which Jesus displayed in washing the disciples' feet is even more striking when we consider that one of those whom he served in this way was Judas, whom he knew would betray him (v. 11). The fact that Judas' plot was prompted by the devil, and that it fulfilled prophecy, does not reduce Judas own responsibility; in Jesus' words, “It would be better for him if he had not been born” (Mt. 26:23-24). Ironically, the death of Christ, although instigated by Satan, took place according to God's “deliberate plan and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23), and was the cause of Satan's ultimate defeat (Col. 2:15).
- v. 3 ***“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power”*** Jesus served, not out of weakness, but out of strength. Although he was fully God, he voluntarily “made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness . . . he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:7-8). Thus, Jesus illustrates the principle that the path to greatness is the path of humility and service (see Mk. 10:42-45; Lk. 22:24-27).
- v. 6 ***“Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”*** Peter's incredulous response testifies to the extreme self-abasement of Jesus' action. Foot-washing was the most menial of tasks, usually performed by servants, rarely by equals, and never by a superior. What Jesus was doing was simply unthinkable, a complete reversal of what the disciples expected. Thus, they did not understand it, nor the atoning death to which it pointed, until after the resurrection (v. 7; see 2:22; 12:16; 16:13; 20:9).
- v. 8 ***“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me”*** Jesus is not referring merely to the physical act of foot-washing, but to the spiritual cleansing which it represents. Unless we have been cleansed of our sin by Jesus, we have no real connection with him, nor any claim on the eternal inheritance of children of God (Jn. 1:12; see Rom. 8:16-17; Gal. 3:26-29, 4:7).
- v. 10 ***“Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean”*** There are two main ways to interpret this statement. The first relies on a shorter reading found in some early manuscripts, making the statement read, “A person who has had a bath does not need to wash; his whole body is clean.” In this view, Jesus is emphasizing that the complete cleansing from sin represented by the foot-washing is a once-for-all experience which does not need to be repeated.
- In the other view, Jesus is moving on to make a new point, based on a secondary significance in the foot-washing. Whereas in vv. 6-8 the foot-washing represented the objective fact of the once-for-all cleansing from sins which Christ accomplished through his death, in v. 10 it represents the experience of daily cleansing from sins in the life of the believer (see 1 Jn. 1:9-2:2).
- “you are clean, though not every one of you”*** All of the disciples, with the exception of Judas, had at this point been cleansed from their sins (see 15:3). In every age, the *basis* of salvation has been the atoning death of Jesus Christ, the *means* of salvation has been faith, and the *object* of faith has been God and His revelation. However, the *content* of that revelation has differed. Thus, although the disciples did not yet understand the nature of Christ's (still future) atonement, their response of faith to the revelation they had received was sufficient for salvation.
- v. 14 ***“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”*** Jesus' act of foot-washing was in a sense unique, in that it represented the cleansing from sin provided through his death. It was also, however, an example of love and humility for his followers to imitate (see vs. 1).
- Some would elevate this practice to the same status as baptism and the Lord's Supper, teaching that we ought to continue the act of foot-washing itself. However, there is no other mention of foot-washing in Scripture, except as simply a good deed (1 Tim. 5:10), while baptism and the Lord's Supper are clearly attested as ordinances commanded by Christ and practiced by the early church (Mt. 26:26-30; 28:19; Mk. 14:22-26; Lk. 22:14-20; Acts 2:38-41; 1 Cor. 1:23-26). In addition, foot-washing no longer has the practical purpose which it did in first century Palestine, when dirt roads and open sandals were the norm. Thus, it seems better to understand Jesus' words to mean that we ought to imitate his love and humility in serving one another, not that we should imitate this specific act.

- v. 18 ***“But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: ‘He who shared my bread has turned against me’*** Judas' betrayal came as no surprise to Jesus (see v. 11; 6:70); in fact, it was a fulfillment of Old Testament scripture. The text referred to is Ps. 41:9, in which David laments the fact that his close friend has turned against him. The fulfillment is not prophetic, but typological. Many of the events and themes of David's life foreshadowed, or anticipated, the life of Christ. Thus, Christ's experience of being betrayed by a close associate was a typological fulfillment, or antitype, of the pattern established by David's experience.
- v. 19 ***“I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am”*** Jesus' purpose in sharing this information with his disciples is to prepare them in advance, so that after he is betrayed and crucified, they will remember and believe that he is Yahweh God, the “I Am” of the Old Testament (see notes on 8:24; also Jn. 12:16; 13:7; 20:9).
- v. 20 ***“Whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me”*** Jesus continues to prepare his disciples for their future ministry by revealing that those he commissions are his true representatives, just as he is of God the Father. Thus, to accept or reject his messengers is to accept or reject him (see 20:21; also Mt. 10:40; Mk. 9:37; Lk. 10:16).
- v. 23 ***“the disciple whom Jesus loved”*** The author of this gospel (Jn. 20:20, 24), most likely John the son of Zebedee, one of the Twelve. Perhaps John avoids identifying himself directly in order to steer away from any appearance of self-exaltation or pride (see also Jn. 19:26; 20:2). The purpose of the designation “whom Jesus loved,” then, is not to imply that he was more beloved than the other disciples. Rather, it was a way of describing his relationship with Jesus which put all the emphasis on God's grace, rather than himself (see 1 Jn. 4:19).
- v. 25 ***“Leaning back against Jesus”*** John was next to Jesus, and, like the other participants in the meal, was “reclining,” i.e., lying on the floor propped up on an elbow (v. 23). Therefore, the easiest way for him to speak to Jesus was to lay his head back until it literally rested on Jesus' chest. In our own culture, most men would not be comfortable with such physical contact, but in that culture it reflected close, non-sexual, friendship.
- v. 26 ***“Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread’*** Jesus' answer to John must have been given quietly, since most of the disciples did not understand why Judas left (v. 28).
- v. 27 ***“As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him”*** Judas' acceptance of the bread, a symbol of friendship and trust, even while he is intending to betray Christ, exposes the depth of his treachery and the hardened condition of his heart. By willingly yielding to the devil's promptings (v. 2), he has opened himself up to increased Satanic influence: at this point, Satan takes direct control over his actions through personal indwelling.
- “What you are about to do, do quickly,”*** Even in the timing of his betrayal, Jesus is in control of his own destiny. No one takes his life from him; he lays it down voluntarily (Jn. 10:18). The fact that it was night when Judas went out (v. 30) tells us more than the time of day; it is an allusion to Judas' own spiritual darkness and the reign of evil which his betrayal inaugurates (Lk. 22:53).
- v. 31-32 ***“Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him”*** Judas' departure to retrieve the authorities sets in motion the final chain of events which will end in Jesus' return to his pre-incarnate glory, through the obedient act of dying on a cross (Jn. 12:23-28; 17:4-5; Phil. 2:8-9). This glorification of the Son is also a glorification of the Father who sent him (17:1).
- v. 33 ***“You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come”*** Although Jesus had given the Jewish leaders this same message (7:33-36; 8:21), the meaning here is considerably different. In the former case, the inability of the Jews to follow Jesus was permanent—they would die in their sin. However, in this case the inability to follow is temporary: Jesus is going ahead to prepare a place for his own (14:1-3), where they will follow him later (13:36).
- vv. 34-35 ***“A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”*** This commandment is not “new” due to being the first time that love for others had ever been prescribed (see Lv. 19:18; Mk. 12:28-33). Rather, it is “new” because it sums up and replaces the legal code of the Old Covenant (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14), and also because its standard is the love of Christ himself (“as I have loved you”), and it is thus dependent upon his power for fulfillment.
- In contrast to the casual attitude which believers sometimes display toward this matter, Jesus does not view love between Christians as of minor importance; on the contrary, it is the primary test of our obedience and the distinguishing mark of our identity to the world.

Unit 18 – Jesus Comforts His Disciples

John 14:1-31

Text

¹ “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God ^a; believe also in me. ² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.”

⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know ^b my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands.

¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be ^c in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as

orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”

²³ Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ “All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

²⁸ “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. ³⁰ I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, ³¹ but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

“Come now; let us leave.

^a 14:1 Or *Believe in God*

^b 14:7 Some manuscripts *If you really knew me, you would know*

^c 14:17 Some early manuscripts *and is*

Open

Have you ever been separated from a loved one, and then reunited? How did you feel when you were separated? Reunited?

When you feel “blue,” what do you find comforting and encouraging?

Discover

1. What does Jesus tell the disciples to calm their fears about his leaving? (vv. 1-3)

2. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the “way”? (vv. 4-6) How many “ways” are there?

3. How is Jesus the “truth”? The “life”? (v. 6)

4. According to vv. 8-11, how can we come to know God the Father?

5. To what extent does Jesus reveal the Father? (vv. 8-11; see John 1:14, 18; Hebrews 1:3)

6. How does this passage describe the relationship between Jesus and the Father? (vv. 10-11; see John 1:1; 10:30-33)

7. What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name? (v. 13; see 1 John 5:14) What will be the result?

8. Are there any other conditions on answered prayer? (see John 15:7, 16; 1 John 3:21-22)

9. What is the evidence of our love for Christ? (vv. 15, 21, 23)

10. What is the main “command” or “teaching” we are to obey? (John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:23-24; 2 John 6)

11. Who has Jesus sent to comfort and encourage believers? (vv. 16-17) Which believers receive this gift? (vv. 16-17; see Rom. 8:9)

12. How does Jesus describe our relationship with the Holy Spirit? (v. 17; see John 7:38)

Apply

How is the peace Jesus gives different from that which the world gives? (v. 27) How much of that peace are you experiencing right now?

How do you feel about the fact that God lives in you? (vv. 17, 23)

What statement in this passage do you find most encouraging? Most challenging?

Commentary

- v. 1 **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me”** Even though Jesus is deeply disturbed by the prospect of his crucifixion (13:21), his primary concern is not for himself, but for his disciples. He comforts them, not by denying or discounting the struggle they are about to undergo, but by inviting them to trust in God and in himself. God is worthy of our trust, and his grace is sufficient for us, even in the most difficult of circumstances (Ps. 46:1; 2 Cor. 12:9).
- vv. 2-3 **“My Father’s house has many rooms . . . I am going there to prepare a place for you . . . I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”** The basis for the disciples’ hope is Jesus’ promise that his separation from them will be temporary: he will someday return and take them to be with him in heaven, which he will make ready for them in advance (1 Cor. 15:20-23; 1 Th. 4:15-17; 2 Th. 2:1-12). The point of describing heaven as a “house” with many “rooms” is not architectural, but theological: there is ample room there for all of God’s people to dwell.
- v. 4 **“You know the way to the place where I am going”** Since Jesus himself is the way to heaven (v. 6), and the disciples know him, then they know the way there.
- v. 6 **“I am the way and the truth and the life”** Jesus’ answer to Thomas reveals that he does not merely *show* us the way to heaven; he himself *is* the way (see notes on 1:51). No one can attain heaven merely by following Jesus’ example, as if the “way” were to live the kind of ethical life Jesus lived, an impossibility (Rom. 3:10-20). We cannot enter heaven by virtue of our own works (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5), but only through union with Christ.
- Jesus is the way to heaven, and to God, because he is the truth: he is the perfect revelation of God to man (Jn. 1:14, 18; 8:32; 12:45; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3), both in what he does and in what he says (Jn. 5:19; 8:28; 14:9-10). He is also the life: he possesses life in himself and has the authority to give eternal life to others (Jn. 1:4; 5:26; 11:25; 1 Jn. 5:20)
- “No one comes to the Father except through me”** Now that Jesus had come, the former way of coming to God, through the Old Testament law and sacrificial system, was obsolete. From this point forward, no one could claim to know God apart from faith in Christ. In fact, those who rejected Christ demonstrated that they had not previously come to know God the Father (Jn. 5:37-47).
- v. 7 **“If you really know me, you will know my Father as well”** Many ancient manuscripts read *“If you really knew me, you would know my Father”*, which implies that the disciples do *not* know Jesus. However, if this were true, then Jesus’ disappointed reaction to Philip’s request (*“Don’t you know me, Philip?”* [v. 9]) would be hard to explain. Therefore, it seems better, as the NIV does, to adopt the reading found in other manuscripts, *“If you know me, you will know my Father as well,”* which implies that they do know Jesus, however incompletely, and that this will lead to a knowledge of God the Father. This reading also seems to fit better with the second part of v. 7, *“From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*
- vv. 8-9 **“Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us. Jesus answered: ‘Don’t you know me, Philip?’”** Although the disciples do know Jesus, they do not yet know him fully; they do not realize that he is the perfect revelation of God, and that seeing him is the same as seeing the Father (see notes on v. 6). Jesus’ response reveals his sadness at their lack of understanding.
- vv. 10-11 **“Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?”** This mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son is another way of describing their unity: they share one divine essence, but are two unique persons (see notes on 1:1; 10:30, 38). Therefore, Jesus can say that he does the will of the Father perfectly, not only because he knows the Father’s will and is obedient to it (5:19, 36; 8:28; 10:32, 37-38; 12:50; 15:10), but because the Father Himself is in Jesus, carrying out His will. The evidence of this is in “the miracles themselves,” which reveal not only Jesus’ power over nature, but also his identity as the divine Son of God.
- v. 12 **“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these”** The works which Jesus’ followers perform will match and even exceed his because they reveal the power and authority of the risen Christ (Phil. 2:9) and testify to the coming of the Messianic age. This age was inaugurated at Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension and will be fully realized when he returns to earth as conquering King.
- The works performed by Jesus’ followers, such as prevailing against the powers of darkness (Eph. 6:10-18) and bringing new life through the gospel to those spiritually dead (Jn. 20:21-23), are possible because Jesus has broken the power of sin and Satan through the cross (Col. 2:15). Their greatness lies not in their dramatic character or visible power, but in the greatness of the king and kingdom to which they bear witness (see Mt. 11:11).

- vv. 13-14 **“And I will do whatever you ask in my name”** The works performed by Jesus' followers (v. 12) will be done not through human power, but through the power of the risen Christ, in response to prayer. Such prayers will be answered when offered in Jesus' name, i.e., when they are consistent with his revealed will and purpose (1 Jn. 5:14), not merely when they contain the words, “in Jesus' name”. Answers to prayer are also closely related to obedience (v. 15; see also Jn. 15:7, 16; Js. 4:3; 1 Jn. 3:22).
- v. 15 **“If you love me, keep my commands”** Salvation invariably produces a change in behavior, motivated by love for Christ (see also vv. 21, 23-24). This obedience includes all of Jesus' teaching, but it is centered on faith in him and love for other believers: *“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them.”* (1 Jn. 3:23-24; see Mt. 7:21-23; Jn. 13:34-35; 15:12-14; 1 Jn. 2:3-11; 5:2-3; 2 Jn. 6).
- vv. 16-17 **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth”** To those who love him, and who therefore obey him (i.e. all believers, Rom. 8:9), Jesus will send the Holy Spirit, whom he describes as a *paraklētos*, literally, “one who is called alongside.” The Spirit is one who, in Jesus' stead, comes to the believer to strengthen, encourage, and exhort. He is the Spirit of Truth because he reveals Christ, who is the truth (15:26; 16:13-14; see 14:6).
The “world” (i.e., sinful mankind in rebellion against God) does not know, and cannot accept, the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14). In contrast, the Spirit is not only known to believers, but actually indwells them (see 7:38). Thus the Spirit, whose coming signals the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom (Acts 2:1-36), is the source of the power for the “greater things” done by Jesus' followers (see notes on v. 12).
- vv. 18-20 **“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you”** This refers to Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to the disciples. At that time, they will finally understand the divine unity of Christ and the Father, as well as their own spiritual union with Christ (see 17:20-26).
- v. 21 **“The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him”** Jesus is not saying that we earn God's love by obeying or loving Him (see Eph. 2:8-9), nor that we take the initiative in loving God, for John tells us elsewhere that “we love because he first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19; see Jn. 15:16). Rather, love and obedience are the distinguishing characteristics of those whom Jesus and the Father love—all believers (see v. 23; 16:27). To them, Jesus promises “I will . . . show myself” (“disclose myself” [NASV]). In other words, Jesus will make himself known to those who love and obey him.
- v. 23 **“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them”** The Father and the Son will not only love those who love and obey the Son (see vv. 15, 21), but will also come and dwell with them. This indwelling comes in the form of God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity (v. 17; Eph. 2:22), who is the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 3:17-18).
- v. 24 **“Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching”** However good and moral one may appear, if the motive for one's behavior is not love for Christ, it is not obedience, but the “filthy rags” of self-righteousness (Isa. 64:6).
- v. 26 **“the Holy Spirit . . . will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you”** Since the work of the Holy Spirit here is related to the words which Jesus spoke personally to the disciples, this promise is specifically for them, not for all believers at all times. It explains how, after the resurrection, the disciples came to fully understand the significance of the events of Jesus' life and the words which he spoke (2:22; 12:16). However, it is true that the Holy Spirit has a teaching ministry in the life of every believer (1 Cor. 2:12-16).
- v. 27 **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you . . . Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”** The peace which Jesus gives comes through the indwelling Holy Spirit who guards our hearts and minds in Christ (Phil. 4:6-7; see Rom. 14:17; Gal. 5:22; Col. 3:15). This peace is eschatological (from Gr. *eschatos*, or “last things”), in that it is a foretaste of the peace of the Messianic kingdom (Is. 9:6-7; Ezk. 37:26).
- v. 28 **“the Father is greater than I”** This does not mean that Jesus is something less than God; he is fully God and equal with God the Father (1:1, 18; 5:18; 10:30; 14:9-10; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:8). Two things may be in view here. First, Jesus is functionally subordinate to the Father, thus the Father is “greater,” in that the Son voluntarily submits to His will (Jn. 5:19-30; 8:28-29; 12:48-49). Also, the Father was greater in glory than the Son during Jesus' time on earth, until Jesus returned and regained his pre-incarnate glory (Jn. 17:5).

Unit 19 – The Vine and the Branches

John 15:1-16:4

Text

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes^a so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

²⁰ Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’^b If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’^c

²⁶ “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

¹ “All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. ² They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. ³ They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. ⁴ I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you,

^a 15:2 The Greek for *he prunes* also means *he cleans*.

^b 15:20 John 13:16

^c 15:25 Psalms 35:19; 69:4

Open

Who in your family has a green thumb? A brown one?

Does a day spent working in the garden or yard seem more like pleasure or punishment to you?

Discover

1. What does it mean for Jesus to call himself the “true vine”? (v. 1; see Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21)

2. What does it mean to 'remain' in Christ? (vv. 5-10)

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3. How does Jesus describe the two kinds of “branches” in v. 2? What is the meaning of this figurative language? (For help, see John 6:37; 8:31; 10:28-29; 1 John 2:5-6, 2:19; Hebrews 12:1-11.)

Branch 'A'

What characterizes this 'branch'?

What people does this 'branch' represent?

What happens to this 'branch'?

What happens to these people?

Branch 'B'

What characterizes this 'branch'?

What people does this 'branch' represent?

What happens to this 'branch'?

What happens to these people?

4. Is it possible for someone who knows Christ as Savior not to 'remain' in him? Why or why not? (see John 5:24; 6:37-39; 10:28-29; also, Romans 8:35-39 and 1 Corinthians 1:8-9)

5. What are the results of remaining in Christ? What do they reveal about us? (vv. 5-8)

6. What is the “fruit” that Jesus' disciples will bear? (vv. 8, 16; see Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 1:10; Hebrews 13:15)

7. What does Jesus mean when he says that the Twelve did not choose him? (v. 16; see 6:44)

8. How will the 'world' react to Jesus' disciples? Why? (vv. 18-21; see 16:3; 1 John 3:12-13)

Apply

What life experiences do you look back on as 'pruning' experiences?

What can we do to more fully experience fellowship with Christ, our life-giving “vine”?

How well 'connected' to Christ do you feel right now?

Commentary

v. 1 ***"I am the true vine"*** Here, as earlier in John's gospel, "true" signifies that Christ fulfills the limited revelation of the Old Testament (see notes on 1:9, "true light," and 6:32, "true bread"). Thus, as the vine was an Old Testament symbol for Israel (Ps. 80:8-18; Isa. 5:1-7, 27:2-3; Je. 2:21, 12:10; Ezk. 15:1-8, 17:1-21, 19:10-14; Ho. 10:1-2), so now Jesus, the sole mediator between God and man (Jn. 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5), has superseded Israel as the center of God's dealings with mankind. It is no longer through incorporation into Israel, but through union with Christ, that we become children of God. In contrast to Israel, whose disobedience and failure is emphasized in the above passages, Jesus is the faithful vine who produces good fruit.

v. 2 ***"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit"*** Thus, these branches are people who have some association with Christ (as Judas did), but who have never come to know him as Savior (see notes on 8:31; see also 1 Jn. 2:19; Mt. 13:18-22; 24:12-13; Heb. 3:14; 2 Jn. 9). As the parable of the wheat and tares reveals, their "cutting off" will take place at the end of the age (see Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43).

Some have proposed that these "branches" are Christians who lose their salvation. However, these branches are cut off because they have borne "no fruit," while vs. 8 indicates that every true disciple produces fruit (see 14:15). In addition, other passages in John make clear that no one who possesses eternal life can ever be separated from Christ (see notes on Jn. 5:24, 6:37, 10:28-29).

"every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful" The Father disciplines, and through suffering purifies, every true disciple. He does this in order that we might increase in holiness, righteousness, and peace (Heb. 12:1-11; see Jas. 1:2-4).

vv. 4-5 ***"Remain in me, as I also remain in you"*** Our spiritual union with Christ is an objective fact which can never be undone; it is also a subjective experience which gives evidence of the objective reality. By remaining in Christ, i.e., by continuing in fellowship with him, obedience to him, and reliance upon him, we demonstrate that we are truly his disciples; and therefore we have the assurance that he will never leave us.

Thus Jesus states: *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples,"* and John asserts, *"This is how we know we are in him. Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did"* (Jn. 8:31 and 1 Jn. 2:5-6; see also 1 Jn. 2:10, 24; 3:6, 24; 2 Pet. 1:10-11). In contrast, those who fail to continue with Christ demonstrate that they never really knew him. As John writes elsewhere:

"They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us".
(1 Jn. 2:19; see also 2 Jn. 9)

It must be emphasized that persevering in faith, or "remaining" in Christ, does not earn salvation, nor does it keep us from losing our salvation. Our salvation is an eternally settled fact from the moment we trust in Christ. Rather, perseverance is the evidence that such a change has taken place. We must also remember that the strength to continue in faith does not come from ourselves, but from Christ, and that he has promised we will continue (see notes on 8:31; also Jn. 10:27-30; 17:11-12; Rom. 8:35-39; 1 Cor. 1:8-9; Phil. 1:6). Thus, if we have trusted in Christ, we should not worry that we will fail to persevere, but rather rely on him to do in and through us what he has promised.

"No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine" This is the central idea behind the metaphor of the vine and the branches: that our spiritual life derives wholly from Christ. Thus any "fruitfulness," or manifestations of spiritual life, depend on our remaining in close and vital fellowship with him, and this in turn depends on obedience (v. 10). Lacking this ongoing union with Christ, we can do "nothing" of any true value (v. 5).

But what is the "fruit" that we bear? Is it converts (Rom. 1:13) or Christlike character (Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 5:9; Phil. 1:11) or good works (Col. 1:10) or worship (Heb. 13:15)? In fact, it is all of these things, and more. The fruit we bear for Christ is everything which springs from our relationship with him, such as love (vv. 9, 16-17), obedience (v. 10), and joy (v. 11).

v. 6 ***"If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned"*** Jesus' threat of fiery judgment applies to all those who reject him, including his own people, the Jews (Mt. 8:11-12, 13:37-42; see Ezk. 15:1-8; Heb. 10:26-27).

vv. 7-8 ***"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you"*** If we are living in obedient fellowship with Christ (vv. 9-10) and his teachings are guiding our mind, heart, and will, then our prayers will be answered, because we ask with the proper motives and for those things which are in accordance with his will (1 Jn. 3:22; notes on 14:13-14). This glorifies God and reveals that we are truly Christ's disciples.

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- vv. 9-10 **“Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love”** Although Christ's love for us is unchanging and unconditional, our subjective experience of it depends upon our remaining in obedient fellowship with him. It is then that, having been “rooted and established in love,” we will come to understand “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,” and will “know this love that surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:17-19).
- vv. 12-13 **“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you”** The command to love one another as Christ loved us (see Jn. 13:34) is amplified by v. 13; such love is willing to sacrifice for the one loved, even to the point of giving up one's life. The emphasis on loving one another as our primary Christian duty does not mean that we should be unconcerned with loving God. On the contrary, love for others is evidence of love for God; each requires the other (1 Jn. 4:11-21).
- v. 14-15 **“You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business”** We do not become Jesus' friends through obedience; rather, obedience is what characterizes Jesus' friends (i.e. believers). Although in a sense we are servants of Christ, (v. 20; Rom. 6:22; 1 Cor. 7:22), our relationship with him differs from that of a servant: while a servant is merely given commands to obey, we are given the reasons behind those commands.
- v. 16 **“You did not choose me, but I chose you”** Although the Twelve did in a sense choose Jesus, his prior choice of them was primary and determinative; they merely responded to his call. Thus, they enjoyed intimate friendship with Christ (vv. 14-15), not because of their own wisdom in choosing him, but solely on account of his electing grace and mercy.
- vv. 18-19 **“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you”** Through the warnings in this passage (15:18-16:4), Jesus seeks to prepare his disciples for the persecution they will face after his departure, so that they will not become confused by it and go astray (16:1, 4). Having become united with Christ, they are now aliens in a world in active rebellion against God. In the same way, we are hated because we bear the name of Christ (v. 21), and because our righteous conduct exposes the world's evil (3:20; 7:7; 1 Jn. 3:12-13). As Paul puts it, as far as the world is concerned, we stink!
- “For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life” (2 Cor. 2:15-16).*
- This is true only because Christ has chosen us “out of the world” (v. 19), since at one time, “like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath” (Eph. 2:3).
- v. 20 **“A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also”** It should not surprise us when we are mistreated by the world, because this is how it treated Christ (see Mt. 10:17-25; Mk. 13:9-13). Since the world did not obey Jesus' teaching, neither will it obey that of his disciples. This does not mean that no one will respond to the gospel, but that only those whom God has called out of the world will respond (6:44; Eph. 2:1-10).
- vv. 22-24 **“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin”** This does not mean that if Jesus had not come they would have had no sin whatsoever; rather, they would not have been guilty of the supreme sin of rejecting the revelation of God in Jesus' words and works. By revealing himself so clearly, Jesus provoked their equally clear and decisive response of hatred, which eliminated any pretense that they loved God (3:19). Increased revelation, if not received in faith, only increases guilt (Mt. 11:20-24; Lk. 11:31-32; Heb. 10:26-31).
- v. 25 **“But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'”** Just as David was hated by his enemies (Ps. 69:4), so also was Christ, in typological fulfillment of David's experience (see notes on 13:18).
- v. 26 **“the Spirit . . . who goes out from the Father”** This “going out from the Father” does not refer to the Spirit's being, but to his mission. In other words, it refers to the fact that God the Holy Spirit is sent into the world by the God the Father, just as God the Son was sent (Jn. 5:23). His purpose is not to draw attention to himself, but to testify about Christ, a work he fulfills through us as we witness to Christ (v. 27).
- v. 16:2 **“the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God”** Ever since the resurrection of Christ, there have been misguided people who sought to kill his servants, thinking that they were honoring God by doing so. Zeal, sincerity and good intentions are not enough. Unless guided by a knowledge of the truth, they produce death, not life.

Unit 20 – The Work of the Holy Spirit

John 16:5-33

Text

⁵ but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'
⁶ Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. ⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

¹² "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

¹⁶ Jesus went on to say, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me."

¹⁷ At this, some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" ¹⁸ They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying."

¹⁹ Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a

little while you will see me'?" ²⁰ Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. ²¹ A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. ²² So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. ²³ In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ²⁴ Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

²⁵ "Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. ²⁷ No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸ I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."

²⁹ Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. ³⁰ Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God."

³¹ "Do you now believe?" Jesus replied. ³² "A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.

³³ "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Open

How would you describe your relationship with your father when you were growing up? Now?

How do you think your relationship with your father has affected your relationship with God?

Discover

1. Why was it better for Jesus to "go away"? (v. 7)

2. What is the Spirit's ministry toward the "world"? (vv. 8-11)

3. What events is Jesus referring to in vv. 16-22?

4. What kind of relationship do we now have with God the Father? What is the basis of this relationship? (vv. 23-27; see Ephesians 2:18; 3:12)

5. What is the source of peace for a believer? How does this differ from the source(s) of the world's peace? (v. 33; see 14:26-27)

6. What do you think Jesus means when he says, "I have overcome the world"? (v. 33)

7. Topical Study: What are some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit ministers to believers?

Romans 8:2; 2 Corinthians 3:17	1 Corinthians 2:12-13
Romans 8:13	1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:3-4
Romans 8:26-27	Galatians 5:22-23
Romans 14:17; 15:13	Ephesians 3:16

Apply

How would you describe the Spirit's role in bringing people to Christ? How does this fit with our role?

How does your view of God affect your prayers?

Which of the Spirit's ministries have you experienced recently?

Commentary

v. 5 **“None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’** It is difficult to reconcile this with 13:36 and 14:5. Perhaps Jesus means that, although they had earlier been asking him such questions, they now were so saddened at their own loss (v. 6) that they no longer cared where he was going and had stopped asking. Or perhaps he means that, although they were asking such questions, their real intent was not to learn about his destination, but to protest the fact that he was leaving them.

vv. 6-7 **“... it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you”** However blessed it was to live and fellowship with Jesus during his earthly ministry, the experience available to his disciples since the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) is even greater. For now Jesus not only lives *with* us, he actually dwells *in* us all the time through his Spirit (14:17; Rom. 8:9).

The Spirit's ministry to believers includes, first, the new birth (Jn. 3:5-8), regeneration (Titus 3:5), and baptism into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). Following those things: peace, joy, and hope (Rom. 8:6; 14:17; 15:13; 1 Th. 1:6); an inner witness that we are children of God (Rom. 8:15-16); freedom from the Law (Rom 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:17); understanding of spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:12-13); guidance (Rom. 8:14); inner strength and the power to resist sin (Rom 8:13; Eph. 3:16); growth in Christian character (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:22-23); access to God and help in prayer (Rom. 8:27; Eph. 2:18, 6:18); unity with other believers and gifts of ministry to build them up in Christ (1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 2:22, 4:3-4, 4:12); and power for the work of the gospel (Acts 1:8).

These things are possible because the age of the Spirit, the messianic age, has been inaugurated in Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation (see Acts 2:17-21, 2:32-36).

vv. 8-11 **“When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment”** The Greek word rendered here as “prove . . . to be in the wrong” (*elenxei*) could also be read as “convict”, as in the ESV translation. This passage has been understood in various ways: that the Spirit will convict the world in a judicial sense by obtaining a verdict of “guilty” against it in God's courtroom; that He will bring about an acknowledgment of personal sin and guilt in the hearts of individuals; and that He will persuade the world of the truth about sin, righteousness, and judgment.

The latter alternatives seem most consistent with other New Testament uses of the verb *elenxei*, (see Mt. 18:15; 1 Cor. 14:24). Thus, the Holy Spirit will convict the world of its sin, pre-eminently the sin of unbelief; He will convict the world of the emptiness of its own righteousness and of its need for true righteousness (Is. 64:5; Mt. 5:20; Rom. 10:3), because Jesus is going to the Father and can no longer perform this ministry directly; and he will convict the world of the judgment which it deserves, the judgment which it will share with Satan, its “prince,” unless it repents (Mt. 25:41).

In other words, the Spirit will convict the world of the *sin* of which it is guilty, the *righteousness* which it lacks, and the *judgment* which it deserves, in order to bring about repentance, thus calling out of the world those who were formerly “by nature deserving of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). His ministry is not merely to convince people of the truth of the gospel, but to open their eyes to their own need of a savior.

vv. 12-13 **“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear”** The “much more” of v. 12 is parallel to “all the truth” in v. 13 and the “all things” of 14:26. It refers to the fullness of revelation which the Spirit will bring concerning the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, who himself is the perfect and complete revelation of God (Heb. 1:1-3; see vv. 14-15). It is probably best to see vv. 12-15 as primarily intended for the Eleven (the Twelve minus Judas), rather than for all believers at all times, since v. 12 makes reference to their personal capacity to absorb additional revelation, and also includes a promise to reveal the future: “he will tell you what is yet to come” (see 15:27; notes on 14:26).

vv. 14-15 **“He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.”** The purpose of the Spirit's ministry is not to bring honor and glory to himself, but to honor and glorify the Son (see 5:23). He will do this by continuing to unfold to the disciples the meaning and significance of Jesus' words and works, which in turn reveal the Father.

v. 16 **“In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me”** The time when the disciples will see Jesus no more is the time following his death; at this time they will “weep and mourn” (v. 20). A “little while” after that, he will be raised from the dead; then they will see him and rejoice (v. 22).

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- v. 20 **“you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices . . . but your grief will turn to joy”** As promised, when the risen Christ appeared to them, *“The disciples were glad”* (Jn. 20:20; see Lk. 24:41, 52). While the disciples mourned, the world, and Satan, the *“ruler of this world,”* (14:30) rejoiced. But the enemy's apparent triumph was actually a stunning defeat, for it was through death that Christ *“disarmed the rulers and authorities . . . triumphing over them in him”* (Col. 2:15). As it was then, so it will be when Christ returns: at a time when Satan seems to have the upper hand, Christ will come and utterly destroy him and his works (2 Thess. 2:3-8).
- vv. 21-22 Jesus illustrates his point with the figure of a woman in childbirth; her pain and suffering is changed into great joy when she sees the child. This figure echoes an Old Testament theme of the suffering that Israel will undergo prior to her eventual deliverance and the coming of the messianic age (Isa. 26:16-27:13; 66:7-24). This does not make the events surrounding Jesus' death a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, but it does suggest that the messianic age which Israel looked forward to has been inaugurated in the exaltation and reign of Jesus Messiah (Acts 2:33-36).
- vv. 23-24 **“In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name”** In “that day” (i.e., the time after the resurrection), Jesus' disciples will no longer make their requests of him, but will pray to the Father in his name. This does not mean that prayers to Christ are improper (see Jn. 14:14), but that we now have immediate access through Christ to God the Father, and thus may pray to him directly, confident that he hears and answers our prayers (Eph. 2:18, 3:12; Heb. 4:15-16; see notes on 14:13-14; 15:7-8).
- Our free access to God the Father is no trivial matter. Formerly, only the priests could approach God directly, and for them to do so in the wrong way meant death (Ex. 28:42-43; 30:20-21; Lev. 16:13; 22:3-9; Nu. 1:51; 4:15, 20; 18:22). But when Jesus died, the curtain in the temple, which separated the people from the presence of God, was torn in two, symbolizing the fact that we now have access to God through Christ (Mt. 27:51; Heb. 10:19-20).
- v. 25 **“a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father”** This promise was fulfilled during Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to the disciples, which took place over a period of forty days (Acts 1:3; see Lk. 24:27, 44-48; 1 Cor. 15:4-8). The Holy Spirit's continuing ministry of revelation to the apostles may also be in view here (see notes on 14:26).
- vv. 26-27 **“I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf”** Christ does indeed intercede for us before God, but his intercessory ministry does not consist of conveying to God our prayer requests; our prayers are heard by God himself. Rather, Christ's intercessory ministry is related to our justification; it has to do with defending us against any imputation of guilt. This defense is based on the atoning sacrifice of his own life, which he offered on our behalf and which renders us blameless before God (see Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1; Rev. 12:10).
- vv. 31-32 **“A time is coming and in fact has come, when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone”** Jesus is not impressed with his disciples' confident affirmation of faith (v. 30); he knows they will soon be tested and found wanting. Just as he predicted Peter's denial (13:38), he now predicts his abandonment by all of the disciples (see Mk. 14:27, 50).
- v. 33 **“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace”** The peace Jesus gives does not consist of being sheltered from all pain and trouble; in fact, Jesus explicitly states, “In this world you will have trouble.” The peace Jesus gives is not dependent on our circumstances, but flows from the fellowship we have with him through his Spirit (14:26-27).
- Thus, peace is not the absence of difficulty, but the ability to trust in God in the midst of both difficulty and ease (see Phil. 4:11-12). We are able to maintain this confidence because we know that Christ has overcome the world; he has conquered all the forces of sin, evil, and death, so that their eventual destruction is assured. We can rejoice in the midst of suffering because we know the final score, and we're on the winning side! We know that nothing can ever separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35-39).

Unit 21 – Jesus Prays For His Disciples

John 17:1-26

Text

¹ After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

⁶ “I have revealed you ^a to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of ^b your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by ^c that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

¹³ “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the

world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by ^d the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴ “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

²⁵ “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I have made you ^e known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

^a 17:6 Greek *your name*.

^b 17:11 Or *Father, keep them faithful to*

^c 17:12 Or *kept them faithful to*

^d 17:17 Or *them to live in accordance with*

^e 17:26 Greek *your name*

Open

Do you enjoy being in the spotlight, or do you prefer to work behind the scenes?

Do you feel that one of these alternatives is more 'spiritual' than the other? Why?

Discover

1. From whom did Jesus seek glory? For what purpose? (v. 1; see 8:50, 54; 13:31-32)

2. To whom does Jesus give eternal life? (v. 2; see vv. 6, 9, 24; Jn. 6:37)

3. What is eternal life? - In your own words, paraphrase the meaning of Jesus' statement in vs. 3.

4. For whom is Jesus praying in this passage? For whom is he not praying? (vv. 6, 9, 20)

5. What does Jesus ask the Father on behalf of his disciples?

vv. 11, 15

vv. 21-23

vv. 17, 19

v. 24

6. What is Jesus asking the Father to protect his disciples from? What will be the result? (vv. 11-12, 15; see John 10:27-29; Romans 8:38-39)

7. In your own words, what does it mean to be “in” the world, but not “of” the world? (vv. 14-17; see 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 1 John 2:15-16)

8. If the primary meaning of “sanctify” is to “set apart” for God's use (see commentary), then what is Jesus asking the Father for in vv. 17-18?

9. What kind of unity is Jesus praying for in vv. 20-23? What does this kind of unity look like?

Apply

How well do you see the unity Jesus prayed for being lived out in your own church? What can you do to influence this?

How does the knowledge that Jesus was praying for you (v. 20) affect your attitude toward the Christian life?

How does this passage influence your attitude toward involvement with the “world”?

What does this passage teach us about prayer?

Commentary

- v. 1 ***“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that your Son may glorify you”***
Jesus did not seek or accept glory from men; he sought it from God the Father, in order that he might reflect the glory he received back to the Father and they be glorified together (Jn. 5:41, 44; 7:18; 8:50, 54; 11:4; 12:23; 13:31-32). The supreme example of this mutual glorification came in Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation to the right hand of the Father (see v. 5; Acts 2:29-36; Phil. 2:9-10).
The fact that these events were foreordained by the sovereign will of God (see Mt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; Acts 2:23, 3:18, 4:28) did not prevent Jesus from praying that they would take place. God's promise to do something does not eliminate the need for prayer, but instead guarantees that prayer will be effective.
- v. 2 ***“For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him”***
The authority over mankind which Jesus possesses was given to him by the Father as part of the plan of redemption, in which the Son was appointed to die as an atonement for sins, and we were chosen for eternal life in him. All this took place “before the creation of the world” (Eph. 1:4; see Mt. 18:18; Jn. 5:21-27). Note that although Jesus has authority over “all people,” he gives life only to those whom the Father has “given him,” i.e., the elect (vv. 6, 9, 24; see notes on 6:37, 44).
- v. 3 ***“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”***
Eternal life is a gift which cannot be obtained apart from a relationship with the giver. It is something which we possess by virtue of our personal knowledge of Christ, for he himself is life and the source of life (Jn. 1:4; 11:25; 14:6; 20:31; Col. 3:3-4). This life is eternal because we can never be separated from him (see Rom. 8:38-39; 1 Jn. 5:11-12, 20).
Therefore, we do not merely possess a kind of life which in and of itself is eternal; rather, we possess an eternal relationship with the One who is the source of our life. This One is Jesus Christ, through whom we come to know God (Jn. 1:18; 14:7; 17:26; Mt. 11:27). Such an intimate and personal knowledge of God was foreseen by the Old Testament prophets as a part of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:11).
- v. 4 ***“I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do”***
This “work” encompasses all of Jesus' labors, including the miracles (see 4:34; 5:36; notes on 11:4; 12:28). It also looks forward in anticipation to the crucifixion, for it was on the cross that Jesus was able to say, “It is finished” (19:30).
- v. 5 ***“Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began”***
Christ's incarnation involved laying aside, in some measure, his glory; now he asks that his glory be restored (see Phil. 2:9-10). Note that Christ did not discard his humanity when he returned to the Father; rather, he ascended to heaven with a glorified human body (see 20:17,27). The act of taking to himself human flesh at the incarnation (1:14; Phil 2:7-8) was not temporary, but permanent; he remains for all eternity both God and man.
- v. 6 ***“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world”***
Although Jesus performed much of his ministry in public, not everyone who witnessed his works saw the glory of God, but only those who had eyes of faith (11:40). These were the ones whom the Father had given to Jesus, who were “chosen . . . out of the world” (15:19). The rest refused to believe, even in the face of undeniable miracles (see notes on 11:45-48; 12:37-40).
- “They were yours; you gave them to me”***
Those who trust in Christ are actually his beforehand, as he indicated when he stated, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also” (10:16). The “sheep” who have not yet come to Christ belong to him already, because they have been chosen by God and given to Christ. The evidence of his prior ownership is that when they hear his voice, they recognize it and respond to his call (10:3-4).
- “and they have obeyed your word”***
The obedience Jesus speaks of here is probably the obedience of faith; they had accepted Christ's words and believed that God had sent him (v. 8; see 6:29).
- v. 9 ***“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours”***
Those who receive the blessings which Jesus requests from the Father are those who belong to God; i.e., all believers (v. 20). These blessings include protection from the evil one (vv. 11, 15), union with God and with one another (vv. 11, 21, 23), and sanctification (vv. 17, 19). Note Jesus' clear statement that he is praying only for those whom the Father has given him, the elect (see 6:37-40), and not for the “world” (i.e., mankind in general, characterized by rebellion against God).

v. 11 **“I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you”** The disciples needed, and we need, God’s gracious protection and provision, because we no longer have Jesus in the flesh to minister to us directly. His blessings are mediated to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (14:16-18; 15:26; 16:7-15).

“protect them by the power of your name” The protection which Jesus asks for is protection from apostasy, i.e., that God would preserve his disciples against defecting from the faith (see v. 12). In other words, he is not asking that we be kept from trials, but that those trials not separate us from him (see Jn. 10:27-29; Rom. 8:38-39; 2 Cor. 4:8-9). Thus, our perseverance in the faith does not ultimately depend upon our own spiritual strength, but upon the faithfulness and power of God, who will not allow us to be tested beyond our ability to endure (see 1 Cor. 10:13).

v. 12 **“I protected them and kept them safe . . . None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction”** The fact that Judas ultimately rejected Jesus does not imply a failure on Jesus’ part, for Judas had not been predestined for salvation, but for damnation. In fact, his betrayal of Jesus took place “so that Scripture would be fulfilled” (see Mt. 26:24; Ps. 41:9; notes on Jn. 13:18).

v. 14 **“the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world”** Jesus’ disciples no longer belong to this “world,” i.e. the present world system, in rebellion against God and under the dominion of Satan (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:12; 1 Jn. 5:19). Although we all at one time lived in this world, those who trust in Christ have been called “out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet. 2:9; see Eph. 2:1-5). Therefore, the world hates us as alien intruders (see notes on 15:18-19).

Similarly, James warns that “friendship with the world means enmity against God” (Jam. 4:4). This does not mean that we should avoid friendships with the people in the world, but that we should avoid participation in the sin that characterizes the world (see 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 1 Jn. 2:15-16). We are to be “in” the world, but not “of” the world (vv. 15-16), for we are not citizens of this world, but of heaven (Phil. 3:20). As a great preacher once said, the proper place for a boat is in the ocean, but heaven help us if the ocean gets into the boat!

v. 17 **“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth”** The primary meaning of the word “sanctify” (Gr. *hagiason*) is to consecrate, to set something or someone apart for God’s use. Thus, in the Old

Testament the priests who ministered in the tabernacle, as well as the tabernacle itself and its furnishings and utensils, were said to be holy (Gr. *hagios*); they were set apart for use in the worship of God.

The concept of sanctification is both positive and negative; it is a setting apart to God and from sin. In this case, the disciples are set apart from the world (v. 16) and set apart to serve God in the world (v. 18). The ethical connotations of sanctification arise from the fact that those who are set apart to God for his use are obligated to obey Him and to do those things which please Him.

Thus, sanctification has both an objective and a subjective aspect. It is an objective fact that in Christ, we have already been called out of the world, set apart to God, and cleansed from sin (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Eph. 5:26; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 10:10; 1 Pet. 1:2). But it is also true that, as through the Spirit we continue to abide in Christ and come to know more of the truth about God, we become increasingly conformed to his character, devoted to his service, and separated from sin in our experience (Rom. 6:19, 22; 8:29; 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:15; 1 Pet. 1:14-16).

v. 19 **“For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified”** The ground of our sanctification is Jesus’ atoning death on the cross. Here, he voluntarily consecrates himself to the task the Father has given him, to suffer and die on behalf of his disciples, in order that they may be set apart to God.

vv. 20-23 The unity for which Jesus prays also has both objective and subjective aspects. Objectively, all believers, without respect to time or geography, are united with Christ (Eph. 1:22; 4:4-6,16; 5:23). This is referred to as the invisible or universal church. Subjectively, this spiritual reality is seen in our relationships with other professing believers, the visible or local church. Such unity consists of our common agreement on the essentials of the gospel message, our sacrificial love for one another, and our commitment to Christ and his commission (Mt. 28:19-20). It does not imply agreement on every issue of doctrine, Christian living, or church government. The result of this supernatural unity is that the world will see revealed in and through us the glory of God, and that many will come out of the world to faith in Christ.

v. 24 **“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory”** When Christ returns, not only will we see him revealed in glory, we will also share in his glory, being transformed into his likeness (Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 3:4; 1 Jn. 3:21).

Unit 22 – Jesus Arrested

John 18:1-27

Text

¹ When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it.

² Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

⁴ Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?”

⁵ “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied.

“I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) ⁶ When Jesus said, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.

⁷ Again he asked them, “Who is it you want?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” they said.

⁸ Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” ⁹ This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you gave me.”^a

¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.)

¹¹ Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”

¹² Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him ¹³ and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴ Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard, ¹⁶ but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

¹⁷ “You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?” she asked Peter.

He replied, “I am not.”

¹⁸ It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

¹⁹ Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

²⁰ “I have spoken openly to the world,” Jesus replied. “I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.”

²² When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. “Is this the way you answer the high priest?” he demanded.

²³ “If I said something wrong,” Jesus replied, “testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?” ²⁴ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵ Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, “You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?”

He denied it, saying, “I am not.”

²⁶ One of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?” ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

^a 18:9 John 6:39

Open

When do you tend to feel alone? What keeps you going during these times?

When do you tend to feel “connected” and in touch with other people?

Discover

1. If Jesus knew that Judas was about to betray him, why did he go to the one place where Judas would be most likely to look for him? (vv. 1-4; see 10:17-18; 13:27)

2. Why was Jesus arrested at night in a secluded place, rather than in public during the daytime? (see Mt. 26:55-56; Lk. 22:52-53)

3. How do the soldiers react to Jesus words, "I am He," in vv. 4-6? Why do they react in this way?

4. What kind of protection does Jesus give the disciples in 17:12?

What kind of protection does Jesus give the disciples here, in vv. 8-9?

What do these two acts of protection have in common?

5. How does Peter react to the arrest of Jesus? Why does Jesus rebuke him? (vv. 10-11; see John 18:36; Matthew 16:21-23)

6. How do you explain Peter's denial of Christ? (v. 17; see 13:38)

7. In light of this denial, how do you explain Peter's post-resurrection transformation into a fearless preacher of the gospel? (see Acts 1:8; 4:1-20)

8. Why do you think Jesus refused to answer the high priest's questions?

Apply

How do you think Peter felt when Jesus rebuked him for attacking the high priest's servant?

What lessons can we learn from Peter's failure and eventual restoration to fellowship with Christ and fruitful ministry?

How do you think Peter felt when he was being questioned by the servant girl? After he heard the rooster crowing? Have you ever felt like this?

Commentary

- v. 1 **“On the other side there was a garden”**
This is the garden of *Gethsemane* (“oil-press”). It was located at the foot of the Mount of Olives, about 150 yards east of the city of Jerusalem and about a mile from where the last supper took place (Mt. 26:36; Mk. 14:32; Lk. 22:39).
- v. 2 **“Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples”**
The gospel of Luke is more specific, telling us that during the week preceding the Passover, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives “each evening” (Lk. 21:37; see Lk. 22:39). This is another example of the fact that Jesus knew from the beginning what was going to happen to him (v. 4), and that he gave his life voluntarily (10:18, see 13:27). If he had wished to avoid capture, he could have easily gone somewhere else, but instead he placed himself exactly where Judas would expect to find him.
- v. 3 **“a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees”**
The “soldiers” would be an auxiliary cohort of Roman troops, which were stationed in Jerusalem on feast days to maintain order and to guard against any kind of nationalistic uprising. Their presence at Gethsemane, along with the darkness and the secluded locale, would help to ensure that no mob would prevent the arrest of Jesus (see Mk. 11:32; Lk. 22:2; Acts 5:26). The “officials” were the Jewish temple police. Matthew refers to this group as a “large crowd” (Mt. 26:47); it may have numbered into the hundreds.
- v. 4 **“Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, ‘Who is it you want?’”**
This again demonstrates that it was Jesus, not the Roman or Jewish authorities, who was in control of his own destiny. Rather than being captured, he willingly offered himself up for arrest, even forbidding Peter to defend him (v. 11; see 10:18; 13:27; 19:10-11).
- v. 6 **“When Jesus said, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground”**
Jesus' words could be taken as a simple self-identification, i.e., “I am Jesus of Nazareth.” But the soldiers' response indicates that Jesus is doing something more, revealing himself as Yahweh God, the “I AM” of the Old Testament (see notes on 8:24, 58; 13:19). Evidently, at this moment he unveiled something of his glory, so that the soldiers were unable to stand in his presence. This revelation was not necessarily visual; it may have taken the form of a direct impression on their minds that they were standing in the presence of majesty.
- v. 9 **“This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: ‘I have not lost one of those you gave me.’”**
The focus in 17:12 is on protecting the disciples from apostasy in order to safeguard their salvation. Here, the focus is on protecting them from arrest and execution. But in both cases, Jesus is protecting them from the evil one in order that that the purpose which God has for their lives may be fulfilled. In this sense, Jesus' ability to protect them from physical death points to his ability to protect them from spiritual death: both were accomplished by offering himself in their place (see v. 8). This does not imply that believers will never die or suffer physically, but that Satan cannot afflict us without God's permission (see Job 1:12; 2:6) and that nothing Satan may do can prevent God from carrying out the plans he has for our lives.
- vv. 10-11 Simon Peter, not understanding the significance of what is happening, attempts to defend Jesus by attacking the high priest's servant. Although brave, the effort was quite useless: a handful of fishermen had no hope of defeating a detachment of Roman soldiers. Moreover, it was in direct opposition to Jesus' determined purpose of carrying out the Father's will, which required that he die and rise again (see Mt. 16:21-23). Thus, Jesus rebukes Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” (see Mt. 26:39, 42).
- (Luke, the physician, reports that Jesus healed the servant's ear [Lk. 22:51].)
- vv. 12-14 The fact that the soldiers brought Jesus to the religious authorities indicates that they considered this a religious matter. Their role was merely to assure that Jesus' arrest did not cause a riot.
- “Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year”**
Both Annas (vv. 19, 22) and Caiaphas (vv. 13, 24) are referred to in this passage as the “high priest.” Annas was the high priest from A.D. 7-15, but was removed from office by the Roman governor. After that time, he continued to wield a great deal of influence, due at least in part to the fact that five of his sons, as well as his son-in-law Caiaphas, held the office after him. Apparently, although Caiaphas was at this time the official high priest, Annas was still calling the shots, and was thus the *de facto* high priest (see Lk. 3:2; Acts 4:6).
- vv. 15-16 The “other disciple” was likely John, the author of this gospel: he and Peter were closely connected (13:23-24; 20:2-9; 21:20-24), and John refers to himself both as “the other disciple” and as “the one Jesus loved” in 20:2 (see notes on 13:23).

v. 17 **“You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?” she asked Peter. He replied, “I am not.”** How can we explain Peter’s tragic denial? From the perspective of divine sovereignty, he was acting out the part that God had planned for him, fulfilling Jesus’ prophecy (13:38). On a human level, he might have been intimidated by the unfamiliar environment of the high priest’s courtyard (v. 16), and fearful that if he were identified, his attack on the high priest’s servant could result in his own arrest. Add to this his confusion and lack of understanding concerning what was happening, and we can perhaps understand, if not excuse, Peter’s failure.

But we must avoid a condescending attitude toward Peter, as if we would have behaved differently in his place. Not only is it impossible for us to comprehend the stress he was under, but Jesus’ words in chapters 14-17 clearly establish that only the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit prevents each of us from doing exactly what he did. This is the same Spirit who changed Peter from a man who trembled at a servant girl’s question into a bold and fearless preacher of the gospel (see Acts. 1:8; 2:14-39; 4:1-20).

Peter’s denial also emphasizes the fact that Jesus was completely alone in his suffering (13:33). On the night of his betrayal, the disciples were unable to stay awake and pray with him (Mt. 26:36-45). At his arrest, they deserted him and fled (Mt. 26:56; Jn. 16:32). And at the end, when on the cross “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21), even the Father turned away from him (Mt. 27:46).

As a result, there can be only “one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). He alone suffered and died for sins, and he suffered and died alone.

vv. 20-21 Jesus’ refusal to answer Annas’ question is an implicit rejection of Annas’ authority to ask it. First, the interrogation itself was illegal, being held at night contrary to the Mishnah (Jewish oral law). In addition, it is possible that under the legal procedures in effect at that time, the proper approach would have been to examine witnesses, rather than the defendant himself. This would explain Jesus’ statement that Annas should question those who had heard him teach. In any case, Jesus’ response was entirely appropriate (v. 23), exposing the lawlessness of those who presumed to judge him as a lawbreaker.

It is worth noting that Jesus’ teaching was not revealed in secret, but was proclaimed openly to the world (although it was sometimes explained more fully to the disciples in private). This should make us suspicious of groups whose teachings are secret and revealed only to members of the group, or are even restricted to a select few within the membership.

vv. 25-27 The placement here of the account of Jesus’ interrogation, between the accounts of Peter’s two denials, serves to highlight the contrast between the two: even while Peter is breaking under pressure and denying his master, Jesus is standing firm and recanting nothing.

Unit 23 – Jesus Before Pilate

John 18:28-19:16

Text

²⁸ Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

³⁰ "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

³¹ Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."

"But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. ³² This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

³⁸ "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him.

³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"

⁴⁰ They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

¹ Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ² The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him

in a purple robe ³ and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face.

⁴ Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." ⁵ When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

⁶ As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

⁷ The Jewish leaders insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

⁸ When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid. ⁹ and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

¹¹ Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

¹² From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."

¹³ When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). ¹⁴ It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon.

"Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews.

¹⁵ But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"

"Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked.

"We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered.

¹⁶ Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.

Open

Have you ever been unfairly treated by someone in authority, such as a teacher or a policeman?

Discover

1. Why do the Jewish leaders avoid entering Pilate's palace? What is ironic about this? (18:28)

2. What does Jesus mean by the statement, "My kingdom is not of this world"? (18:36)

3. What kind of weapons are effective in advancing and defending this kingdom? (18:36; see 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:10-18)

4. What do Pilate's statements in 18:38; 19:4; and 19:6 indicate about Jesus? (see 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26, 27)

5. In light of this, what does Pilate's decision in 19:16 tell us about him?

6. If Pilate believed that Jesus was innocent, why did he have him flogged? (19:1; see Luke 23:13-16, 22)

7. What does the treatment Jesus accepted in 19:2-3 reveal about him? (see Matthew 26:53; Philippians 2:8)

8. How do the Jewish leaders present their charge against Jesus in 19:7? How does Pilate react? Why? (see Matthew 27:19)

9. Where did Pilate's power over Jesus ultimately come from? How does this affect Pilate's guilt for his actions? (19:11; see Acts 4:27-28)

10. How do the Jews finally convince Pilate to crucify Jesus? (19:12-16)

11. What does the response of the Jewish leaders in 19:15 reveal about them?

Apply

How is the release of Barabbas a picture of the gospel?

Who in this passage can you most easily identify with?

What most impresses you about Jesus in this passage? How does this serve as an example for you to follow?

Commentary

- v. 28 **“the palace of the Roman governor”** Although Pilate’s usual residence was in the coastal city of Caesarea, he made his headquarters in Jerusalem during the feasts (see notes on 18:3). The specific location is not certain; it may have been Herod’s former palace on the western wall of the city (as assumed by the NIV translation of *praetorium*, “headquarters,” as “palace”), or it may have been the Fortress of Antonia adjacent to the temple court.
- “to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover”** The religious scruples of the Jews are quite ironic: while maneuvering to kill Jesus, the true Passover lamb (see 1 Cor. 5:7; notes on Jn. 1:29; 6:4; 12:1; 13:1), they are carefully avoiding any ritual defilement which would prevent them from participating in the Passover (see Mt. 23:23-28). “Passover” here probably refers, not to the Passover meal itself, but to the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread which followed it and which was part of the same celebration (see Lk. 22:1).
- vv. 29-30 At this point the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, had already determined to put Jesus to death (Mt. 27:1-2). However, under Roman rule they had no authority to enforce the death penalty; only the Roman governor could do that (v. 31), so they brought Jesus to Pilate. Evidently, they had reviewed the case with Pilate in advance (evidenced by the fact that Roman troops were involved in Jesus’ arrest), and thus they fully expected that he would accept their judgment and order Jesus executed. But instead, Pilate asks them to state the charges against Jesus, in effect ordering a new trial! This explains their belligerent answer, **“If he were not a criminal . . . we would not have handed him over to you.”** It also explains why they were not better prepared to prosecute Jesus; only after two unsuccessful attempts (18:38; 19:4) were they able to persuade Pilate to crucify him (19:12).
- v. 31 **“Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law”** Knowing that the Jews want to crucify Jesus, Pilate threatens to thwart them by dismissing the case; thus they are forced to admit that they cannot carry out their plan without him. It appears that Pilate is asserting his authority, reminding the Jews that they have to play by his rules to get what they want.
- v. 32 **“This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die”** The Jews’ appeals to Pilate, which eventually resulted in Jesus’ crucifixion, fulfilled Jesus’ prophecy that he would be “lifted up from the earth” (Jn. 12:32-33).
- v. 33 **“Are you the king of the Jews?”** Pilate’s question indicates that the Jews had previously presented the case to him in these terms: that Jesus, by claiming to be their Messiah, was also claiming to be their king (see notes on 1:41, 49). The charge against Jesus was undoubtedly cast in political terms in order that he might be viewed as a threat by the Roman authorities (19:12; see Mt. 2:1-18; 26:55).
- vv. 34-35 **“Is that your own idea . . . or did others talk to you about me?”** Jesus asks if Pilate is sincerely inquiring after the truth (see v. 37) or whether he is merely repeating the charges of the Jews. He does this in order to prompt Pilate to consider his personal response to Jesus’ claims, rather than considering only his official response as governor. Similarly, each of us, whether ruler or ruled, potentate or peasant, must decide how we will respond to the one who is “king of kings and lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16).
- v. 36 **“My kingdom is not of this world”** Jesus is not saying that his kingdom has nothing to do with this world, as if his rule were irrelevant to the lives we live in the world (17:16). Rather, he means that his kingdom (Gr. *basileia*; signifying primarily “reign” or “kingship”, not physical territory) is not *from* this world. It does not have its source or origin in this present created order, which is in rebellion against its creator and is the “dominion of darkness” rather than light (Col. 1:13; see notes on 3:3; 8:23; 17:14).
- The kingdom of God concerns hearts and minds, rather than states or nations. Thus its strength and progress cannot be measured by the status or recognition it receives from human governments, nor can it be promoted or defended through the use of earthly weapons (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-18). Although it grows in the midst of this world (Mt. 13:31-33), it will not be attained through the improvement of this present world order, but through its eventual overthrow and destruction from heaven (1 Cor. 7:31; 2 Pet. 3:3-13).
- v. 37 **“You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth.”** Jesus’ kingship is displayed in his bearing witness to the truth; i.e., the truth about God, revealed in his own life and works (see notes on 14:6). The result of his testimony is the bringing of men to salvation, thus transferring them into his kingdom (Col. 1:13-14).
- v. 38 **“What is truth?” retorted Pilate.** Pilate did not wait for the answer to his question, or he might have learned that the one to whom he was speaking was himself the truth (Jn. 14:6).

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- “I find no basis for a charge against him”*** This statement, repeated in 19:4 and 19:6, emphasizes the fact that Jesus was sinless, and that therefore he did not die for his own sins, but for ours (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26-27).
- vv. 39-40 The Jews' demand that Pilate release Barabbas instead of Jesus exposes their blind hatred: they preferred to murder an innocent man, the lord of glory, even though it meant freeing a violent criminal. This is also a picture of salvation, in that we who were guilty of rebellion against God have been set free through the death of Jesus Christ.
- 19:1 ***“Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged”*** If Pilate had determined that Jesus was innocent (18:38), then why did he have him beaten? It appears that by punishing Jesus, Pilate hoped to appease the Jews, so that they would allow Jesus to be released (Lk. 23:13-16, 22).
- vv. 2-3 These verses are a graphic illustration of Jesus' humility and obedient self-restraint. Although he could have called forth twelve legions of angels to defend himself (Mt. 26:53), he chose instead to endure the abuse and humiliation of sinful men, and ultimately, death at their hands (Phil. 2:8).
The soldiers' mocking worship of Jesus is another example of irony: although they do not realize it, they are speaking the truth (see v. 14; also 11:49-52), for Jesus is in fact the king of the Jews (18:37).
- vv. 4-5 Pilate again attempts to release Jesus. By presenting to the Jewish leaders a man clothed in a ridiculous costume, who is beaten, bruised, and bloody, Pilate hopes to demonstrate that Jesus is not the dangerous rebel they had thought, but a pathetic and harmless figure. Thus the sarcastic announcement, “Here is the man!” i.e., “here is the poor, wretched man whom you fear so much!” However, his strategy fails; the Jews will not be satisfied with anything less than Jesus' death.
- v. 6 ***“You take him and crucify him”*** Pilate is not actually giving the Jews permission to crucify Jesus, as is shown by their failure to take him up on his offer. Rather, he is expressing his disgust and frustration toward the Jews for their obstinate refusal to accept his verdict. In other words, he is saying, “If you are determined to carry out this injustice, then why don't you just kill him yourself, instead of using me to put a facade of legality on it!”
- v. 7 ***“. . . according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.”*** The political charge of insurrection having been rejected by Pilate, the Jews now reframe their accusation against Jesus
- in theological terms, revealing their real objection to Jesus, his alleged blasphemy (see Mk. 14:55-56; also Jn. 5:18; 8:58-59; 10:33). Their call for the death penalty is based on Lev. 24:16, “anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord must be put to death.” They correctly understood that Jesus' reference to himself as the Son of God was a claim to deity; what they did not realize was that his claim was true.
- v. 8 ***“When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid”*** Although Pilate does not understand who Jesus is, he perceives that there is something unique about him; the news that Jesus claims the title “Son of God” only heightens his superstitious fear. Matthew also tells us that Pilate had received word from his wife of a dream concerning Jesus, warning Pilate not to harm him (Mt. 27:19). It seems that Pilate is sensing something very wrong with what is happening, but is unable to muster the will to stop it.
- v. 11 ***“You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”*** Jesus is not speaking in general of the fact that Pilate's authority derives ultimately from God (Rom. 13:1-7); rather, he is referring to the sovereignly guided chain of events which has placed Jesus before him for judgment (see Acts 4:27-28). Since Pilate did not initiate the plot against Jesus, but was merely being used by the Jewish leaders to carry out their evil purpose, his guilt was less than the one who actually handed Jesus over to him (Judas, or perhaps Caiaphas). However, although Pilate's guilt is less, it is not eliminated; he is still responsible for condemning a man to death whom he knew to be innocent.
- v. 12 ***“If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.”*** These words carry an implied threat: failure to convict and execute Jesus for the crime of sedition would be viewed as an act of disloyalty to Caesar, and would be reported to Caesar as such. If this were to happen, the subtleties of Jesus' claim to kingship being “not of this world” would be difficult for Pilate to explain to the emperor.
- v. 15 ***“We have no king but Caesar, the chief priests answered”*** In claiming allegiance to Caesar alone, the Jewish leaders not only reject Jesus as their king, but also repudiate Israel's Messianic hope and, ultimately, God's kingship over them as well. By doing so, they demonstrate that they are not true Israelites at all (see Rom. 4:12; 9:6-8; Gal. 3:7) and make themselves guilty of the blasphemy of which they accuse the Lord.

Unit 24 – The Crucifixion

John 19:1-42

Text

¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. ²¹ The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.”

²² Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

²⁴ “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.”

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,

“They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.” ^a

So this is what the soldiers did.

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, ^b here is your son,” ²⁷ and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. ³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. ³⁶ These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken,” ^c ³⁷ and, as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced.” ^d

³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ^e ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

^a 19:24 Psalm 22:18

^b 19:26 The Greek for *Woman* does not denote any disrespect.

^c 19:36 Exodus 12:46; Num. 9:12; Psalm 34:20

^d 19:37 Zech. 12:10

^e 19:39 Or about 34 kilograms

Open

What predictions have others made about your future? Did any of them come true?

What predictions are you making to your children about their future?

Discover

1. What significance is there in the fact that Jesus was crucified between two criminals? (v. 18; Isaiah 53:12)

2. Why do you think Pilate chooses the inscription “JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS”?

Why do the Jews object?

What is ironic in this?

3. Why is it significant that even the minor details of Jesus' crucifixion, such as the division of his clothing, fulfilled prophecy? (vv. 23-24; see Psalm 22:18)

4. What do Jesus' words in vv. 26-27 reveal about him?

5. How does Jesus' role in fulfilling prophecy differ from that of Pilate or the soldiers? (v. 28; see Acts 3:17-18; 4:28)

6. What does Jesus mean by “it is finished”? (v. 30; see John 6:37-38; 17:4)

7. Why is it significant that Jesus “gave up” his spirit? (v. 30; see John 10:17-18)

8. What does the flow of blood and water from Jesus' side reveal about him? Why is this important? (v. 34)

9. How are Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12 fulfilled in verse 33? (v. 36; notes on John 1:29; see also 1 Corinthians 5:7)

Apply

How do you feel about the fact that God used even the actions of godless men like Pilate to accomplish his plan?

What did those who witnessed the crucifixion likely think about Jesus' success in life? What does this tell you about the limits of our own reason and judgment?

Commentary

- v. 17 **“Carrying his own cross, he went out”**
Jesus likely carried only the horizontal beam, the cross-member. The typical procedure would be for the condemned man to carry this beam to the place of execution, where his arms were nailed or tied to it. After this, the cross-beam, with the victim attached, was hoisted up and attached to the vertical beam already planted in the ground. (The other gospels include a detail omitted here, that Simon from Cyrene carried the cross for part of the way [Mt. 27:32; Mk. 15:21; Lk. 23:26]). This experience of Jesus, who carried the cross for his own execution, parallels that of Isaac, who carried the wood for the burnt offering on which he himself was to be sacrificed (Gen. 22:6).
- v. 18 **“There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.”** Jesus’ execution between two criminals is a vivid picture of the fact that he was “numbered with the transgressors,” as Isaiah writes in the prophecy of the suffering servant (Isa. 53:12). Only by bearing our sins, and thus being considered a sinner himself, could Jesus atone for those sins and thereby make us righteous (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24).
- vv. 19-22 It was a common practice in cases of crucifixion for the convicted person’s offense to be posted on the cross as a warning to others. Here, in revenge against the Jews who had manipulated him throughout the trial, Pilate taunts them by affixing an inscription to the cross which publicly proclaims Jesus as their king, and then stubbornly refuses to change it. But this petty spite serves God’s purposes, for in doing so Pilate unwittingly proclaims the truth about Jesus to the world.
- vv. 23-24 The four pieces of clothing divided among the soldiers might have been an outer robe, a belt, sandals, and a head covering. Even the customary act of dividing the convicted man’s possessions among his executioners fulfilled prophecy, thus underscoring God’s sovereign control over all the events surrounding Jesus’ death (see Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:28). The reference is to a Psalm in which David, a type of Christ (i.e., an Old Testament character whose life experiences foreshadowed those of Christ), compared his own sufferings to those of a man being executed (Ps. 22:18). The fact that Jesus’ sufferings were a typological fulfillment of Psalm 22 is also supported by his quotation of Ps. 22:1 while on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:46; see notes on 13:18).
- v. 25 John names four of the women who came to visit Jesus on the cross (see Mk. 15:41). If the women in this list are the same as those mentioned in the other gospels, it is quite possible that the sister of Jesus’ mother Mary is Salome, the mother of the disciples James and John (Mt. 27:56-57; Mk. 15:40), making them Jesus’ cousins. This would help explain the connection which Jesus establishes between John (“the disciple whom he loved,” v. 26; see notes on 13:23) and Jesus’ mother, who in this scenario would be John’s aunt.
- vv. 26-27 Although Jesus earlier found it necessary to issue a mild rebuke to his mother (see notes on 2:4), he nonetheless loves her, and so takes care to see that she will be provided for after his death.
- vv. 28-29 **“Later, knowing that everything had now been finished”** This should not be taken to imply that Jesus’ work was at this point finished, even prior to his death; rather, Jesus realizes that the purpose for which his Father sent him into the world is now drawing to a close, and that the final consummation, death itself, is all that remains (see v. 30).
- “and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’** While others, such as Pilate and the soldiers, fulfilled their part in the divine plan unknowingly, Jesus both knowingly and willingly carried out the task the Father had given him, a task which he knew was foreshadowed and foretold throughout the Old Testament scriptures (Lk. 24:27).
The specific reference may be to Psalm 22:15, where the Psalmist’s tongue is said to stick to the roof of his mouth. Another possibility is Ps. 69:21, “*They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.*” In this case, it would not be Jesus’ cry of thirst alone which fulfilled Scripture, but that which resulted from it (v. 29).
- v. 30 **“When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”** Jesus words, “It is finished,” express not only the fact that his life is now ended, but that he has accomplished all that the Father had given him to do (see 17:4). He was faithful and obedient to the end, not failing to carry out the Father’s will in even the smallest detail (Jn. 8:29; 14:31; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 3:2, 6). This fulfillment of the Father’s will included, most importantly, securing the salvation of all those whom the Father had given him (Jn. 6:37-39).
Note the emphasis once more on the voluntary nature of Christ’s atoning death, as John tells us that he “gave up” his spirit to God (Lk. 23:46; see Jn. 10:17-18)

v. 31 **“Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.”** Again, the Jewish leaders meticulously adhere to the Mosaic regulations, even as they go about tying up the loose ends of a murder (see notes on 18:28; also Mt. 15:8-9). The relevant statute here is Dt. 21:22-23, which prohibits leaving the corpse of an executed person hanging on a tree overnight, lest it “desecrate the land.” Breaking the legs of the condemned men would make it impossible for them to support their weight sufficiently to breathe, and they would soon die of suffocation.

v. 33 **“But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs”** Jesus' relatively quick death (see Mk. 15:44) may have been due to the brutality of the beatings he suffered from the Roman soldiers.

v. 34 **“Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water”** The best medical explanation for this phenomenon is that this was hemorrhagic fluid which had accumulated between the rib cage and the lung and had separated into two blood components, one watery clear and one red. Theologically, this gives conclusive evidence that Jesus was fully a flesh-and-blood man, and not simply a spiritual being who only appeared to be a man, as the heresy of docetism later taught (see notes on 1:14; also 1 Jn. 4:2; 5:6-8). It also demonstrates that Jesus actually died, and was not just in a coma.

v. 35 **“The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true”** The most likely person to identify as the eyewitness is John, the author of this gospel (see 21:24). The importance of what has been described in the prior verse is underscored by John's insistence that this version of events is supported by eyewitness testimony. Furthermore, this testimony is such as to lead the reader to faith in Christ; it is given so that you also may believe (see 20:31). Thus, the physical evidence of Jesus' humanity and death lends critical support to those doctrines, and ultimately, to the gospel.

v. 36 **“These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken”** Note once again that while Jesus knowingly and willingly acted to fulfill Scripture, the other actors in this drama were God's unwitting servants, guided by his sovereign hand in carrying out his purposes (see Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:28).

There are two possibilities as to the passage being referred to here, and either or both may be in view. First, Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12 are regulations instructing that none of the bones of the Passover lamb may be broken. This accords well with other Scriptures which refer to Jesus as the true Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:19; see notes on Jn. 1:29). And Psalm 34:20 speaks of God's care for the righteous man by stating that “he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.” Here the point would be that in spite of his shameful death on a cross, Jesus was indeed a righteous man, as Pilate testified (19:4,6; see also Lk. 23:47), and that even in death, Jesus was in God's care.

v. 37 **“as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced.”** The reference is to Zechariah 12:10. In the context of a prophecy concerning the end-time destruction of the enemies of the Lord, this verse states that: “I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”

In Mt. 24:30 and Rev. 1:7, the fulfillment of the Zechariah passage is related to the Second Coming of Christ. Thus, while the piercing of Jesus has already taken place, the time when ethnic Israel (and all the people of the earth) will look upon him and grieve over their sin is now still future. In the case of ethnic Israel, this grief appears to be the mourning of repentance (Zech. 13:1; see Rom. 11:11-32).

Note also that since the one speaking through the prophet in Zech. 12:10 is Yahweh God, the identification of Jesus with the subject of that prophecy is a recognition of his deity, and evidence of the unity of God the Son with God the Father.

vv. 38-42 The other gospels tell us that Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy and prominent member of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin; a man who was seeking the kingdom of God and who had become a disciple of Jesus (Mt. 27:57; Mk. 15:43). Perhaps the presence of Nicodemus on this expedition indicates that he had also become a disciple of Jesus since their first encounter (see Jn. 3:1-15).

Unit 25 – The Empty Tomb

John 20:1-31

Text

¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

¹⁷ Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus ^a), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe ^b that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

^a 20:24 *Thomas* (Aramaic) and *Didymus* (Greek) both mean twin.

^b 20:31 *Or may continue to believe*

Open

Have you ever received news that you were hesitant to believe, because it seemed too good to be true?

Discover

1. What do the grave clothes reveal about Jesus? (vv. 5-9; see vv. 19, 26)

2. Why does Jesus tell Thomas to touch his wounds? (v. 27)

3. Why does John mention the fact that the doors to the room Jesus entered were locked?

4. What is the significance of Jesus' repeated greeting to the disciples, "Peace be with you!" (vv. 19, 21, 26; see John 14:27; 16:33 and Colossians 1:19-20)

5. How does the commission Jesus received from the Father compare to the commission the disciples received from Jesus?

The commission Jesus received (John 3:16-17; 6:38-40; 10:10)	The commission the disciples received (John 17:18-20; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16)
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6. What gift empowers Jesus' followers to carry out his commission? (v. 22; see John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8)

7. When do the disciples receive this gift? (see John 15:26; 16:7; Acts 1:8-9)

8. What is the significance of what Jesus does in v. 22?

9. What authority does Jesus give to the disciples in v. 23? How are they to exercise this authority?

10. Why did John write his gospel? Why did he omit many of the miracles which Jesus performed? (vv. 30-31)

Apply

What would you say to someone who argues that the theological issues presented in John are too difficult or controversial to be used in evangelism?

What can you do this week to carry out Jesus' commission in v. 21?

Commentary

- v. 1 **“Early on the first day of the week”**
This was Sunday, the third day after Jesus' death (Mt. 16:21; 1 Cor. 15:3-4), counting Friday, the day of the crucifixion, as the first day. The fact that Christ rose on a Sunday undoubtedly guided the early church's decision to gather for worship on that day rather than Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath (see Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). Gathering at the beginning of every new week also emphasizes the newness of our life in Christ (see Jn. 3:3; 2 Cor. 5:17).
John mentions only Mary Magdalene (although the “we” in vs. 2 may imply more), while the synoptic gospels tell us that other women were present (see Mt. 28:1-10; Mk. 16:1-8; Lk. 24:1-10). This is not a contradiction, but simply a case in which one writer, in order to emphasize certain aspects of the story, has omitted details which another writer includes.
- v. 2 **“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!”** Although Mary is aware of Jesus' predictions concerning his resurrection, she does not yet entertain the possibility that he has risen from the dead. The meaning of his words were veiled until after the fact (v. 9; see also Mk. 9:31-32; Lk. 18:31-34; 24:5-8).
- vv. 3-5 **“the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in”** The fact that John was the first to reach the tomb, and thus the first to see the grave clothes, gives support to his eyewitness testimony concerning their appearance.
- vv. 6-7 John's description of the grave clothes suggests that they lay where they had fallen when Jesus' body passed through them; a contrast with Lazarus, who emerged from the tomb still wearing his grave clothes (11:44). This highlights the difference between Lazarus' resuscitated, but essentially unchanged, body and Jesus' resurrection body, which although having physical “flesh and bones” (Lk. 24:36-43) was able to pass through locked doors and to appear and disappear at will (vv. 19, 26; Lk. 24:31). This is the same kind of body that we will someday possess (1 Cor. 15:35-58; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Jn. 3:2).
This highlights one of the implications of Jesus' bodily resurrection: that there is a continuity between our present physical body and our future resurrection body. Admittedly, the resurrection body is radically different than the body which dies; Paul lists several fundamental ways in which it is changed, and likens this to the difference between a seed and a mature stalk of wheat (1 Cor. 15:35-58).
- Nevertheless, the resurrection body is not a different body, but the same body, transformed (see vv. 25-27).
- vv. 8-9 **“He saw and believed”** Upon seeing the grave clothes, John becomes convinced that Jesus has risen from the dead, although he still does not understand that this is a fulfillment of scripture (v. 9, see Ps. 16:10; also Mt. 12:39-40). Why did the sight of the grave clothes produce faith in John? One possibility is that they proved that Jesus' body had not been carried away: grave robbers would hardly have taken the time to unwrap a corpse before removing it.
- vv. 11-12 If the absence of Jesus' body and the presence of his grave clothes were not enough, the appearance of angels in the tomb leaves no doubt that this was the work of God and not man. The angels appear in human form, as they sometimes do elsewhere (Gen. 18:1-20; 19:1). The fact that the gospels of John and Luke mention two angels, while Matthew and Mark mention only one, is another example of a case in which different writers selectively omit or include details for their own narrative purposes (see notes on v. 1).
- v. 13 **“They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”** The angels' intent in asking this is probably to comfort Mary by guiding her into a realization that there is no longer any reason for weeping (see Heb. 1:14), just as Jesus subsequently does (v. 15).
- v. 14 **“At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.”** In several of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, he is not immediately recognized, as when he accompanies two men on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:16; see also Mk. 16:12; Jn. 21:4). Apparently, Jesus' identity in these cases is veiled, so that he can be recognized only through special revelation (see Lk. 24:31). For Mary, this revelation came through a loving word; for the disciples, it came through a miracle (Jn. 21:4-7). But in each case, those who belonged to Jesus came to recognize him as their shepherd (see 10:2-4, 14-16, 27).
- In the same way, people may look at the portrait of Jesus contained in the Scriptures, and yet not recognize him as God's son, the savior of the world (see 1:10-11). They do not recognize him because they have not been given to him by the Father; they are not his “sheep” (6:36-39; 10:25-29). Only those to whom God gives eyes of faith can see Jesus as he really is (notes on 9:1-7; 1 Cor. 2:14).

- v. 15 **“Who is it you are looking for?”** Jesus' question invites Mary to consider who she is really seeking there in the garden. A martyred prophet? A good man, victimized by political forces beyond his control? Or the Son of God, whom death could not conquer? If she seeks the latter, then a grave is surely the wrong place to look!
- v. 17 **“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.”** The meaning of this statement is difficult to determine. How is the prohibition against touching Jesus related to his ascension? And why is Thomas later invited to touch his wounds (v. 27)? Some have proposed that it has something to do with the nature of Jesus' post-resurrection body, such that physical contact with him was no longer appropriate. This would suggest that an ascension, and some kind of accompanying bodily change, then took place prior to Jesus' encounter with Thomas. But a more likely explanation is that Jesus' prohibition has nothing to do with his body. He may be telling Mary to stop clinging to him as if he might disappear at any moment and ascend to heaven (see Mt. 28:9). That will soon come to pass, but not immediately. And when it does happen, she will not be able to prevent it by clinging to him.
- v. 19 **“when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”** The locked doors emphasize the fact that Jesus' resurrection body was able to transcend physical barriers (see notes on vv. 6-7). His benediction of peace to the disciples, repeated in vv. 21 and 26, is not just a standard greeting, but a statement of what his presence among them signifies: that his promise of eschatological peace has been and will be fulfilled (see notes on 14:27; 16:33). Christ has triumphed over sin and death, and we with him; therefore, we have peace with God, both now and forever (Jn. 8:34-36; Rom. 5:1; 6:5-9; Eph. 2:14-18; Col. 1:19-20).
- v. 20 **“he showed them his hands and side”** This is additional confirmation that Jesus' resurrection body is the same body that was crucified (see notes on vv. 6-7). The disciples' response of joy fulfills Jesus' prophecy (16:20-22).
- v. 21 **“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”** As Jesus was sent into the world by the Father in order to bring salvation and new life to men (1:29; 3:16-17; 6:38-40; 10:10), so we have now been sent into the world to lead men to the one who is the way, the truth, and the life (14:6; 17:18-20; see also Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16).
- v. 22 **“And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”** The task which Jesus gave his disciples in v. 21 is linked with the gift of the Holy Spirit (see 15:26-27; Acts 1:8). But how could the disciples have received the Spirit at this time, when Jesus indicated that the Spirit would be given after he had returned to the Father (Jn. 14:25-26; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 1:8-9), a promise which was fulfilled in Acts 2, after his ascension?
The best approach is to understand Jesus' statement as a symbolic promise of the Spirit, a re-affirmation of his assurances that he would send a Counselor to the disciples after his departure. Nothing in the text demands that Jesus' words be fulfilled immediately, and indeed, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit recorded in Acts was not evident in the lives of the disciples until after Pentecost.
- v. 23 **“If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”** Jesus is here conferring upon the disciples, not an arbitrary and independent power to forgive sins, but rather the authority to proclaim forgiveness of sins through the preaching of the gospel, the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Those who accept the gospel are forgiven (by God), those who reject it are not.
- v. 28 **“Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”** Faced with indisputable evidence of the resurrection, Thomas' doubts vanish and he immediately receives Jesus as his Lord and his God (see Rev. 4:11). “Lord,” in this case, has more than the common meaning of “sir” or “master.” It carries also the significance it primarily has in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament); that of “Lord God.” Thus, Thomas' words are a confession both of Jesus' lordship over all creation (Phil. 2:9-11; also Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3), and also of his deity. While Jesus, the son of God, is distinct from God the Father (see 5:16-30; 20:17), he is himself fully God (see notes on 1:1; Rom. 9:5; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:8). Yet there is only one God, consisting of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; this theological tension is known as the doctrine of the trinity.
- v. 29 **“blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** Even though we have not seen Jesus in the flesh, the blessings of faith available to us, who have believed through the witness of the apostles (v. 31; Jn. 17:20; Rom. 10:17), are just as real as theirs (see 1 Pet. 1:8-9). And in fact, one day we shall see Jesus, never to be parted from him (1 Jn. 3:2).

Unit 26 – Jesus and the Miraculous Catch of Fish

John 21:1-25

Text

¹ Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. ^a It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus ^b), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

⁶ He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ^c ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

²⁰ Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) ²¹ When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”

²² Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” ²³ Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”

²⁴ This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

^a 21:1 Greek *Tiberias*

^b 21:2 *Thomas* (Aramaic) and *Didymus* (Greek) both mean twin.

^c 21:8 Or about 90 meters

Open

How have you benefited from this study of John?

Discover

1. Why do you think Peter and the other disciples went fishing? (v. 3)

-
2. What similarities can you find between John 21:3-8 and Jesus' encounter with Peter, James, and John at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 5:4-11)?

Luke 5:4-11	John 21:3-8

3. What spiritual truth is illustrated by the fact that in both of these encounters, the disciples had fished all night without catching anything? (v. 3; see 15:5)

4. What spiritual truth does the great quantity of their catch illustrate? (v. 11; see Lk. 5:10)

5. Why is it significant that the net was not torn? (v. 11; see 6:39; 10:28)

6. Why do you think Jesus prepares a meal for the disciples?

7. Why is it important that Jesus tells Peter to feed his sheep in the presence of the other disciples? (vv. 15-17)

8. Why does Jesus ask Peter three times if he loves him? (vv. 15-17; see 18:15-18, 25-27)

9. How could Jesus' prophecy of Peter's death be seen as a blessing rather than a curse? (vv. 18-19; see Acts 5:41; Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 4:14)

10. In light of v. 22, what should our attitude be toward differences in how other Christians or Christian leaders serve God? (see 1 Corinthians 3:1-4:7; 12:4-11; 2 Corinthians 10:12)

Apply

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> How do you think Peter felt when he first realized that it was Jesus on the shore? When Jesus asked him for the third time whether he loved him? When Jesus called him to "follow me"? | <input type="checkbox"/> What lessons for your own relationship with Christ can you find in his encounter with Peter?
<input type="checkbox"/> What can help us to keep following Christ even when we are hurting? |
|---|---|

Commentary

After the climax of the preceding chapter, which included Christ's post-resurrection appearances, Thomas' dramatic statement of faith (v. 28), and the purpose statement for this gospel (v. 31), we might have expected John to conclude his narrative. But instead, he adds a postscript which ties up some loose ends, including a beautiful picture of reconciliation between Jesus and Peter, and which gives us some additional lessons to consider.

- v. 1 **"Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee"** This appearance took place sometime during the thirty-three days between Jesus' appearance to Thomas and his ascension (see Acts 1:3).
- v. 3 **"'I'm going out to fish,' Simon Peter told them, and they said, 'We'll go with you.'"** Some have criticized the disciples for going fishing after having seen the risen Lord, as if they were abandoning their commissions (20:21) to return to their homes and former occupations. However, since Jesus had said that he would meet them in Galilee (Mk. 14:28; 16:7), it is more likely that they are just trying to keep busy while awaiting further directions. Leaping into the water and swimming to Jesus (v. 7) does not seem like the response of a man who was abandoning his master!
- "that night they caught nothing"** This parallels Jesus' initial encounter with Peter, James, and John, in which, after a night of fruitless effort, they respond to the suggestion of a stranger and take in a huge catch of fish (Lk. 5:4-11). A replay of that scene at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry illustrates the fact that the disciples still cannot do anything (such as fulfill their commission to be fishers of men) apart from him (15:5; see 20:21; Lk. 5:10).
- vv. 5-6 If the willingness of these professional fishermen to take advice from a stranger seems odd, we must remember that they had done so before (Lk. 5:4-11). Perhaps their fatigue and failure made them open to suggestion, fostering an attitude of "what have we got to lose." And perhaps Jesus spoke with an authority that implied he knew what he was talking about. In any case, they complied.
- v. 7 Although John is the first to see the hand of their master at work, perhaps recognizing the similarities between this event and their first encounter with Jesus, Peter is (characteristically) the first to react. It is not clear exactly what Peter did with his outer garment; perhaps he knotted it around his waist so as not to impede his movements while swimming.
- v. 11 **"It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn"** Although the exact number of fish is probably not significant, their great number is likely an anticipatory sign of the fruitfulness which Jesus' followers will enjoy as "fishers of men" (Mk. 1:17) as they follow the guidance of their Lord. The fact that the net was not torn reminds us of Jesus' assurances that he would lose none of those whom the Father had given him (6:39; 10:28).
- vv. 12-13 Jesus ministers to the disciples by preparing and serving them a meal, showing that, although in one sense their relationship has been dramatically altered, in another sense it has not changed. He continues to serve them, even as he remains their master (see 13:12-14; also Lk. 22:24-27). This scene reminds us that no matter what service they, or we, may render to Jesus, we can never equal his service to us.
- This is also a powerful symbol of the fact that Jesus provides the spiritual strength and nourishment his disciples need to carry out the task he has given them. The disciples' response to their master is halting and tentative; although they know it is Jesus, they dare not ask so as to remove all doubt. The contrast between the response of Peter and the other disciples should cause us to reflect on how we may react when we come face to face with our Lord. Will we respond in exuberant joy, as did Peter? Will our welcome be lukewarm, muted? Or will we be ashamed because we have failed to continue in him (1 Jn. 2:28)? May our attitude be that of John at the close of Revelation: "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20; see 1 Cor. 16:22).
- vv. 15-17 At this point, Jesus has already appeared to Peter alone (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5); perhaps some reconciliation had taken place between them already. But just as Peter's boast of ultimate loyalty and his subsequent denial of Christ were made in public (13:37-38; 18:15-18, 25-27; see Mk. 14:29), so also must his reinstatement be made publicly, in order to eliminate any question in the minds of the disciples (or Peter) concerning his fitness for ministry.
- "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"** Jesus could be asking if Peter loves him more than he loves the other disciples, or more than he loves fishing. But it is more likely that Jesus is asking whether Peter's love for him is greater than that of the other disciples; in other words, "Peter, do you really love me more than these other men do?" Peter's answers show that he has gained humility by his failure; he does not compare himself with the other disciples, but only speaks of his own love (see vv. 20-22; 1 Pet. 5:1).

It is often suggested that the different Greek words for “love” in these verses indicate differences in the meanings of the questions and answers, since Jesus uses *agapaō* in the first two questions and *phileō* in the third, while Peter responds with *phileō* all three times. Supposedly, *agapaō* expresses a higher, self-sacrificing love, the love which comes from God and which one has toward God, while *phileō* expresses a more common kind of love, the love which one has toward a friend. Therefore, it is argued that Jesus first asks Peter (twice) to testify that he loves him with a worship-love (*agapaō*), but Peter, remembering his shameful denial, cannot bring himself to do so, answering only that he loves him with a friendship-love (*phileō*). Finally, Jesus relents and asks Peter to affirm merely a *phileō* type of love.

However, this is unlikely, because the distinction between these two verbs is not consistently maintained in the New Testament. For example, in John's gospel, both verbs are used of God's love for Jesus (*agapaō*, 3:35; *phileō*, 5:20), of Jesus' love for John (*agapaō*, 19:26, 21:7; *phileō*, 20:2), and of Jesus' love for Lazarus (*agapaō*, 11:5; *phileō*, 11:36). In addition, John often uses different terms for stylistic, rather than theological reasons. Thus, the three repetitions of Jesus' question do not indicate a change in their content. Rather, they provide Peter an opportunity to reaffirm his love for the Lord three times, just as he had denied him three times. In response, Jesus accepts his testimony and restores him to ministry, exhorting him to “feed my lambs” (see Jn 10; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

vv. 18-19 Peter's threefold affirmation of love results, not in a promise of reward, but in a promise of suffering: death by crucifixion. However, in truth the suffering is a reward, for through his own crucifixion Peter would have the honor of glorifying God just as his master before him had done (Jn. 12:27-28; 13:31-32; 17:1; also Acts 5:41; Phil. 1:29; 1 Pet. 4:14-16). Historically, Peter was probably crucified in Rome under the emperor Nero.

“Then he said to him, ‘Follow me!’”

Jesus invites Peter to walk with him (see v. 20), but his words also summon Peter to discipleship in spite of the suffering that awaits him.

vv. 20-21 John's reference to himself as “the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper” and who had asked Jesus Peter's question (13:24-25) gives credibility to the next few verses by reminding us of the intimate relationship which John enjoyed with both Peter and Christ.

v. 22 **“Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.’”** Jesus' words are a reminder to Peter and to us that the commission we share as Christ's disciples (Jn. 20:21) will require different things from each one (see 1 Cor. 12-14). For Peter, it meant martyrdom; for John, it meant a long life and the writing of this gospel (v. 24). Thus, comparisons between different ministries or different leaders are foolish (2 Cor. 10:12). One reason for this is that we are unable to judge another's heart; only God can (and will) judge motives. Another is that visible fruit in ministry often results from the prior work of those who prepare the soil without producing obvious results. In the end, what matters is our faithfulness to the task the Lord has assigned us (1 Cor. 3:1-4:7).

v. 24 **“This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.”** Here the author of this gospel is identified as John, the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (v. 20; see notes on 13:23).

The “we” may refer to the people or elders of the church that John belonged to when he wrote this gospel. Or it may be an editorial “we” which John uses as an alternative to referring to himself directly (see 1 Jn. 1:4; 2:1). This is consistent with the fact that he avoids naming himself anywhere in this gospel.

v. 25 **“Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”** If we evaluate this statement in terms of Jesus' earthly ministry, it must be regarded as the literary device of obvious exaggeration, *hyperbole*. But if we consider all the deeds of the Son of God, including his pre-incarnate works of creation and providence (Heb. 1:2-3), then this is not in the least an exaggeration.

Acknowledgments

The primary commentary consulted was D.A. Carson's *The Gospel According to John*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991. The two-volume work by Raymond E. Brown was also referred to (*The Gospel According to John* [Anchor Bible], Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1966).

About the Author

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