

THE GOSPEL OF  
**JOHN**



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*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. (John 20:30-31)*

So concludes John's gospel. After 20 chapters, his intent should hardly come as a surprise! From the very outset of his gospel John confronts, indeed bombards, the reader with the person of Jesus.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, 14)*

Look again at 20:30-31 and you will find the key words which reveal John's plan as an evangelist-writer.

*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 <sup>1</sup>that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God,*

*and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

In John's gospel the miracles of Jesus are called *signs* which are to produce *belief* which results in *life*. Everything in John's 21 chapters is to this end.

If one were to take an afternoon and read through all four gospels in the order we find them in our Bibles, John would stand out. When we come to the fourth gospel we will immediately be impressed with its uniqueness. It's so different!

In John we find no record of Jesus' birth or childhood, no mention of Mary (by name) and Joseph, no record of Jesus' temptation in the desert. We look in vain for the Lord's Prayer. We find no parables, no exorcisms, no transfiguration, no Olivet discourse,<sup>2</sup> no celebration of the Lord's supper with the disciples in Jerusalem, no cursing of the fig tree, and no agony in the garden of Gethsemane.

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<sup>1</sup>Is John writing to confirm the belief of Christians who need assurance or is he trying to persuade the unpersuaded? Readers of his gospel have debated this for centuries. John uses the subjunctive mood in 20:31 which the NIV brings out with may believe. The subjunctive could be rendered *so you might believe*.

<sup>2</sup>This is the name given to Jesus' sermon recorded in all three of the synoptic gospels (Mark 13, Matthew 24, Luke 21) which details the events surrounding the second coming of Jesus.

## INTRODUCTION

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But the fourth gospel should not be defined according to what the author leaves out of his life of Jesus. John gives the reader what most would agree is the profoundest of the gospels. John has long been regarded as the *theologian* of the gospel writers. His gospel is at once suitable for the beginner or the expert. The Gospel of John is the pool where, as one commentator points out, *a child may wade and an elephant can swim*. John's gospel is inexhaustible. Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, a British scholar writing in the early part of this century concluded, *he will not be true to the book he is studying if, at the end, the Gospel does not still remain strange, restless, and unfamiliar*.

What do we find in John? We find a superbly crafted gospel that compels the reader to make a decision about Jesus. John will not allow his readers to be *middle-of-the-road* with regard to Jesus. John begins with the bold affirmation, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*. The rest of his text is an attempt to get us, his readers, to agree.

Again, John won't allow his readers to sit on the fence. In this gospel we find presented a Jesus who leaves no room for indecision. We are confronted with *life* and *death* (cf. 3:16; 5:24; 8:51; 17:3), *truth* and *falsehood* (cf. 1:14; 5:33; 8:32; 8:44; 18:38), *light* and *darkness* (cf. 1:4-5, 7; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35-36), *flesh* and *spirit* (cf. 1:14; 3:5-6; 3:34; 4:23; 6:51).

We are confronted with the claims of Jesus regarding himself:

6:35	<i>I am the bread of life</i>	Will you eat?
8:12	<i>I am the light of the world</i>	Will you see?
10:7	<i>I am the door</i>	Will you come in?
10:14	<i>I am the good shepherd</i>	Will you follow?
11:25	<i>I am the resurrection and the life</i>	Do you want life?
14:6	<i>I am the way</i>	Are you on it?
15:1	<i>I am the vine</i>	Are you connected to me? <sup>1</sup>

Most biblical scholars think John was the last gospel to be written. John, it is surmised, is complementing Matthew, Mark and Luke<sup>2</sup> filling in details where they made omissions. In John we have three (or possibly four if we count 5:1) Passover feasts mentioned while

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<sup>1</sup>There are three more *I am* statements in John. In 6:30 Jesus simply says, *I am*. *Don't be afraid*. In 18:5 Jesus says *I am* and the Roman soldiers fall down. In 8:58 Jesus says, *Before Abraham was born, I am!*

<sup>2</sup>These three gospels are called the *synoptic* gospels because they *see* the life of Jesus in much the same way, recording, for the most part the same miracles, events and sermons of Jesus.

the synoptics mention only one.<sup>1</sup> In John the temple is *cleansed* at the outset of Jesus' ministry, while the other gospel writers place this event during the final days of Jesus' activity. Was the temple cleansed of money changers, etc. twice? John's Jesus ministers in the south of Israel. Four times Jesus goes to Jerusalem. Matthew, Mark and Luke concentrate on Jesus' northern ministry in Galilee.

But there is more at stake in John's selection of material than simply *filling in* what the others left out. John, writing late, wants to evangelize the second generation of hearers. He seeks to persuade those who never saw or heard Jesus during his earthly ministry. The apostle wrestles with the questions: How can the second generation know and trust Jesus for salvation? How can I really be sure of the sufficiency of Jesus when I wasn't there?

To answer these questions John employs a double testimony throughout his 21 chapters.

First, there is the testimony of those whom Jesus encountered. John the Baptist, perhaps the second most startling figure of the first century, is so impressed with Jesus that he points his sizable following toward the man from Nazareth proclaiming, *Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (1:29 ff.). Later, when the Baptist's disciples become jealous of Jesus' growing popularity, John rebuffs them saying, *[The] joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.* (3:29b-30). John the apostle, the writer of this gospel, is witness to the worth of Jesus. *We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* (1:14). Along the way Peter, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and a host of others bear witness to Jesus.

But man's testimony is not enough for John. John claims in 1:1 that Jesus is God in the flesh. Only God can verify God so Jesus needs a divine testimony. This testimony is given dramatically in 12:27-30. But there is even more! Jesus was attested to in the Hebrew scriptures. He is the fulfillment of prophecy (5:37-47). Secondly, Jesus testifies for himself. He is the highest authority there is (8:17-18; 3:34). Thirdly, the works of Jesus bear witness to his authority and sufficiency (5:36, 10:38).

John, written primarily to compel faith in unbelievers (20:31), is loaded with material that will deepen the discipleship of the most mature of believers. In 1:18 John tells us that Jesus has made the unseen God of the universe *known* to us. Jesus, we learn, is here called the *exegesato* (ἐξηγησατο) of God. This is the Greek word for *exegesis* which means *to explain* or *to interpret*. As we study Jesus in John's gospel we will learn about God himself. Our lives in Christ should be deeply enhanced!

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<sup>1</sup>This gives us an understanding of Jesus' ministry which lasted three and one half years.

*Sermon Notes...*

**Study One**  
**In the Beginning!**  
**John 1:1-18**



**John**

As you begin this study, read these 18 verses from as many translations as you have available. What is going on in John's mind? John seems to *spill the beans* in the very first sentence of his book.<sup>1</sup> Why do you think he begins his gospel like this as opposed to, say, the way Matthew begins his gospel by not only presenting the birth of Christ but also his genealogy?

John seems to look back to Genesis 1:1 in his prologue. What parallels can you find with Genesis 1? Why did John draw these parallels?

**Genesis**

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<sup>1</sup>This is so utterly different from Mark's gospel. Ultimately, Mark wants to make the same point John makes, Jesus is the Savior! But in Mark the reader has to wait until the very end for the climax when the Roman centurion, witnessing Jesus' crucifixion proclaims, *Surely this man was the Son of God!* (Mark 15:39).

## ***IN THE BEGINNING!***

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Read our text again with care. List the major Bible doctrines presented by John. Notice how these very brief verses summarize the entire story of our sin and salvation.

### **Major Bible Doctrines**

Okay, one last time. Look through these verses and see how many titles or ascriptions John gives to Jesus (hint: you should be able to find at least 4-5).

### **Titles/Ascriptions for Jesus**

They are usually called the *prologue* but we might call these 18 verses the *overture* of John's gospel. An overture of a symphony introduces the major themes which will follow in due course. They stimulate the appetite of the listener, creating both a sense of anticipation and a longing for fulfillment. G. Campbell Morgan said of these verses:

We usually call it the prologue. I am not quarreling with that word, provided that we do not think prologue means preface. It is far more than a preface. In these eighteen verses we have an explanation of everything that follows from the nineteenth verse of chapter one, to the twenty-ninth verse of chapter twenty. All that follows is intended to prove the accuracy of the thing declared in the first eighteen verses. (Morgan, p. 18)

John begins his *prologue* with the words, *In the beginning was the word...* He employs a Greek word which was loaded with significance, *logos* (λογος). The Greeks had literally talked about the *logos* for over six hundred years! *Logos* was a philosophical term which referred to reason, rationality and the laws of nature. The *logos* was sometimes thought to be the unifying principle of the universe. Heraclitus, for example, writing six centuries before Christ, said the *logos* is *always existent*, and that all *things happen through this logos*. For this influential philosopher ultimate reality was called Fire, God or *logos*. (cf. Morris, pp. 115-126)

Later Plato and then the Stoic philosophers further developed the concept of *logos*. The Stoic philosophers were impressed with the order of the universe. Why do the stars



follow their trajectory with precision? Why does the sun rise every morning? What controls the arrival of the seasons? Their answer was that all things are controlled by the *Logos*, the Reason of God. *The Logos pervades all things*, according to the Stoics. (cf. Barclay I, p. 13)

By the time of John, the Greeks had come to view the gods as very distant. The gods were uninvolved in the world, impersonal, detached from humankind's concerns, joys and sorrows. Now look again at John's prologue. Notice how he employs this familiar concept giving it entirely new meaning.

Leon Morris explains;

For [John] the Word was not a *principle*, but a *living being* and the source of life; not a personification, but a Person and their Person divine. The Word was nothing less than God. (Morris, p. 123, emphasis added)

What does John do with this word which was very familiar to his readers? How is the *logos* relevant to John's readers? Make a list of the things John says about the *logos*.

Think through this list with regard to your own life. How does John present Jesus as the answer to your deepest longings?

In verse 3 John affirms that all things were *made* by the *Logos*. What difference does this make? Notice that God (the *Logos*) and the universe are distinct from one another in this passage. How do these truths inform our understanding of Darwinism and the New Age movement?

In verse 9 we learn that the *logos* gives light to *every man*. What does this mean? What does this affirmation tell us about our neighbor who claims to be an atheist?

In 1:12 we find that *believing* in Jesus gives us *the right to become children of God*... This is the first hint of the *new birth* which Jesus will explain to Nicodemus in chapter three. Notice John goes on to say these children (all of us who follow Christ) are born not of *natural descent* but are born of God. One of John's major themes is that of the necessity of decision with regard to Jesus. While the synoptic gospels will hardly ever use the term, we find *the Jews* referred to 70 times in the fourth gospel as John outlines Jewish antagonism to Jesus. John wants Jewish readers to understand that they too need to make a commitment to the Messiah.

In 1:1 John boldly proclaims that Jesus (the *Logos*) was with God and was in fact God from the beginning. One of John's concerns is to show the sufficiency of Jesus for salvation (life). His sentence structure in 1:1 could not be more bold!

The preposition *with* in the phrase *the Word was with God* indicates both equality and distinction of identity along with association. The phrase can be rendered *face to face with*. The position of the noun God in the Greek text marks it as a predicate, stressing description rather than individualization. The *Word* was deity, one with god, rather than *a god* or another being of the same class... The external coexistence and unity of the Word with God is unmistakably asserted. (Tenney, p. 28)

After his proposition, *The Logos is God*, John goes on to shock his readers in verse 14: *The Logos became flesh*. Barclay says it was for the sake of this sentence that John wrote the fourth gospel (Barclay, I, p. 44). In the Greek world there was nothing comparable. The gods were distant, but here, John affirms the *Logos* became *flesh*! The idea was so staggering that the earliest theological mistake made regarding Jesus was not to doubt his deity, but to doubt his humanity.<sup>1</sup>

John will leave no doubt in his readers' minds as to the genuine humanity of Jesus. B. F. Westcott comments on John's vocabulary.

He became flesh. He did not simply become *a man*. He became *man*. The mode of the Lord's existence on earth was truly human, and subject to all the conditions of human existence; but he never ceased to be God. (Westcott, p. 10)

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<sup>1</sup>The *Docetists* claimed that Jesus only *seemed* to be human. In reality, they claimed, he was simply a spirit.

William Barclay says, *It might well be held that this is the greatest single verse in the whole New Testament.* Why is this verse so important? Compare I John 4:2-3, Hebrews 4:15.

How have you personally responded to, or reacted to, the God who was in the beginning, created all that is, then came and became human that we would believe and be saved?

Notice three things John tells us about the Word in verse 14.

1. The Word *became* flesh.
2. The Word *lived* for a while among us.
3. The Word *revealed* his glory.

John's encounter with the man Jesus, his *living* with Jesus, his glimpse of Jesus' glory forever changed his life. How has Jesus affected your life? How has his glory transformed your view of your self, your goals, and your dreams?

Respond to the following statement by Lesslie Newbigin.

Jesus is God's word. There is, therefore, only one way to know God, and that is to attend to his word. All men share the longing to know the ultimate secret of their life. Without this they are in darkness. The *good news* which John is about to tell is that the light, the only light there is, has come into the world, that the word of God has become flesh in the man Jesus Christ, and that here, therefore, in this life, God has made himself fully known. For the beloved Son, who is the word of God, is God, and only God can make God known. (Newbigin, p. 11)

## ***IN THE BEGINNING!***

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Consider the greatness of God's revelation of the gospel through Jesus. As a group praise God for His gracious mercy exhibited in your lives through this *good news!*

## Study Two

### Witness

### John 1:19-50



After his prologue John begins his case for belief in Jesus. He begins with witness, or testimony. A look at John's choice of words is instructive. The Greek verb for witness (*martyrein*) is used 47 times in John's writings, but only 33 times in the rest of the New Testament. The fourth gospel employs the verb 33 times.

First there is the witness of John the Baptist,<sup>1</sup> then there is the witness of the early disciples. In chapter two John will move to the witness of the miracles (signs) of Jesus. As John's story unfolds we find the witness of God the Father (5:32, 8:18), of Jesus himself

(8:13ff.), of the Old Testament Scriptures (5:39) and of the Holy Spirit (16:13-14).

When we open the pages of our New Testament we are immediately struck with the importance of a man named John who baptized people. Matthew gives us the most information about the Baptist's ministry. We learn that John was peculiar (he wore clothes made of camel's hair), popular (people were coming to John from *Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan* Matthew 3:5), and very bold (pugnacious?). John had never taken a course in how to conduct a *seeker sensitive* ministry.<sup>2</sup> When the Pharisees and Sadducees came to see John he confronted these religious leaders,

*You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance!* (Matthew 3:7)

Matthew tells us that many confessed their sins and were baptized.

<sup>1</sup>John the Baptist had no relation to John, son of Zebedee, who wrote the Fourth Gospel.

<sup>2</sup>Baptism was a Jewish rite for converts to Judaism. It symbolized the washing away of sin. But John wants to baptize Jewish leaders! They too need to repent.

Why was the ministry of John the Baptist such a phenomenon? Why did Jesus go so far as to say, *I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist...* (Matthew 11:11)?

The Jewish mind of the first century held the notion of spiritual silence. At the close of what we call the Old Testament period the prophets spoke of the absence of God's spirit in Israel as a sign of God's judgment on the nation.

*On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more, declares the LORD Almighty. I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, 'You must die, because you have told lies in the LORD's name.' When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him. (Zechariah 13:2-3)*

Jews understood history as a conflict of the ages.

### Present Age

Characterized by:

evil  
oppression  
demonic activity  
the absence of the Holy Spirit

### Age to Come (the Kingdom of God)

Characterized by:

overthrow of Satan  
coming of Messiah  
judgment of Yahweh  
coming of the Spirit

By the time of John the Baptist there had been, roughly, 400 years without prophetic voice. Along comes this very gutsy preacher who is, evidently, filled with the spirit of God! His message is one of judgment, deliverance, the day of the Lord and the baptism of the Spirit! It should come as no surprise that John attracted a sizable following.

*Well John the Baptist, asked the priests and Levites, Who are you? Are you the Messiah (the Christ), the one prophesied in Isaiah? Are you Elijah, the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy (Malachi 4:5)? Are you the prophet foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15?*

John responds with an allusion to Isaiah 40:3. *My job is to prepare the way for the Lord,* John replies.

The imagery was taken from the days when there were no paved roads, only tracks across the fields. If a king were to travel, the road must be built and smoothed out that the royal chariot might not find the traveling unduly rough, not

be swamped in the mire. John claimed that he was to make the road for a greater personage who was to represent Jehovah. (Tenney, Gospel, p. 79)

John wants to leave no room for misunderstanding in the minds of his audience. His job is to magnify the Messiah. His comment about being unworthy to untie the sandals of Jesus is telling. There is a Rabbinic saying which states, *Every service which a slave performs for his master shall a disciple do for his teacher except the loosening of his sandal-thong*. (cited in Morris, p. 141) John chooses this task, too menial for a disciple to perform for his mentor, and declares himself too lowly to perform it for Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

In 1:29 it is time for John to give direct testimony to Jesus. *Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*

The word lamb (*amnos*) occurs only four times in the New Testament:

John 1:29: *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*

John 1:36: *When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!'*

Acts 8:32: *The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: 'He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.'*

I Peter 1:19: *but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

Read I Peter 2:22-24. With these passages in mind, what is John's point in calling Jesus *lamb of God*?

Matthew 8:17, Luke 22:37 and John 12:38 also look back to Isaiah 53 and see Jesus as fulfillment of this prophecy. Read Isaiah 53. What does this add to your understanding of Jesus' life, ministry and role as the *suffering servant*?

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<sup>1</sup>Some of the Baptist's followers missed the point entirely. John the Baptist had a following into the eighth century which held that he (John the Baptist) was the Messiah.

Lambs were used throughout Bible times as sacrifices for sin (Genesis 22:2-8; Leviticus 14:10-25). The sacrifices in the Old Testament were not efficacious (they didn't really work) for the forgiveness of sins according to Hebrews 10:1-4. They looked forward to the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus on the cross. In our text John the Baptist announces that in Jesus we have the *lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*.

Read the following verses in I John and ponder as a homegroup the atonement provided by Jesus. How do these verses explain the meaning of John the Baptist's proclamation?

- I John 1:7
- I John 2:2
- I John 4:9-14

What other titles does John the Baptist apply to Jesus in John 1? You should be able to find three more. What do they imply about our Lord?

How would you be different if you whole-heartedly embraced the Jesus that these titles describe?

The rest of John 1 details the early disciples of Jesus. Verses 35-50 mention five disciples: Andrew; an unnamed disciple (cf. verse 40); Peter (Andrew's brother); Philip and Nathanael.<sup>1</sup>

Notice how John weaves together a tapestry of witnesses to Jesus. John the Baptist points Andrew and, presumably, John to the Lamb of God (John 1:29-37). Then Andrew points his brother Peter toward Jesus (John 1:41). Jesus himself found Philip and called him to follow. Philip goes after his friend Nathanael (1:44). The good news was contagious.

How did you come to know Jesus? Was your introduction to Jesus similar to Nathanael's? Did someone point you toward the Messiah?

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<sup>1</sup>John never gives his readers a list of all twelve disciples.



Are you pointing others toward Jesus? Do you reflect the exuberance of Philip who says to his friend, *We have found the one Moses wrote about...?*

What could you do to more actively point the people around you to Jesus? Who might you start with?

Respond to the following statement by the eighteenth century historian Edward Gibbon:

*[I]t became the most sacred duty of a new convert to diffuse among his friends and relatives the inestimable blessings he had received. (The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, chapter XV, pp. 430ff., cited in Milne, p. 58)*

Read again verses 47-51. Note what happens to Nathanael when he encounters Jesus. He is, at first, skeptical. His skepticism is shattered when Jesus utters an un-sensational word of prophecy over him. *I called you while you were still under the fig tree.* Finally Nathanael submits to the authority of Jesus. *You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.*

How was it with your conversion to Christ? Did the beginning of your faith follow this pattern? What information first compelled you to believe?

Pray with thanks that God revealed Himself to you. Submit to being one who points others to the Lamb of God!

*Sermon Notes...*

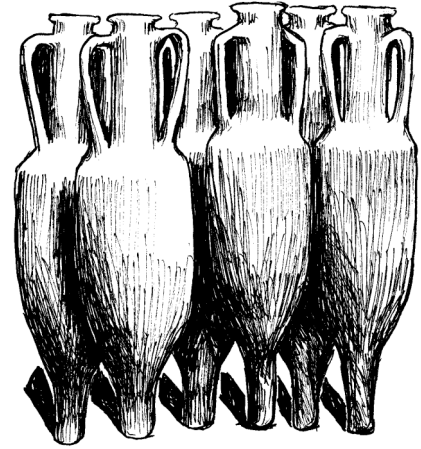
## Study Three

### New Wine

### John 2:1-11

In John 2 we find two stories which establish the ministry of Jesus. This rabbi, Jesus, is offering something new, something not anticipated by either the Greeks or the Jews, or even his immediate disciples.

Read 2:1-11. Here we find a story, unique to John, which presents a simple problem (not enough wine) met by a profound provision (120-180 gallons of the best wine ever tasted!). As you read these verses jot down the details which stand out. What is John up to with this story? What confuses you? What is clear?



In John's gospel we will see repeatedly that the details have rich significance. This is nowhere more evident than in John's record of the miracle at Cana in Galilee. Raymond Brown, one of the most able commentators on John writes of this section, *Here our problem is not a poverty of detail but an embarrassment of riches*. (Brown, p. 103) Indeed, Jesus' first miracle is wrapped in both historical certainty (it really happened!) and theological depth (the miracle revealed Jesus' glory).

If the bride were a virgin (as opposed to a widow), a wedding would take place on Wednesday night.<sup>1</sup> The procession from the bride's home to the groom's home would be conducted with torches and would likely involve the whole town. When the party arrived at the groom's house the couple was *married*. We have no records in the Bible or elsewhere of a wedding liturgy, vows, pronouncement, kiss, etc. Then the party would begin and would last for about a week! (And you thought you were tired after your wedding...)

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<sup>1</sup>In John 1-2 the Evangelist has been careful to point out a time sequence. Most commentators see this as the seventh day of Jesus' ministry. With John's obvious parallels to the creation story in Genesis 1, some speculate that John is making a theological point. What is it? Keep reading.

We shouldn't underestimate the predicament of the hosts of this wedding feast. Reciprocal hospitality was extremely important in the ancient Near East. The invited guests would bring gifts and the family of the bride and groom would provide the feast.<sup>1</sup> A wedding feast was a significant break from the day-by-day poverty endured by rural Palestinians. Tenney notes,

*Refreshments* were provided for all guests. Of these, wine was very important. To fail in providing adequately for the guests would involve social disgrace. In the closely knit communities of Jesus' day, such an error would never be forgotten and would haunt the newly married couple all their lives. (Tenney, p. 42)

Think of this miracle from the perspective of the host family. What does Jesus do for them? What do we learn from this story of God's gracious provision in our lives. Go ahead: spiritualize the text a bit. What *new wine* has God given to you?

Have you ever been in a hopeless situation where the only remedy was God's grace and provision? Describe this.

Bruce Milne sees a model of intercessory prayer in Mary's brief discussion with her son, *They have no more wine*. What do you think of the following statement?

We all have a tendency to use prayer to dictate to God. Our part is to lay the need before him to respond as he wills. We also note that Mary's request was followed by implicit obedience (verse 5). Prayer without a willingness to obey is little better than faith without a willingness to work. (Milne, p. 64)

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<sup>1</sup>It was actually possible to bring a law suit against someone who failed to provide an appropriate gift at your daughter's wedding.

Can you think of a time when obedience went along with a particular prayer? Share this with your group.

The story in Cana has a deeper significance than Jesus saving the honor of a Galilean family. The *new wine* of Jesus is replacing the *old water* of Judaism. Late in Israel's history the prophets foretold of God's judgment on the nation and of the restoration of his people under the leadership of the Messiah. Wine was often employed as a symbol of God's future blessing. Notice how two prophets, Joel and Amos, use wine as an image of God's grace in the coming kingdom.

*The threshing floors will be [in the coming kingdom] filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil. (Joel 2:24)*

*In that day [when Messiah reigns] the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and will water the valley of acacias. (Joel 3:18)*

*The days are coming, declares the LORD, when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. (Amos 9:13-14)*

Now think back to John's story in Cana. From where does the water for the wine come? It is from ceremonial washing pots. Upon entering the house where the feast was taking place, the guests would wash their hands and feet in an exact, prescribed fashion. They might even re-wash between courses of the meal.

The symbolism is rich. The water of Judaism is replaced by the wine of Jesus. John's point is precise; the best has been *saved till now*.

In the Bible the glory of God refers to his splendor, his majesty. In I Kings 8:11 the temple built by Solomon is filled with the glory of God. When the temple was rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity there is no record of God's glory filling the temple. In the time of Jesus there is in Jerusalem the second rebuilt temple. But, again, the glory of God is not there.

It is in Jesus, John tells us, where we at last find the revealed glory of God!<sup>1</sup> In 2:11 we learn this miracle revealed the glory of Jesus.

What was the result of the revelation of Jesus' glory?

The synoptic gospels tend to see the glory of Jesus in his resurrection. But John sees Jesus' glory in his ministry and, of all places, in his crucifixion. Consider (ponder) the following texts in John. In each passage, what is the source or reason for Jesus' glory? Notice how surprising some of them are.

- 7:37-39
- 8:54
- 9:24
- 11:1-4, 39-44
- 12:14-16, 23, 27-28
- 12:38-42 (difficult?)
- 13:25-32
- 16:13-15
- 17:4-5 (!)

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<sup>1</sup>John 1:14 is significant with regard to the glory of God revealed in Jesus. In Jewish writing the glory resulting from the immediate presence of the Lord is referred to as the *shekinah* glory of God. The word means *to dwell*, or *dwelling*. In 1:14 Jesus dwelled for a while among us.

Summarize what stands out as the source of Jesus' glory.

What is your response to reading multiple passages pointing to Jesus' glory? Often Christians find themselves tied up in the things of earth. What can we do to keep focus on this great glory?

The new wine has come. Believers are drinking of it every day. Spend time as a group giving God glory for his wonderful provision.

*Sermon Notes...*

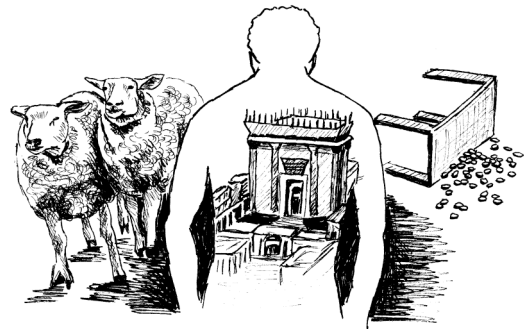


## **Study Four**

### **A New Temple**

#### **John 2:12-25**

Read 2:12-25. Compare Matthew 21:12-17, Luke 19:45-47, Mark 11:12-19. What are the similarities and the differences between John and the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) in this account?



What stands out as you read four versions of this story? Would you expect Jesus to act this way?

At that time the Jews believed that the temple was the dwelling place of God. Why is the *cleansing of the temple* so significant that it is included in all four gospels? What is the message the writers were trying to communicate?

As we read John's account of Jesus cleansing of the temple we should note several details:

- First, John's gospel places the event at the beginning of our Lord's ministry as opposed to the last week of Jesus' ministry in the synoptics.
- Second, in John Jesus is concerned over the *fact* that there are money changers in the temple and not that they are dishonest (as is the case in the synoptic gospels, cf. Luke 19:45-46).
- Third, in John Jesus drives out the animals; in the first three gospels he expels the money changers themselves.
- Fourth, in John Jesus connects his action with the *sign* of destroying and rebuilding the temple. In Matthew, Mark and Luke this sign is brought up at Jesus' trial.

With these differences in mind it seems that John is giving us an account of the first of two temple cleansings, one at the beginning and the other at the end of Jesus' ministry.<sup>1</sup> In John 2 we have two highly significant events. The changing of the water to wine is a hidden *sign* for the disciples. The cleansing of the temple is a public sign for the Jews given in their central place of worship.

But why did Jesus do it? Why is he concerned over the presence of those selling animals in the temple? Aren't they supposed to be there? Again, in John there is no suggestion that the money changers were dishonest. Were not animals necessary for the sacrificial system which was firmly in place during the time of Jesus?

At one level there is a messianic announcement here. The prophet Zechariah foretold of a day when the temple would be devoid of merchants or traders (Zechariah 14:21). Malachi 3:1ff. reads,

*See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come, says the LORD Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in the days gone by, as in former years.*

In cleansing the temple Jesus announces *Messiah is here! The temple is cleansed!*

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<sup>1</sup>There are, of course, other options. We could say the synoptics are right, John is right, or that the cleansing took place at some other time during Jesus' ministry and the gospel writers placed it where it best suited their theological purposes.

When the Jews ask for a sign of Jesus' authority Jesus could have said, *You just had your sign, I cleaned up the temple.* Instead he predicts, in a single sentence, both his own death and resurrection *and* the destruction of the temple built by Herod.<sup>1</sup>

Newbigin explores the rich irony of Jesus' words.

The Temple is the place of sacrifice, where God has provided the "mercy seat" at which sin is put away and men and women can come into the presence of God. But with the death of Jesus the one true sacrifice is offered and there is no more need for the blood of sheep and oxen. The Temple is the place of God's tabernacling where his glory dwells. But in Jesus the word of God has come to tabernacle among us and we have seen his glory (1:14). The flesh and blood of Jesus, this man, is the temple where God dwells in the fullness of grace and truth. The Jews will destroy the Temple, but Jesus will raise it up (not build another one as in the "false witness" quoted by the synoptics). The man's body will be the true temple, built of living stones and always growing into fullness (Ephesians 2:19-21). (Newbigin, p. 33)

Newbigin goes on to point out the depth of meaning in Jesus' action.

So the action of Jesus is more than an example of prophetic protest against corrupt religion. It is a sign of the end of religion. (Newbigin, p. 33)

As John points out, it is only after the resurrection that the disciples understand the fullness of this sign.

Think of this story in its larger context as the original readers must have done if we are correct in assuming John was written late in the first century. They knew that the earthly temple had been destroyed by Titus in 70 A.D. John's believing readers, we might suppose, had some familiarity with Paul who develops the notion of the people of God as the new temple. Read and discuss the following texts in light of John 2.

- I Corinthians 3:16-17 (notice this is plural)
- I Corinthians 6:19
- Ephesians 2:19-22
- I Peter 2:4-5

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<sup>1</sup>Herod's temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

What do John 2 and the above texts teach us about corporate worship?

What do the above verses have to say about casual church attendance? What would Peter and Paul say to someone who decided to skip corporate worship in order to sit on the beach, read a good book, or participate in a favorite sporting event?

How are your habits of corporate worship? Do you joyfully participate? If there are things that deter you from Sunday worship, what are they and what can you do to overcome those distractions?

When Jesus cleanses the temple he is intent on protecting the Father's reputation; *How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!* Think through this statement with regard to the above passages. If Jesus was concerned for the purity of temple worship, what should our concern be for the purity of the church? What does this teach us regarding the care of our own physical bodies?

What does it mean for a believer to keep one's body pure? What does that entail?

Consider the following statement by Bruce Milne.

A significant proportion of the Bible is devoted to the regulation of worship and we are sadly misled if we imagine that the quality of what we offer in worship services, or the devotion with which we participate, are matters of peripheral importance. If *Jesus is Lord*, he claims the temple as a primary sphere of his rule. Modern-day worship which is irreverent, superficial, distraction-filled, cold, lifeless, sloppy, self-indulgent, hypocritical, ill-prepared or theologically inappropriate will likewise receive his censure, as will worship which detracts from the honour and glory of the living God through a concern for performance and self-display on the part of those leading it. (Milne, pp. 70-71)

Have you ever thought of SBCC as a temple of God? Would he be pleased with our corporate worship? How do you structure your week and your Sunday to make a contribution to our worship together?

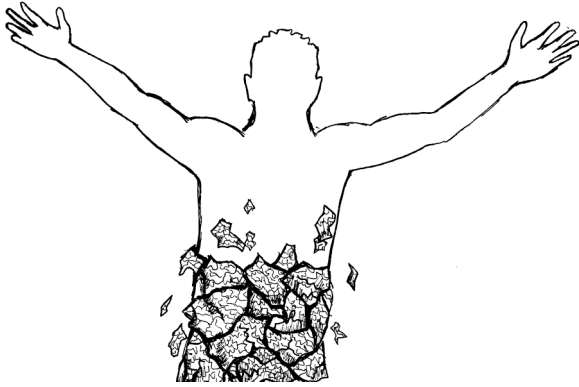
Encourage one another and pray for one another that you would reflect God's glory as His temple both individually and corporately.

*Sermon Notes...*

## **Study Five**

### **New Birth**

### **John 3:1-36**



John 3 makes, if nothing else, one thing extremely clear: Whatever our background, whether we were wealth addicts, drug addicts, careerists, swindlers, sexually licentious or converted at age seven, becoming a Christian is always a miracle. Jesus' words to Nicodemus show that no one comes to the kingdom of God through religious activity, knowledge of the scriptures or external obedience to the law.

By the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had been in existence for about 200 years. Their roots went back to the *hasidim* (the godly Jews) who were faithful to God during the time between the Old and New Testaments. The Pharisees were a lay movement of non-priestly Jews. By the time of Jesus there were probably about 7000 Pharisees.<sup>1</sup> Nicodemus had risen to the top group of the Pharisees. He is a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Pharisees. Nicodemus comes to Jesus to discuss the miracles our Lord had performed and, presumably, to find out about the specifics of Jesus' teaching.

Read John 3. We might outline the chapter as follows:

- I. Jesus' testimony to himself
- II. John's (the Apostle) testimony to Jesus
- III. John the Baptist's testimony to Jesus

John 3 is loaded with spiritual gems. What stands out as you read these verses? What speaks to you in your Christian life? What is unclear or confusing?

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<sup>1</sup>The other group of Jews often mentioned in the gospels is the Sadducees. This group was much less religious, secularist (they denied the resurrection), and very political.

Why is John 3:16 possibly the most famous verse in the Bible?

In John's gospel, as we will see, the words of Jesus fill in the meaning of his deeds. In John 2 we read of two signs: the turning of water into wine; and the cleansing of the temple. Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus will illumine the meaning of these two signs.

Note the setting. It is night (John makes much of *light* and *darkness*), and a Pharisee comes to have a chat with Jesus. Evidently Nicodemus wants to discuss theology. He approaches Jesus with a term of respect in calling him *Rabbi*.<sup>1</sup> Jesus, abruptly, makes a startling point to this Pharisee. Leon Morris writes of verse 3;

In one sentence [Jesus] sweeps away all that Nicodemus stood for and demands that he be re-made by the power of God. (Morris, p. 212)

The NIV and ESV renders the key word *born again*. The translation is viable, but might not bring out the fullness of the word used by Jesus. The Greek word is *anōthen* (ἀνωθεν) and can be translated *again*. But the word can also be rendered *above*.

If rendered *again*, the emphasis is on the nature of the experience of entry into the kingdom (*born again; it is a crisis akin to physical birth*). If rendered *from above*, the emphasis is on the origin of the experience. (Milne, p. 75)

Commentators point out that both senses of the word are true and John may have had both in mind. Barclay enjoys both senses of the word when he translates the verse, *...unless a man is reborn from above...*

Linguistic considerations aside, these words must have shocked Nicodemus. Jews of his day were looking for the kingdom of God to come in an external fashion. Messiah would arrive, overthrow the Romans, and rule Israel from Jerusalem. To be Jewish, thought Nicodemus, was to be among those who would enjoy the rule and reign of Messiah in the Kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup>

But Jesus introduces to Nicodemus what we might call the *shock* of the New Testament: With Jesus the kingdom has been inaugurated! Entrance to the kingdom is through spiritual new birth!

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<sup>1</sup>*Rabbi* literally means *my great one*. By the time of Jesus it had become a simple title of respect which was employed by disciples addressing their mentor (cf. Morris, p. 157).

<sup>2</sup>It is significant that the words *kingdom of God* occur only here in John's gospel. These words occur repeatedly in the synoptic gospels. Why are they omitted in John? John wants to appeal to his non-Jewish readers, the Greeks. So from this point on he will substitute the words *eternal life* for the words *kingdom of God*.



How do we see this same surprise in the synoptic gospels?

- Luke 4:17-20
- Mark 1:15
- Matthew 4:23
- Matthew 11:2-6

Notice in these verses that the kingdom foretold by the Old Testaments prophets has arrived, *partially*, in the person and ministry of Jesus.

How does one participate in this kingdom? What does it take to get in? How does Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus answer these questions?

In 3:5 Jesus speaks of being born of *water* and of *the Spirit*. What does Jesus mean by these terms?

1. Some take *water* to refer to one's physical birth (accompanied by watery fluid) and *Spirit* to refer to one's entry into the kingdom of God (*getting saved...*).<sup>1</sup>
2. Others take *water* and *Spirit* to refer to the same thing, that is, spiritual birth.
3. Still others see *water* as a reference to John's baptizing in the Jordan. In this case Jesus is saying, *You need to repent, as John has commanded, and be baptized in the Holy Spirit.*

What do we learn about the Holy Spirit in this dialogue?

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<sup>1</sup>Water could even be a euphemism for male sperm (Michaels, p. 56). One of the Qumran texts refers to humanity as dust or clay *kneaded with water*.

Notice how these figures of speech are completely transforming. Newbigin points out that to be a believer is *not simply a matter of illumination; it is a matter of regeneration. It is not just a new seeing, but new being.* (Newbigin, p. 38). We must be *born again*!

Describe for your homegroup the transformation you have experienced in Christ. What does your new birth look like?

People are born as babies then grow toward maturity. Is spiritual birth similar? How so or how not? Illustrate your answer with an example from your own life.

In what way is the Holy Spirit similar to wind? What is Jesus' point in verse 8? Compare the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2:1ff.

We have in this chapter a clash of two communities. The Greek text makes this plain. In verse 7 Jesus uses the plural personal pronoun. *You* (all of you, Pharisees included) *must be born again*. We find the same plural pronoun in verse 11.

Michaels comments:

The community of Nicodemus can no more understand the community of Jesus than one can understand where the wind comes from or where it goes. The lives of those who are born again are an utter mystery to those who are not (verse 8). The conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus centers on the impossible. Jesus' miracles are impossible without the help of God (verse 2). No one can see or enter the kingdom of God without a new birth (verses 3, 5), and no one can go through the process of birth a second time (verse 4). There are two spheres of existence, the physical and the spiritual, with no natural access from one to the other (verses 6-8). (Michaels, p. 57)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>We meet Nicodemus two more times in John's gospel. It is fun (but probably fruitless) to speculate what he did with this conversation recorded in John 3. See John 7:45-52 and John 19:38-42. Did Nicodemus become "born again"?

How did you think of the Christian community before your *new birth*? What was your view of Christians?

John 3:16ff. are among the most loved and most famous of all the verses in the Bible. Read these with care. Do you think these are from the mouth of Jesus or are they John's commentary?

Reflecting on the preceding quote from Michaels, what was your initial response when you began to understand the mystery of rebirth? How might this concept be difficult for those whose thinking is couched in the relativism and uncertainty of our culture today?

We speak of becoming *saved*. What, according to these verses, are we saved from?

Respond to John Calvin's statement on this verse.

The evangelist does not say that God was moved to deliver us because he saw something in us which deserved such an excellent blessing; rather, he ascribes the glory of our deliverance entirely to his love. (Calvin, p. 76)

In 3:22ff we find the final speech of John the Baptist in this gospel. We know from the study of history that the Baptist had followers for centuries, people who claimed he was actually the Messiah. Here the Apostle John wants to set the record straight: The Baptist, before he was executed, pointed to Jesus as the Messiah!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The death of John the Baptist is described in Matthew 14.

What do we learn about John the Baptist from this story? Notice that the conversation, brought up by *a certain Jew*, involves ceremonial washing (3:25). Eventually a potential conflict breaks out. *John, do something. Everyone is going over to Jesus' side. He is becoming more popular than you are.*

What is John's response? Try to outline John's answer to this question. In what ways does John point to the supremacy of Jesus?

Verse 3:36 is the climax of this chapter. To believe in the Son is to have eternal life and to reject the Son is to receive the wrath of God. For John there is no middle ground, no third way. We are either believers or we are outside the kingdom of God.

... the Bible in general, and Jesus in particular, take the wrath of God with an awesome seriousness. For Jesus, God's wrath is not the outworking of some impersonal principle of retribution. It is a personal reality. God personally resists those who resist him. Further, God's wrath, unlike our fitful and often uncontrolled emotion, is without sin or error in its exercise. (Milne, p. 82)

If God's wrath is real and abiding, how should we then speak with our non-believing friends and acquaintances?

Consider being *born again*! If you are not a follower of Christ consider John 3 and ponder why you may not have accepted this in your life.

## Study Six

### New Water

### John 4:1-42

Palestine was a very small country during the time of Jesus (about 100 miles long), and consisted of three regions. Judea was in the south, Galilee in the north and Samaria was in between the two. The most direct route from Judea to Galilee was to pass directly through Samaria. But the Jews hated the Samaritans with such vehemence that they often took a longer circuitous route through Transjordan in order to avoid contact with the Samaritans.

Contact with Samaritans was thought to defile a Jew because of the religious compromises the Samaritans had made over the centuries. Israel and Judea divided after King Solomon's death (I Kings 12:1-24). The northern tribes, collectively called Israel, fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. (II Kings 17:1ff). After the Assyrian captivity of Israel, inter-marriage with those who were not deported became common, as did religious syncretism (the blending of religions). About 400 B.C. the division between North and South was intensified when the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim.<sup>1</sup> Judaeans saw



themselves as those who were *pure* both religiously and racially. During the time of the Maccabean revolt, when devout Jews avoided Greek influences in the Temple, the Samaritans sided with the Syrians.<sup>2</sup> For these reasons, the Jews of Judea hated every Samaritan. Samaritans had, after all, compromised both their religion and their heritage.<sup>3</sup>

With the above in mind, read this passage. Here we catch a glimpse of Jesus as an evangelist. By the end of his time in Sychar ... *many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him...* (John 4:39). What makes him so effective?

<sup>1</sup>This temple was destroyed by the Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus in 108 B.C.

<sup>2</sup>About 163 B.C.

<sup>3</sup>The Samaritans only recognized the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) as Scripture.

On your first reading of this chapter make a list of details which stand out. Which ones do you think John included to make a theological point? What point do you think these details make?

John's gospel is loaded with irony. When we come to chapter 4 we are freshly familiar with Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. Compare and contrast these two encounters. Note how different they are! Compare Nicodemus with the woman of Sychar. What is the difference in their conversation with Jesus? What is the difference in the outcome? Look for an initial similarity in Nicodemus' and the woman's initial response to Jesus.

### Nicodemus

### Woman at Jacob's Well

Jesus breaks through several formidable barriers in order to speak with the woman at the well. In addition to what we have noted above, Jesus is speaking with a woman, something not done in public during this time.<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce says that Jews of Jesus' day must have already held the view that would become religious law within a few years. This law stated that all Samaritan women *must be assumed to be in a perpetual state of ceremonial uncleanness*. (Bruce, p. 103)

What cultural/racial barriers do we face with people we encounter in Santa Barbara?  
How can we break through these barriers in our evangelism?

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<sup>1</sup>Milne cites two rabbinic statements to this effect. *One should not talk with a woman on the street, not even with his own wife, and certainly not with somebody else's wife, because of the gossip of men,* and *"It is forbidden to give a woman any greetings.* (Milne, p. 83)

Jesus turns an ordinary discussion, if we can call it that, into an invitation to salvation. He finds a point of contact (water) and leads this woman to saving trust in himself. Have you ever done this? Think as a group *about points of contact* for evangelism in our time. Where in our conversations will people be likely to acknowledge their thirst?

What exactly are people thirsty for? Look at your own life. What thirst does the living water quench?

Bruce writes of this section,

Here the water in Jacob's well, symbolizing the old order inherited by Samaritans and Jews alike, is contrasted with the new order, the gift of the Spirit, life eternal. (Bruce, p. 104)

Note the use of *water* in the first miracle (2:1ff.), in the conversation with Nicodemus (3:1ff) and now in this conversation with the woman at Jacob's well. Does John's use of *water* make the same point in each of these stories? Compare Jeremiah 2:13.

Notice the gradual conversion which takes place in the woman's mind. First she sees Jesus as a *Jew* (verse 9). Then he is a *prophet* (verse 19). As they continue to converse she sees Jesus as the *Messiah* (verse 29). Finally she calls him the *Savior of the world* (verse 42).

There is, possibly, a fascinating connection made in the mind of the woman at the well. In the Samaritan liturgy for the Day of Atonement we find these words describing the arrival of the Messiah, *Water shall flow from his buckets*.

When the woman first realizes Jesus' prophetic knowledge of her life she quickly shifts the topic of conversation. *Let's talk theology*, she says. *Where is the best place to worship*, she asks, *In Jerusalem or on Mt. Gerizim?*

What do you think of this question? Is it a dodge, an evasion of Jesus? Is it like the person who, when confronted with the gospel says, *Well, yeah, but what about flying saucers? What about dinosaurs? Who made God???* Or do you think she really wanted to know, *Who is right? The Jews or the Samaritans?*

Notice the profundity of Jesus' answer. It is not *where* you worship but *how* you worship that will be important when Messiah comes.

What does it mean to worship *in spirit and in truth*? What can we learn from his answer for our own worship?

Why did Jesus bother to bring up the woman's background? Why does he speak of her five husbands and her adulterous relationship?

We might miss the impact and direct nature of Jesus' response to the woman in 4:26. Here we have a direct claim by Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus uses the Greek words *ego eimi* (εγω ειμι) which literally reads *I, I am*. The same self-designation in 8:58 compels Jesus' opponents to want to murder him. Commentators point out these words show Jesus' *divine consciousness*. William Temple translates this verse, *I that am talking to you, I Am*. (William Temple, Readings in John's Gospel, 1961, p. 64)

What happens to the woman at a psychological level when she realizes that Jesus knows all about her life of sin? How do you think she felt? Note her reaction to Jesus' insight into her life. She goes back to town (leaving her water pot behind) and says, *Come see a man who told me everything I ever did...Could this be the Messiah?* What does this tell us about Jesus' style and demeanor with her?



Is your experience of Christ similar? In what ways? In what ways did Jesus confront your sin as you came to trust in Him? Was your response similar to the woman at the well?

Respond to the following quotation by Malcolm Muggeridge.<sup>1</sup>

I may, I suppose, regard myself, or pass for being a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets — that's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Inland Revenue — that's success. Furnished with money and a little fame even the elderly, if they care to may partake of trendy diversions — that's pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time — that's fulfillment. Yet I say to you, and I beg you to believe me, multiply these triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing — less than nothing, a positive impediment — measured against one draught of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are. (cited in J. Gladstone, Living With Style 1986, p. 85)

As a group spend time in prayer thanking God for the provision of Living Water in your lives – the same that was received by the woman at the well in Samaria!

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<sup>1</sup>Malcolm Muggeridge was one of the more colorful figures of the twentieth century. Born in England and raised in a socialist home, Muggeridge taught school in India (he even met Gandhi), was a journalist in Britain, a foreign correspondent in Moscow, a spy during W.W.II in Africa, the editor of Punch magazine and a television personality. Muggeridge came to the Christian faith late in life.

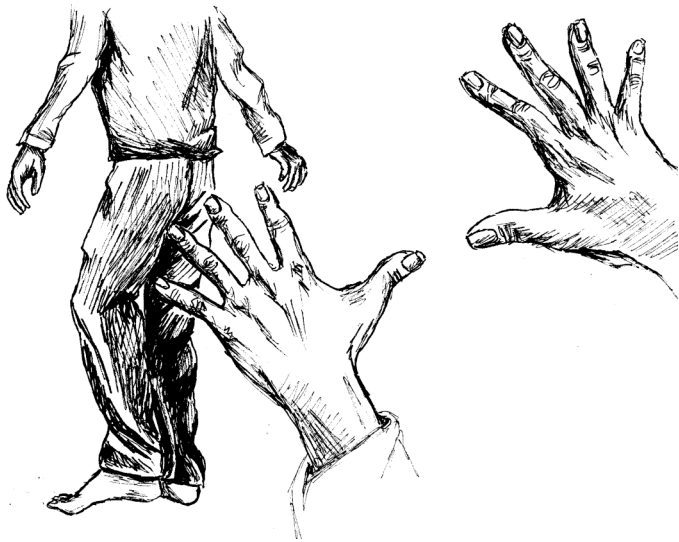
*Sermon Notes...*

## **Study Seven**

### **The Boy and the Invalid**

#### **John 4:43-5:47**

Thus far in John's gospel we have been exposed to several titles for Jesus (lamb of God, Messiah, savior of the world) without much elucidation. At this point Jesus will give lengthy definitions of his own person and being as he interprets the signs he performs.



John 4:43-5:47 contains two miracles, the second and third of the seven *signs* we encounter in John's gospel. Before going on, read and enjoy these two signs. Make a note or two as you read.

What is John doing in these verses? Why do the stories come together in his narrative?

#### **The Boy: 4:43-54**

Examine these verses again. Where does this miracle take place? Is there something significant about these miracles which causes John to pass by the other miracles Jesus had performed in Jerusalem (cf. 3:2)? Michaels comments,

Clearly, more is involved here than simply a pious geographical interest in Cana as a place of miracles. The two stories have in common a direct connection between a miracle and a decisive act of faith. When Jesus *revealed his glory* by turning a great amount of water into wine, *his disciples put their faith in him* (2:11). After his resurrection, their faith was deepened and perfected as *they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken* (2:22). In the case of the government official, the two stages merge into one. As soon as Jesus told him his son would live, *he took Jesus at his word and departed* (verse 50). Right from the beginning he demonstrated faith in the words of Jesus, a faith that is attributed to the disciples only after Jesus' words are verified by his resurrection (2:22). If the disciples typify those who believed because of what they saw, the government official typifies "those who have not seen and yet believed" (20:29). (Michaels, p. 80, emphasis is Michaels')

What are we to make of Jesus' initial rebuff of the official's request (4:48)? It sounds a bit harsh to our ears. It may be that Jesus is testing the man's faith. Or, possibly Jesus wants his message to have priority over his methods. Paul criticizes Jews for being overly fascinated with miraculous signs (I Corinthians 1:22).

We are living in an era of *signs and wonders*. Healing seminars abound. Wonders are performed. Certainly God is at work in much of this activity. Nevertheless Jesus' reticence to perform a sign for the Galileans should serve as a warning to us. The important thing is not the presence of miracles, but in what we do with these miracles.

Miraculous signs and miraculous answers to prayer, such as modeled here, may have a certain value as a starting point, making us aware of God's reality, but they remain sterile unless they lead on to a concern for the Christ to whom they point, and whose glory they signify (2:11). Beyond the miracles we seek the Lord who works them. It is in obeying his commands and trusting his promises (50) that true faith is expressed. Now we have ceased to dictate the terms of our relationship — we exist for him, not he for us. Now we 'believe' (53). (Milne, p. 92)

The official is persistent. He could care less about a *sign*, he wants his son to live! Does this illustrate anything about the nature of prayer? Calvin points out that the man is desperate and loses his composure, *Sir, please, come down to my house before my son dies!*

We are amazingly spoiled, impatient, and fretful until we are subdued by adversities which force us to dispense with our pride and disdain. (Calvin, p. 115)

Have you ever approached Jesus in such desperation? What was the result?

How do signs and wonders effect your faith? How should they?

### The Invalid: 5:1-47

Chapter 5 begins with the words, *Some time later* which show a break in the chronology. Jesus is in Jerusalem and will perform his third *sign*.<sup>1</sup> Here our Lord seeks out an individual who doesn't even know who Jesus is. The man makes no request of Jesus,

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<sup>1</sup>Tenney writes, ... *John was less interested in chronology than in following the trend of Jesus' conflict with unbelief.*

demonstrates no faith, as in Cana, and may even prefer his state of sickness over health. He may, after thirty-eight years of paralysis, have adapted to his state and accepted it.<sup>1</sup> His paralysis has possibly become an integral part of his identity. *Do you want to get well?* Jesus asks (5:6). His answer shows despair over healing. *No one will help me into the water.*<sup>2</sup>

Do you know anyone (possibly yourself) who is afraid to be healed of a particular affliction, someone who needs to be asked the same question, *Do you want to get well?* Explain.

In verse 8, Jesus commands the man, *Get up, take your bed, and walk.* (ESV) Later in verse 14, he commands him, *Sin no more.* What would he have commanded you? Or what is he commanding you now?

Jesus speaks and two things happen. The man is healed and the Jews are incensed. *Hey. Whoa, wait just a minute. What are you doing carrying your bed on the Sabbath? That's against the law!* (verse 10)

The paralytic appeals to the authority of *the man who made me well.* Jesus then appeals to the authority of the Father (5:17). The Father keeps working on the Sabbath and so does the Son.<sup>3</sup>

The story becomes inflamed.

*For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.* (5:18)

What follows is one of Jesus' profound discussions in John. In it we learn a great deal about the triune God of the Bible, and, specifically, about the relation between Jesus and the Father.

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<sup>1</sup>Becoming well might have affected his income as well. Milne quotes Finlay, *An eastern beggar often loses a good living by being cured.* (Milne, p. 95)

<sup>2</sup>Verses 3b-4 are not in the best manuscripts of the Bible. These words were probably added later to clarify.

<sup>3</sup>Barclay cites a Rabbinic saying, *The sun shines; the rivers flow; the processes of birth and death go on on the Sabbath as on any other day; and that is the work of God.* Jews held that God ceased on the seventh day only from the *act* of creation. His higher works of judgment, mercy, compassion and love still continued. (cf. Barclay, p. 179)

## ***THE BOY AND THE INVALID***

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Examine verses 19-23 carefully. What do we learn about the Father's relation to the Son and the Son's submission/dependence upon the Father? Notice and ponder the inner working of the divine trinity.

As you work through these verses consider Tenney's comment on verse 19. Does this help clarify?

The Son is dependent on the Father. He does not act independently apart from the Father's will and purpose. Throughout this Gospel Jesus continually asserted that his work was to do the will of the Father (4:34; 5:30; 8:28; 12:50; 15:10). Equality of nature, identity of objective, and subordination of will are interrelated in Christ. John presents him as the Son, not as the slave of God, yet as the perfect agent of the divine purpose and the complete revelation of the divine nature. (Tenney, p. 64)

**The Father's Relation to the Son**

**The Son's Relation to the Father**

What questions come to mind as you look at these verses?

**Challenge question:** When we call the first person of the Trinity the *Father* and when we call Jesus the *Son* we are employing figures of speech which help us understand their relationship to one another. The Father did not have a baby and name the child *Son*. Some Christians of our time are having a difficult time with the image of God as *Father*.

Why is this? What is the proper response to such a difficulty? Should we drop the metaphor? Why is this figure of speech used through out the scriptures to describe God?

It is easy to grow accustomed to the gospels and the teaching of Jesus. When we read verses 24-30 we should be shocked. Here a Palestinian Jew claims he will judge the masses of humanity. Consider the words of C. S. Lewis.

In the mouth of any speaker who is not God, these words would imply what I can only regard as a silliness and conceit unrivaled by any character in history... You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. (Mere Christianity. p. 55-56)

What are the ramifications of believing that Jesus is the judge? How does or should this effect how you live your life?

What, or who, bears the greatest witness to Jesus in your experience? Explain.

In verses 31-40 Jesus mentions three witnesses to himself. Who (or what) are they?

Jesus is far from a passive defender in these verses. What accusations does he make about his opponents?

## ***THE BOY AND THE INVALID***

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What does Jesus mean when he says (verse 45), *Your accuser is Moses*?

Jewish religion tended to focus on the outward to the neglect of the inward. How can you (we) avoid this mistake in our own Christian lives? What can we do to bolster our belief?

Write out some practical ideas and share them with your homegroup. Pray for one another that your faith will grow increasingly strong.



**Study Eight**  
**The Turning Point**  
**John 6:1-70**



John chapter 6 marks both the high point of Jesus' popularity and the beginning of Jesus' long procession to the cross. The feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle which occurs in all four gospels. It marks the turning point in our Lord's ministry. Jesus' popularity is at its apex. John the Baptist has been executed (Matthew 14:12-13), and now the people want to make Jesus a king. Rejecting the crown, Jesus calls for a greater commitment on the part of his followers (John 6:53ff.; Matthew 16:24ff.; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23) and sets his course toward the cross in Jerusalem at this his followers begin to abandon him.

This is a long, and, as usual, rich chapter containing the fourth and fifth *signs* of our gospel. Read these 70 verses. What questions arise in your mind as you think through this passage? Look for the following details as you read:

When do the events of this chapter take place? What are we to learn from this?

Where do the events take place?

Where is Jesus' discourse (verses 26-59) given? Do you think John has a purpose in giving us the location of Jesus' sermon?

In verses 1-14, consider the feeding of the 5000. Notice the bumbling disciples. Jesus tests them. What do you think of the response of Philip and Andrew? What were they thinking? Do you identify with either of them?

Do you agree with John Calvin's assessment of the disciples?

The disciples were stupid and to blame for not being quicker to entertain the hope which their Master gave, and because they did not think of ascribing to his power all that they should have. (Calvin, p. 147)

Notice that this sign is prefaced by a test for the disciples (6:6). Respond to the following by Bruce Milne.

... Jesus will not let us brood, he challenges us with the need, both for the 'bread of life' and... also for material bread, and every other need that cries out to be met.

Faced with the need, Jesus still asks us individually, and also as church communities, *Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?* (v. 5)... Jesus regularly tests his people. We cannot simply *amble along* with Jesus, for he is concerned more for our growth than for our comfort. To walk with Jesus means climbing. (Milne, p. 106)

We have seen that the details of John's gospel often tell of profound theological truth. What do you make of the detail John includes in the words, *[He] distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat...* (6:11)?

What is the point of the twelve baskets that are left over? (6:13) What were the disciples thinking and feeling as they collected the leftovers?

What does this text offer to us during apparently impossible situations?

Note 6:14. After the people eat and are satisfied they become exuberant. *Could this be the prophet foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15?*<sup>1</sup>

*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.*

Moses had provided food in the desert (Exodus 16:11-36). Now this Rabbi was doing the same.

In 6:15 Jesus' adoring crowd may have intended to kidnap him and force him to be king. Instead, Jesus eludes their grasp and spends some time in solitude.

In verses 6:16-21 The disciples have a five mile trip across the Sea of Tiberias.<sup>2</sup> In the evening it was common for the wind to increase. They are making headway, but they still have almost half the lake to cross.

Notice John points out, *It was dark*. (verse 17). This is probably his way of pointing out the spiritual struggle going on during and after the miraculous feeding.<sup>3</sup> The disciples are discouraged. When the disciples see Jesus walking on water they are, understandably, more *terrified* of him than they are of the storm. Here Jesus utters another veiled claim to deity. *It is I*, or, *I, I am*.

What lesson(s) does John provide for his readers in this sign performed by Jesus?

The dialogue which takes place *on the other side of the lake* (verses 25-59) interprets the miracle of the feeding and is, perhaps, the most significant part of John 6. This narrative takes the place, in John's gospel, of the *Last Supper* in the synoptic gospels.

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<sup>1</sup>Michaels cites Josephus recording the fact that *messianic pretenders* during the first century tried to emulate the miracles of the Old Testament to gain fame and notoriety. Obviously the feeding of the 5000 was more than pretense! (cf. Michaels, p. 102)

<sup>2</sup>Normally this lake was called the Sea of Galilee. The body of water is six hundred feet below sea level and was renamed in 26 A.D. by Herod Antipas to honor the new emperor of Rome, Tiberias.

<sup>3</sup>John's references to *darkness* and *night* are too carefully placed to be understood as simple details. These references make a point, the light has come and is conquering the darkness. See 6:17; 12:35; 20:1; 3:2; 9:4; 11:10; 13:30; 21:3.

Why, according to Jesus did the people pursue him (verse 26)? What point is John making?

The Galileans see Jesus primarily as the one who will meet their materialistic needs. How does Jesus respond to this? What are the implications of verse 29? How does this verse summarize the entire gospel? Can you think of statements by Paul or by Peter which correspond to these words?

Verse 35 contains the first of the great *I am* statements in John (cf. Introduction, p. 2).

The saying enshrines the essence of Jesus' message — he is the answer to the needs of the human heart. *The bread of life* implies the fundamental, elemental role Jesus claims to fulfill in relation to the yearnings of the human spirit. For Jesus' audience bread was the 'stuff of life', the primary source of nourishment, as it continues to be for millions in Third world countries. But since bread is a basic food universally, there is also the implicit claim that he fulfils this role for everyone. Caviar, like cake and confectionery, is for the few, but bread is for all. He is 'the Saviour of the world' (4:42). (Milne, p. 111)

Complete the following sentence and share it with your group. *Jesus is the bread of my life in that he* \_\_\_\_\_.

In 6:48ff. Jesus seems to go out of his way to be offensive to the Jews listening to him in the synagogue. In verse 51, for the first time, he connects *I am the bread of life*, with actually *eating* his flesh. Why is this offensive? To eat flesh and, especially, to drink blood (Leviticus 17:10-14) was unthinkable. It was against the law of Moses and would alienate the participant from Israel.<sup>1</sup> The offense is intensified with the tense Jesus uses for *eat*. The past (aorist) tense of the verb means *to consume* with decisive action. But in

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<sup>1</sup>Eating flesh and drinking blood was what Israel's oppressors would do (Isaiah 49:26) when Yahweh judged them.

verses 54 and 56 Jesus uses the present tense which means *to gnaw*, or *to chew* or *to munch upon*.

What does it mean to *eat the flesh* of Jesus? What did Jesus have in mind with this figure of speech? Does the use of the present tense lend help here?

Share an example with your homegroup of you *gnawing* or *chewing* on Jesus.

Why is this a *hard teaching*? (verse 60) Is it *hard* for you? In what way?

This is a long, and rich, chapter. What have you learned about Jesus from your study? Who is he? What does he offer? What does he demand?

As you end this study, determine one or two things you can do to better chew on the teaching of Jesus and prayerfully commit yourself to those things.

*Sermon Notes...*

## **Study Nine**

### **Are You Thirsty?**

#### **John 7:1-52**



In John seven we come to the wonderful *Temple Sermons* of Jesus which are unique to John's gospel. John 7:1 indicates Jesus is going to stay away from southern Israel because it is too dangerous. The irony of the narrative is that Jesus does go to Jerusalem and, as far as John's narrative is concerned, we don't find Jesus back in Galilee until he has risen from the dead (21:1ff). The

darkness is closing in around the *light of the world*. From now on we will find frequent references to the attempt to kill Jesus (cf. 7:13, 19, 25, 30, 32, 44; 8:37, 59). *John's Gospel is less interested in where Jesus traveled and lived most of his life than in his visits to Jerusalem.* (Michaels, p. 124 cf. Introduction, p. 2) Jerusalem is the *storm-centre of the Messiah's ministry, where He vindicates His claims before consummating His work outside its walls.* (Tasker, p. 101)

Keep the following outline in mind during the next few weeks of our study:

- I. The Journey to Jerusalem (7:1-13)
- II. Feast of Tabernacles: Sermon One (7:14-39)  
Postscript: (7:40-52)
- III. Interlude: The Woman Caught in Adultery (7:53 — 8:11)
- IV. Feast of Tabernacles: Sermon Two (8:12-59)  
Postscript: (9:1-41)
- V. Feast of Tabernacles: Sermon Three (10:1-21)

Chapter seven begins with Jesus' brothers taunting him. *If you would be king, go to Jerusalem. It is there you can make a name for yourself.* Jesus refuses their temptation, *It's not the right time* (verse 6). Jesus, throughout John's gospel, is in control of his destiny. His *hour* will come not according to the whims of his opponents, but according to the will of God (12:23, 29; 17:1).

Nevertheless, after his brothers go to the Feast, Jesus follows *in secret*.

The *Feast* in these chapters is the Feast of Tabernacles (or Feast of Booths) held in late September or early October.<sup>1</sup> This feast, one of the three most important annual feasts, began five days after the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).<sup>2</sup> Historians agree this was the most popular of the feasts. It was a liturgical party that celebrated, non-stop, the miraculous provision Yahweh had made for his people as they wandered through the desert after the exodus.<sup>3</sup> A family would, literally, build a small house (booth) outside of Jerusalem and live in it for the week. These humble dwellings were to remind the people that they were once a nomadic people who had now been granted the land of Israel as a permanent home. Joy and thanksgiving, therefore, marked this feast from beginning to end. Originally, the feast lasted seven days, but an eighth day was added so that the participants could rest after all the festivities of the previous week.<sup>4</sup>

With the above in mind read John 7. Look for the rich irony in the chapter. During the wilderness period of Israel's history the *glory* of God guided the nation by day and by night (Exodus 13:21). Now, Jesus, the *true light* (1:9), who came into the world and *tabernacled* among us (1:14), is teaching in the temple!

Consider the following comments and questions as you read:

Why is Jesus so controversial? What is it about him that causes such a ruckus?

Notice, again, the irony of the complaint in verse 14, *Wait just a minute! Jesus hasn't even been to seminary...* What is Jesus' response to this allegation that he is untrained as a theologian?

Verse 7:20 probably contains a colloquialism. *You are demon-possessed* is equivalent to our saying, *You're crazy*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Old Testament background for the feast is found in Leviticus 23:33-43 and Deuteronomy 16:13-15.

<sup>2</sup>The other two were the Passover, which celebrated the deliverance of Israel during the exodus and Pentecost, which celebrated the giving of the law in the desert. It was mandatory that all the people of Israel attend these three feasts.

<sup>3</sup>The feast also had associations with the fall harvest.

<sup>4</sup>The eighth day was added as a time of singing the Hallel (Psalms 113-118). Jesus will make his startling offer *on the last day of the Feast* (7:37). Is this the seventh or the added eighth day?

<sup>5</sup>We say other things too cruel to be taken literally, *You are nuts*, *Your elevator doesn't go to the top floor*, *You are not the sharpest knife in the drawer*, etc.



To which of his miracles is Jesus referring in verses 21-24?

Verse 7:22-24 make reference to circumcision. All Jewish boys were required to be circumcised on the eighth day of their life. Michaels helps clarify why this becomes part of the discussion.

Jesus' argument makes sense because of an assumption among Jewish teachers that circumcision accomplished the perfection of man (e.g. Mishnah *Nedarim* 3:11: Abraham was not called perfect until he was circumcised).<sup>1</sup> They too argued from the lesser to the greater that if circumcision "which attaches to only one of the 248 members of the human body<sup>2</sup>, suspends the Sabbath, how much more shall [the saving of] the whole body suspend the Sabbath" (Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 85b). The difference is that the rabbis confined the principle to immediately life-threatening situations, while Jesus applied it on behalf of anyone in need of help or healing (cf., e.g., Matthew 12:1-8, 9-14; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6). (Michaels, p. 130)

Verse 7:27 looks back to one strand of Jewish messianic expectation which held that the origin of the Messiah would be a mystery. Jesus neither affirms nor refutes this belief.

Why is Jesus' comment in verses 28-29 inflammatory? Why did the Jews attempt his arrest?

What do you make of verse 30? We are not told how Jesus prevented his capture. What do you think?

The high point of this chapter is in verse 37. Here Jesus stands and says, *Let anyone who is thirsty come to me.* (NRSV) The irony is deep.

One of the features of the Feast of Tabernacles was a concern for rain, for water. Part of the liturgy of the week involved collecting water. Water was ceremonially poured out in the temple as a symbol of God's provision in the past. This feast was a time to pray for

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<sup>1</sup>How interesting, and tragic, that the rabbis would reason this way. Clearly Genesis, and later Paul, makes a point of the fact that Abraham was *declared righteous* before he was circumcised because of his faith (cf. Romans 4:9ff, Genesis 15:6, 22).

<sup>2</sup>Jewish anatomy held that a man's body had 248 parts? Had they ever read Gray's Anatomy?

## ARE YOU THIRSTY?

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rain. The people believed that if it rained during the feast, a good season of rain would follow.<sup>1</sup>

Each morning of the festival contained a procession to the fountain of Gihon near the temple. A priest would fill a pitcher with water and then proceed back to the temple. The priest would circle the altar as the people sang Psalm 118:25. On the seventh day of the Feast this ceremony would take place seven times!

It was at this solemn moment in the ceremonies on the seventh day that the teacher from Galilee stood up in the temple court to proclaim solemnly that he was the source of living water... Their prayers for water had been answered in a way they did not expect; the feast that contained within itself the promise of the Messiah had been fulfilled. (Brown, I, p. 327)

Notice the response to Jesus' offer (verses 40-41), *This is the Messiah!* Undoubtedly some connected Jesus' offer with Zechariah 14:8.

*On that day [when Messiah comes], living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea...<sup>2</sup>*

Jesus, obviously, offers himself as the real thing. The temple with its ceremonies was just a shadow (Hebrews 10:1ff.). Think about your life. How is Jesus a source of living water in your day-to-day living? How does he quench your thirst? Think concretely. List four or five areas of your life where Jesus has provided refreshment.

What does this thirst or desire for the living water look like and feel like?

Verse 7:38-39 are open to some degree of interpretation depending on how one sees the syntax of this section.

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<sup>1</sup>Brown points out, *Even today, as bitterly as the Jordanian Arabs hate the Israelis, they watch carefully to see if rain falls during the Israeli celebration of Tabernacles as a sign of the weather to come.* (Brown, I, p. 327)

<sup>2</sup>cf. Ezekiel 47:1-12.

The NIV reads, Jesus...said ...*If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.* By this he meant the Spirit...

However, the sentence could be broken after the *me* in verse 38. In this case the text would read,

*Jesus... said ...“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me. And let him drink, who believes in me.” As the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit...*

In the first case the streams of living water flow from within the believer (as a consequence of the Holy Spirit in his/her life). In the second case the streams of living water flow from Jesus.

Manuscript evidence is fairly evenly divided as are commentators of John. What do you think? Why? Look at the context to help you make your decision.

What do we learn about the ministry of the Holy Spirit from these verses? (We will learn a great deal more in chapter 16.)

Share with your group your experience of this *living water*. By what means has the Holy Spirit touched your life?

## ***ARE YOU THIRSTY?***

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Do you quench the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19)? In what ways must a Christian not limit the work of the Holy Spirit or in his or her life?

Think through this chapter. Note the various responses to Jesus. How many responses can you find? Do people today respond in the same ways?

**Study Ten**  
**Caught in the Act!**  
**John 7:53-8:11**



What should we do with this story? The manuscript evidence for these verses is so weak that some of our Bibles may not even have them in their pages. The NIV and ESV gives us our text prefaced with a note, *The most reliable MSS [manuscripts] omit John 7:53-8:11*. The verses are contained in a footnote in the RSV and the NEB places them at the end of the Gospel under the heading, *An Incident at the Temple*.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, readers and students of the fourth gospel find the story irresistible. Michael Green says the story is *unmistakably Johannine*.<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce points out the lack of manuscript evidence for these verses.

They are missing from a wide variety of early Greek manuscripts from the earliest forms of the Syriac and Coptic Gospels, from several Armenian, Old Georgian and Old Latin manuscripts, and from the Gothic Bible.

Nevertheless, Bruce continues,

They constitute a fact, a fragment of authentic gospel material not originally included in any of the four Gospels. (Bruce, p. 413)

F. B. Meyer writes,

This passage has been the subject of more eager debate than any other in the Gospels. It is omitted by many ancient MSS; it is rejected by several of the Fathers; it bears in its fabric, in the original, traces of the tremendous storm through which it has passed. And yet there is no possibility of accounting for its existence, save on the supposition that the incident really took place. It reveals in our Saviour's character a wisdom so profound, a tenderness to sinners so delicate, a hatred of sin so intense, an insight into human hearts so searching, that it is

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<sup>1</sup>Some manuscripts place this story after John 7:36, and others place the story after Luke 21:38.

<sup>2</sup>Lecture notes, Regent College, October 1993. Calvin says, *It is quite clear that this story was unknown to the ancient Greek churches. Hence some conjecture that it was inserted from another place. But it has always been received by the Latin churches and is found in many Greek manuscripts and contains nothing unworthy of an apostolic spirit; so there is no reason why we should refuse to make use of it.* (Calvin, 204)

## CAUGHT IN THE ACT!

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impossible to suppose the mind of man could have conceived, or the hand of man invented, this most pathetic story. (F. B. Meyer, Gospel of John, p. 122)

Read this brief story. What do you think? Does it bear the marks of authenticity?

Why do you think the Old Testament is (was) so strict about the sin of adultery? Does the crowd share this same concern?

Why do the older people leave the scene first? How long would you have stayed?

Why is the story so popular? What do we learn about Jesus from this brief narrative?

As we should expect in John's Gospel, the story contains irony. Jesus' detractors have set a trap for their opponent and they are the ones who fall into it. Jesus comes to town from his camp on the Mount of Olives (just over a mile from Jerusalem). As he arrives in the temple court for another day's teaching, he is put to the test by the Scribes and Pharisees. *What about this woman we just caught in the act of adultery? The law says we should stone her. What do you say?* The absence of the man involved implies both a double standard (*Boys will be boys...*) and that the Jews are more interested in trapping Jesus than in pursuing justice. Deuteronomy 22:22 and Leviticus 20:10 prescribe the death penalty for adulterers (both the man and the woman).

If Jesus says, *Let the woman go...*, he would prove himself to be a heretic, a false teacher. His act of healing on the Sabbath already aroused suspicions. This would be proof. *Jesus is against Moses!* If, on the other hand, Jesus takes the hard line and says, *Yes, she should be stoned*, he becomes a revolutionary zealot fighting against Rome. The Romans reserved the right of capital punishment for themselves.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This is why Jesus has to be tried before Herod and Pilate, both Roman authorities, before his crucifixion.

Jesus' response is brilliant! As he stoops down and writes in the ground, he imitates, perhaps, the action of a Roman judge who would first write his verdict and then read it. Jesus continues to write even as the questions continue (verses 6b-7).

With the above in mind, what do you think Jesus was writing? What were the questions which kept coming?

Why do the woman's accusers begin to leave the scene? F. F. Bruce brings out the rich depth of the incident and of Jesus' response.

We may recall Jesus' own words about the lustful look which constitutes adultery in the heart (Matthew 5:28), but more was involved in his ruling than that. The law dealt more severely with women than with men. For a betrothed or married woman to have sexual relations with a man other than her bridegroom or husband was a capital offense; for a married man to have such relations with another woman than his wife was relatively venial, provided the woman was not betrothed or married to another man. It was possible for men to maintain public respectability in spite of certain irregular incidents in their lives; Jesus' ruling therefore came as a challenge to the conscience of each man who heard him. The embarrassment was no longer his, but theirs. His ruling about adultery, like his ruling elsewhere about divorce, amounts to a redressing of the unfavourable balance in favour of the underprivileged sex. But by his appeal to the consciences of the witnesses, he takes the question off the judicial plane altogether and raises it to the moral level where it properly belongs, in accordance with his regular attitude and teaching. (Bruce, p. 416)

Much has been made of verse 11a. What does Jesus mean when he says, *Then neither do I condemn you...*? Does this mean we should never pass judgment on one another's behavior?

In what way are we to emulate Jesus as he is portrayed in this story?

## CAUGHT IN THE ACT!

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What was the appropriate response of the woman to Jesus' grace and authority in her life?

How is your response to Jesus' grace and authority in your life? *Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.* (ESV verse 12)

Like the first century, ours is a time of casual sexual promiscuity. Those who come to know and love Jesus are often wounded warriors of the so-called *sexual revolution*. What does this text say of the grace of God? Of the demand of God? What do the following texts add to John 7:59-8:11?

- I Thessalonians 4:3-8
- I Corinthians 6:12-20

What would you say to someone who says, *God is a gracious God. I know sex outside of marriage falls short of God's expectations, but he would never condemn me! Look what Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery...?*

When we reflect on this story we usually emphasize Jesus' protection of the woman. Did Jesus also protect the angry crowd? What were the people thinking when they left?

This story has a modern counterpart with a different conclusion. The Vatican periodical Oriente Moderno reports,

Two Muslim pilgrims returning from Mecca, found in flagrantly guilty of adultery on July 11, 1957, were taken to the judge in Mecca and sentenced to death by



stoning. The sentence was executed on July 12, the Mufti himself casting the first stone. (quoted in The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 20, [1958], p. 224)

What sorts of thoughts and feelings do you think this *justice* produced in those witnessing the execution?

It is interesting to observe that everyone in John's story is thoroughly sinful. The crowd uses the Bible to put someone to death (and to trap the *light of the world*). The sinful woman is, apparently, guilty of sexual infidelity. Yet, the crowd is self-righteous while the woman, we imagine, hangs her head in shame as she stands alone before the sinless Lord. With whom do you identify?

After thinking through this passage, is there an area of thought, attitude or behavior you might change? If so, what and how?

Praise God for his mercy and grace in your life!

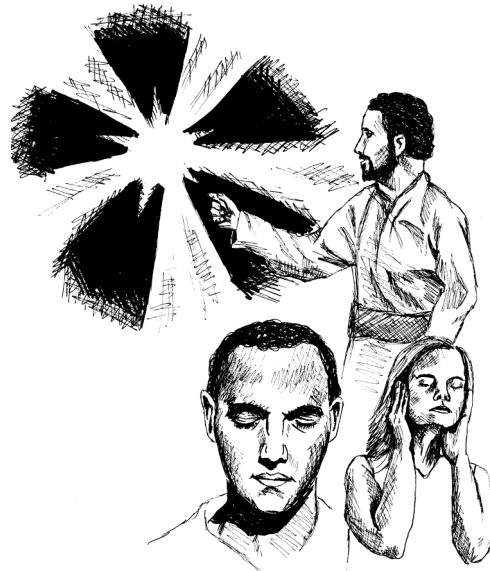
*Sermon Notes...*

## Study Eleven

### The Light of the World

#### John 8:12-59

Read our passage in context. Remember to connect these verses with what we studied in John 7. Jesus is teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast contained two great ceremonies, the pouring of the water and the festival of lights. The water ceremony looked back to God's miraculous provision in the desert. The Festival of Lights remembered Yahweh's guidance of Israel through the desert in the form of a pillar of fire. Each night during the Feast there was the lighting of the four golden candlesticks in the Court of Women in the temple. Each of the candlesticks had four golden bowls in which wicks were floating. It was said that all of Jerusalem was in the glow of these lights.



Keep in mind Lesslie Newbigin's insight as you read.

The reader of this long account of the dialogue between Jesus and his contemporaries cannot fail to feel all the time the presence in the background of a dark and menacing reality. It is the fact that *the world* as a whole is *in the power of the evil one*. Human life as a whole is organized around a false center. It seeks its own glory rather than the glory of its maker and Lord. Therefore its wisdom and knowledge cannot find God. Consequently the revealing of God to the world must be the occasion of crisis for the world. (Newbigin, p. 105)

Make a few notes of those things which stand out and those which are confusing.

#### Highlights

#### Questions

What are the claims that Jesus makes about himself?

Jesus' words in John 8:12 are astounding! As the Feast of Tabernacles draws to its conclusion, and the lights are extinguished for another year, Jesus claims to be the light of the world. This claim incites the discussion/discourse which will take us through the chapter.

Why did the Pharisees object so strongly to Jesus' claim? Undoubtedly they understood the messianic allusions in both of Jesus' pronouncements.

*On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light. On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. (Zechariah 14:4-8)*

Read the following passages. In view of these texts what does it mean for Jesus to be the *light of the world*?

- Exodus 13:21-22
- Psalm 27:1
- Isaiah 49:6
- Isaiah 60:19-22
- Revelation 22:1-5
- I John 1:5-7
- John 1:8-9

What are the practical implications of Jesus as the light of the world?

In what ways is Jesus the light of your life? Give examples.

Verse 8:13 lends insight into the response of the Pharisees. Rabbis of Jesus' day attained their authority by quoting other rabbis and making a small addition of their own to the already vast body of teaching. They would become legal experts, not so much in the Old Testament itself, but in rabbinic interpretation of the law of Moses. Jesus comes to the temple and quotes no one. He simply teaches.<sup>1</sup> When questioned, Jesus does make a case for his authority. What does Jesus point to in order to validate his message? (See verses 14, 16, 23, and 28.)

In verses 14-30 Jesus addresses the Pharisees who don't trust him. Notice the ironic interplay between Jesus and his detractors.

	<b>Jesus</b>	<b>Pharisees</b>
Verse 14	<i>I know</i>	<i>You don't know</i>
Verse 15	<i>I judge no one</i>	<i>You judge</i>
Verse 23	<i>I am from above</i>	<i>You are from below</i>
Verse 23	<i>I am not of this world</i>	<i>You are of this world</i>

Nevertheless, at the end of this section (verse 30) *many believed in him*. Why? What is it that attracted them to Jesus? What attracts you to Jesus?

What is the distinguishing mark of discipleship in 8:31? What does this look like? Does this characterize your life? Explain.

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<sup>1</sup>This was the same shock at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:29).

In 8:32ff. Jesus turns some of our notions of freedom upside down. We tend to think of freedom as a synonym for permissiveness. How does Jesus view freedom? What does Jesus mean in verse 36? What is the relation between *truth* and freedom? What does it mean to know the truth?

The pride of the Pharisees was deeply wounded in verse 32. *We are descendants of Abraham and we are free. As a matter of fact, we have never been in bondage to anyone.* There is deep irony in their assertion because, in fact, the Jews had been in and out of bondage throughout their history. They were in bondage to the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks (Antiochus Epiphanes, 175-163 B.C.) and now the Romans.<sup>1</sup> This leads to a discussion of Abraham as the father of the Jews (verses 39ff.).

Why is this discussion so explosive? What is the climax of the discussion?

When Jesus utters the words *I am* (verse 58) his listeners want to kill him. In uttering these words, *ego eimi* (ἐγώ εἰμι), Jesus claims to be one with Yahweh.<sup>2</sup> We have heard this claim before and, at times, it is somewhat ambiguous. With the woman at the well, for instance (4:26), the reader has to decide whether to supply a predicate, *I am he*, (as most translations) or to understand his response to the woman as a claim to deity. But here there is no doubt, *no clearer implication of divinity is found.* (Brown, I, p. 367).

G. Campbell Morgan exults,

[This] is a supreme claim to Deity; perhaps the most simple and sublime of all the things He said with that great formula of old, the great *I AM*. (The Gospel According to John, 1933, p. 161)

Notice how this chapter, again, forces the reader to decide, *Who is this Jesus? Am I one of his followers or do I want to stone him for blasphemy?*

Respond to the following quotation about this chapter.

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<sup>1</sup>Paul points out again and again that the Jews were in bondage to the law of Moses (cf. Galatians 3:10ff.; Romans 7; II Corinthians 3:7).

<sup>2</sup>The two words are the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *ani hu* first encountered in Exodus 3. *Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"* (Exodus 3:13-14)

Words which in a human being would inevitably look like exaggerated arrogance, can take no other form in the mouth of [Jesus] who alone has brought knowledge of the Father (cf. 1:18). This applies to all the sayings of Jesus in this section: he can speak in no other way — and non-believers cannot understand him (cf. verses 25, 43, 46-47). Anyone looking for a picture of the earthly Jesus will be offended by the uncompromising language of [John's] Christ. (Rudolf Schnackenburg, The Gospel According to St. John II, 1982, p. 193.)

If Jesus is God, then following him is a very serious proposition! Examine your heart and life. For many of us it is easy to slip into a way living in which we get focused on the daily issues and tasks of life, and we lose sight of who Jesus, God, really is.

Do you follow Jesus and his teaching intentionally and consciously to the best of your ability? Or, is it easy to through a day or week and not recognize God for who He is? How can we keep God in the forefront of our minds?

Spend time as a group thanking Jesus, the light of the world, praising Jesus, who is God, and submitting yourselves to abide in the truth by which you have been set free!

*Sermon Notes...*



## Study Twelve

### The Great Irony

#### John 9:1-41

We have seen in John's Gospel that the words of Jesus are used by John to fill in the meaning of the signs (miracles) he performs. Think back over our first eight chapters.



#### Sign

Water to wine in Cana (ch. 2)

Healing of the man at the pool (ch. 5)

Feeding of the 5000 (ch. 6)

#### Speech

*You must be born again!* (ch. 3)

*New life through the Son!* (ch. 5)

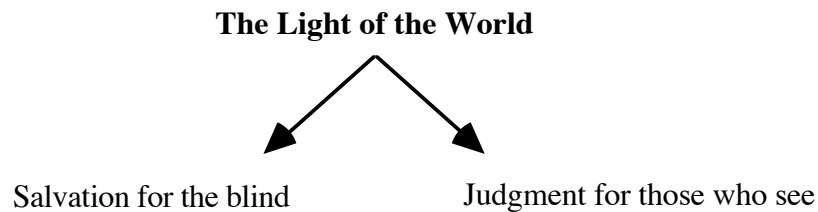
*I am the bread of life!* (ch. 6)

In our current chapter we find the order reversed. First, during the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus proclaims himself to be the *light of the world*. Now, in John 9, Jesus will perform his sixth sign which will verify and draw out the truth of his claim in 8:12.

John 9 is a delight. These verses are theologically deep, multi-layered with meaning, and, as we should expect by now, loaded with irony. The chapter fits together tightly as a single unit. The dialogue is hilarious, at times tragic, and provides a commentary on John 3:19.

*And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.*

Read and savor these 41 verses. Make an outline as you read (the text falls into tidy units). Watch for the grand irony in the discourse.



In 9:1 we are not told how long after the feast this event takes place. John's purposes are theological rather than chronological. The disciples notice the man who was *blind from birth*<sup>1</sup> and bring up a theological question: *Who is responsible for this suffering? Did this man sin in his prenatal life? Or is he being punished for his parents' sin?*

The question is profound. It reveals the mind of first century Jews<sup>2</sup> and, to some extent, our own mind set as well. Jews had the view that all suffering was the result of a cause. The disciples' question is an attempt to make sense of the inequity they saw (and we see) in the world. How does Jesus answer the question? How does the rest of the chapter answer the question?

Have you ever experienced a severe situation in which there was no apparent cause but a result was that God was glorified? Describe this to your homegroup.

Think through the following:

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<sup>1</sup>John gives us this detail because it points to the sensational nature of this miracle. Jesus is not providing a *cure* or a remedy for temporary blindness. He is going to perform a miracle. The synoptic gospels record several healings of the blind (Matthew 9:27-31; 12:22; 15:30; 21:14; Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52). But none of these specify that the individual was *born blind*.

<sup>2</sup>Some rabbis actually debated whether prenatal sin was possible. Those who held it was possible were in the minority. Perhaps the disciples are trying to get Jesus' view of this question (cf. Barclay, II, p. 44; Milne, p. 137).

Whatever the cultural and philosophical background—Indian karma or Judaic theism, or Western positivism<sup>1</sup>—the question *why has this happened?* is one which can hardly be restrained by any human being faced with calamity. But if a good reason could be found for evil, then either evil is not evil or the reason is no good. The attempt to *make sense* of a world which is under the power of sin and death by probing back into its antecedents is doomed to frustration. The only thing which can *make sense* of a dark world is the coming of light, and the light does not come from below but from above, not from the past but from the future. (Newbigin, p. 120)

Newbigin goes on to add,

The Church is not sent into the world to explain the world but to change it. The logos, the true light which makes sense of the world, is not to be found by a study of the experience of the world, for the world, though it was made by him, does not know him (1:10). He has come and is coming and will come into the world. Only by being part of his movement into the world do we *make sense* of the world. (Newbigin, p. 120)

How do these statements bring clarity to the disciples' question?

Is SBCC *explaining* the world or helping to *change* it? Where can we improve in this area?

The healing in verses 6-7 is intriguing. Saliva was thought to have magical powers when it was generated by someone important. Jesus takes his spittle, makes a little mud pie and applies it to the man's eyes.<sup>2</sup> Yuck! No wonder the blind man makes off toward the pool of Siloam as instructed.

This pool is the same water source used for the water festival during the Feast of Tabernacles. John tells us the word Siloam means *sent*. John seems to make theological use of the meaning of the name of the pool. Jesus is repeatedly the one who is *sent* in John's gospel.<sup>3</sup> Here the *sent one* supersedes the waters of the pool called *Sent*.

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<sup>1</sup>*Karma* is a Hindu doctrine which teaches we are punished or rewarded in this life according to what we have done in a previous life. *Western positivism* is Newbigin's word for what others call *scientism*, that is, the view of the world which holds that *only that which can be measured* truly exists. For a good explanation of how this view has permeated our thinking see the chapter on naturalism in James Sire's, The Universe Next Door, Inter Varsity Press, 1978.

<sup>2</sup>Jesus uses spittle for healing in Mark 7:33.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, 3:34, 4:34, 5:23, 24, 30, 36, 6:29.

This healing is more than dramatic. Again, as in several of the other signs Jesus performs, there is a messianic element involved. The Messiah, the prophets predicted, would heal people of their blindness.

*In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. (Isaiah 29:18)*

*[S]ay to those with fearful hearts, Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. (Isaiah 35:4-5)*

When John the Baptist sent word to Jesus from prison asking if he really was the Messiah Jesus responded,

*Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear... (Matthew 11:4ff.)*

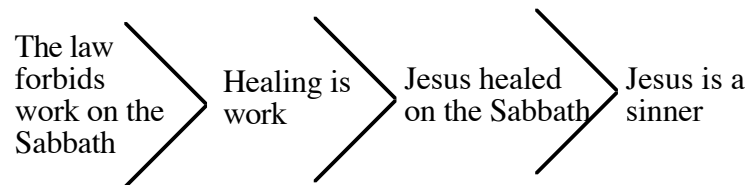
Could this be the real reason why the Pharisees are disgruntled with Jesus for healing the man?

Look over these verses again. Trace the development of both belief and unbelief in the blind man and in the Jews as the chapter progresses.

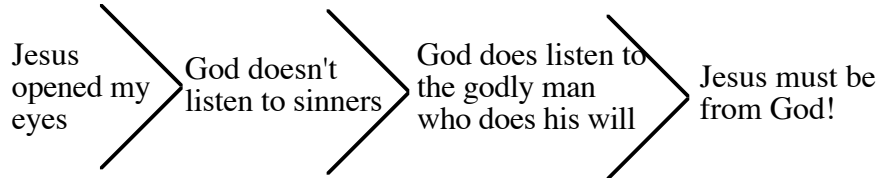
Why does the man believe? What compels the Jews to persist in unbelief?

Notice the logic of the man who is healed and of the Pharisees to whom the man was brought.

**The Pharisees: vs. 24**



**The Man Born Blind: vss. 30-33**



Think of this progression (regression?) of thought. Does this lend insight into why you are (or maybe are not yet) a believer? How so?

Look one more time at verses 39-41. The man who now sees, worships Jesus. (Literally he falls prostrate.) Have you ever had a similar reaction to God's healing touch on your life? Describe how you expressed this and what it felt like.

What might inhibit a response like this?

Worship is the outgrowth of the blind man's encounter with our Lord. We should have no less of a response!

*Sermon Notes...*

**Study Thirteen**  
**The Good Shepherd**  
**John 10:1-42**



A shepherd was a highly valued member of the Palestinian world. Shepherds worked hard and long as they endured a work environment threatened by the elements, by animals looking for a meal and by thieves looking to increase their fortunes. Their labor was skilled and produced a good income. It is no wonder that the biblical writers used shepherd imagery to refer to God (Psalms 23:1ff.; 77:20; 95:7) and to their own rulers and prophets.

Before looking into John's gospel read Ezekiel 34:1-16 (notice especially verses 11-12).<sup>1</sup> Here Ezekiel prophesies against the false (and weak) prophets of his era.

Now read John 10:1-42. Now the setting is the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah), a few months after the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus, again with startling boldness, claims to be the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy! All that Israel yearned for is standing in Jerusalem talking with his followers and his detractors.

The chapter is divided into two sections. First, we read Jesus' sermon (verses 1-18). He is the *good shepherd*. Second, we read of the Jews' divisiveness over Jesus' teaching and their ensuing dialogue with him (verses 19-42). This is the last of the acrimonious interactions Jesus has with the Jews in John's gospel. John again forces the reader to take a position. Who is this Jesus? There is no middle ground. Is he *one* with the Father as he claims (verse 30)? Or has he committed the sin of blasphemy which is punishable by death (verse 33)?

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<sup>1</sup>For extra credit read Jeremiah 23:1-4. Here Jeremiah uses the same imagery and looks forward to the same Messiah.

## ***THE GOOD SHEPHERD***

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There are three main figures in Jesus' sermon/parable: the shepherd, the sheep (always plural in the Greek) and the hired hand. As you read this chapter make a note of what you learn about each figure.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Shepherd**

### **The Sheep**

### **The Hired Hand**

From your lists above, what deductions can you make? What is Jesus teaching us about his role as shepherd?

What do we learn about our role as sheep? What does it mean to *hear his voice* (verse 3), to be *called by name*. What must one do to truly experience Jesus as the Good Shepherd? Give practical examples.

Our era stresses the autonomy of every individual. We admire the *individual*, someone who *makes it on her own*. What does Jesus' shepherd/sheep imagery say about our notion of the *self* as an independent unit?

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<sup>1</sup>One commentator says, *There are not less than eighteen statements made about the shepherd between verses 1 and 29.*



Do you mind being likened to a sheep in a flock? Are you a good sheep? What does it feel like to be dependent on God? Are you?

Consider verses 7-10. What does Jesus have in mind when he claims to be the *door* (verse 7)? What do these verses say about other religions and messiahs? (Compare John 14:6 and Matthew 7:13-14)

Notice the richness of verse 10. The NIV's *life to the full* is rendered as *abundant* life in the NRSV, ESV and other translations. The shepherd came to provide the life God intended his creatures to live.

...*life*...to the full suggests fat, contented, flourishing sheep, not terrorized by brigands; outside the narrative world, it means that the life Jesus' true disciples enjoy is not to be construed as more time to fill (mere 'everlasting life'), but life at its scarcely imagined best, life to be lived. (D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John, 1991, p. 385)

Do you understand the Christian life as a *full* life? Are you ever envious of the non-believer who *gets to* indulge in certain vices which appear gratifying? Give examples.

In 10:11 we find something unique to John's gospel in that the shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. This fits with John's presentation of Jesus as one voluntarily destined for the cross, his moment of glory (cf. 10:17-18; 12:27ff.; 15:13 and especially 17:1-5).

Look carefully at verses 17-18. Here Jesus tells us of his self-sacrifice. What do we learn about the crucifixion from these verses?

Verses 10:22-39 are set specifically around the Festival of Dedication. This was not a biblical festival. Dedication looked back to the time when Antiochus IV, who named himself Ephiphanes<sup>1</sup> attempted to *Hellenize* the temple. The Greeks were ruling the world and wanted to establish uniform worship throughout the empire. Antiochus usurped the priesthood, erected an altar to Zeus, and even sacrificed pigs in the temple. Faithful Jews were devastated and began to revolt under the leadership of Judas Maccabaeus. This revolt succeeded in December 164 B.C. The following year saw the first observance of Hanukkah, a memorial celebration looking back to the time when Judas Maccabaeus purified the temple.

Is John making a point here? Does he point out the obvious, *It was winter*, (verse 22) to show the darkness of the times? Jesus' *hour* is fast approaching as we shall see in chapter eleven. Does the darkness of the season, the shortness of the days in winter, portend the crucifixion of our Lord? Is Jesus *purifying* the temple in the same way Judas Maccabaeus did in 164 B.C.?

The debate which ensues in these verses centers around two titles, *Messiah* (verses 24-30) and *Son of God* (verses 31-39). The conclusion of the first debate comes when Jesus utters the dramatic claim, *The Father and I are one!* (verse 30). One commentator calls this the *shattering statement* which is parallel to the conclusion of an earlier debate when Jesus declared, *Before Abraham was, I AM* (8:58).<sup>2</sup> In both cases the claim is so alarming that Jesus' opponents want to destroy him. Michaels clarifies the intent of Jesus' claim. Respond to the following quote:

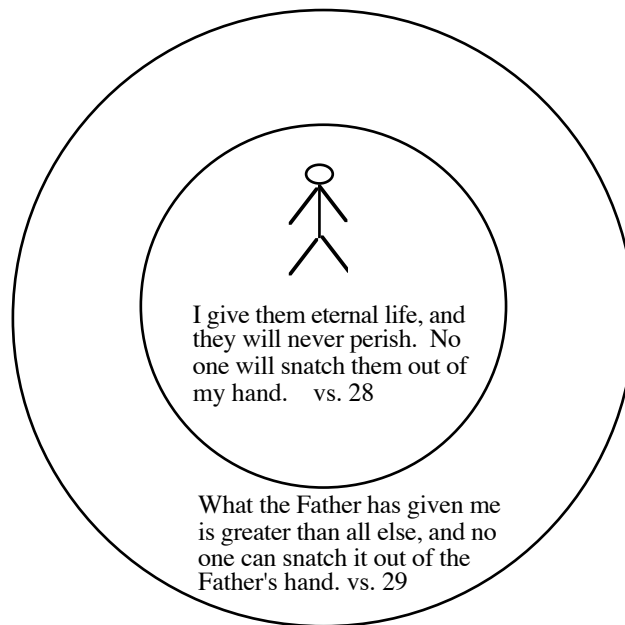
The point of issue for Jesus is not the title **Christ** (verse 24), or **God's Son** (verse 36), or even **God** (verse 33), but the relationship between himself and **the Father**, a relationship displayed in such miracles as the healing of the blind man. More even than mutual knowledge (cf. verse 14), this relationship is one of mutual indwelling: The Father is **in** Jesus and Jesus is **in** the Father. (Michaels, p. 189, emphasis Michaels')

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<sup>1</sup>Ephiphanes was a vague claim to deity.

<sup>2</sup>B. Lindars, cited in Bruce, p. 236.

Verses 10:27-29 Often Christians debate the possibility of one losing his or her salvation. Once saved is it possible to become un-saved? Jesus promises what we might call a *double security* with regard to our salvation. Our security in Christ is sure indeed!



Commenting on these verses Bruce Milne says, *No profounder security is conceivable for the follower of Jesus*. He then adds the following quotation by Emil Brunner from The Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation:

Christ declares that his people “will never perish”. Weak as they are they will all be saved. Not one of them shall be lost and cast away: not one of them shall miss heaven. If they err, they shall be brought back; if they fall, they shall be raised. The enemies of their soul may be strong and mighty, but their Saviour is mightier; and none shall pluck them out of their Saviour’s hand. (from Milne, p. 153)

Jesus makes many promises and claims in John 10. Which one(s) do you find most encouraging to your Christian life? Why?

Take time as a homegroup to encourage one another regarding areas of your lives in which you can become more dependent on Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

*Sermon Notes...*

## **Study Fourteen**

### **Jesus the Life Giver**

#### **John 11:1-57**

In John eleven we have the most sensational miracle Jesus performed, the seventh and final sign in John's gospel. The synoptic gospels record two other occasions when Jesus raised the dead. The daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:41-56) had just died when Jesus did his work. The widow's son, raised in Luke 7:11-16, had probably died the day before the funeral. But by the time Lazarus is raised he has been dead four days. The guy is *really* dead; as a matter of fact, as the King James version has it, *He stinketh!* Jews of Jesus' time believed after death a person's spirit hovered over his body for three days. Even Lazarus' spirit has departed. This miracle is without historical precedent. Not even the prophets Elijah and Elisha<sup>1</sup> performed a miracle such as this!



Read these fifty-seven verses keeping the following outline in mind:

- I. The death of Lazarus (11:1-16)
- II. The resurrection teaching of Jesus (11:17-37)
- III. The raising of Lazarus (11:38-44)
- IV. The subsequent plot to kill Jesus (11: 45-57)

Make a few notes as you read. What do you learn about Jesus? What kind of a friend was he? Does it surprise you to find Jesus with friends?<sup>2</sup> What about his compassion? Why does he weep in verse 35?

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<sup>1</sup>cf. I Kings 17:17-24 and II Kings 4:1-37; 13:20-21

<sup>2</sup>Carson says this text *hints at friendships and relationships that are barely explored in the Gospels, and suggests that some at least felt peculiarly loved by him.* (Carson, p. 158)

Jesus waits two days (verse 6) before going to Bethany<sup>1</sup>, a town less than two miles from Jerusalem. Why? What does this teach us about God's answers to our prayers for physical or inner healing?

Have you ever experienced a delayed answer to prayer? What did this delay accomplish or produce??

Read verses 11:24-27 This chapter is a graphic *preliminary* fulfillment of 5:28. But Lazarus was not resurrected in the way Jesus promised. After he came out of his grave the aging process resumed and, sometime later, Lazarus died a second time. Note the wonderfully personal *I AM* statement in verse 25, *I AM the resurrection and the life...* Jesus sets the miracle he is about to perform in wonderful theological perspective. He, Jesus, will die to procure real and everlasting life for Lazarus and anyone who will believe.

Milne draws out the force of the claim.

*I am the resurrection and the life*, is a culmination of the unfolding revelation in the preceding chapters. Jesus has been revealed as the giver of life, in a number of ways. Materially, he gives life to water, making it wine. Spiritually, he offers the new spiritual life of the kingdom of God to Nicodemus, and the life which springs up within a person satisfying all thirst, to the woman of Samaria. Physically, he imparts life to a dying boy, a long-standing physical paralytic, and a man born blind. He is the good shepherd who has come to give life 'to the full' (10:10)... The life he gives is nothing less than the indestructible life of the resurrection, the very life of the deathless God himself. (Milne, p. 163)

What does this *I AM* mean to you personally? How will your plans be affected for the rest of your life knowing that Jesus is the *resurrection and the life*. How does this claim help in times of adversity?

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<sup>1</sup>Bethany becomes Jesus' headquarters during passion week.

Notice the similarity and the differences of the response Martha (verse 21ff.) and Mary (verse 30ff.) have when Jesus finally arrives. They say almost the same words. Was their tone of voice the same? Is Martha's apparent anger an appropriate model for prayer?

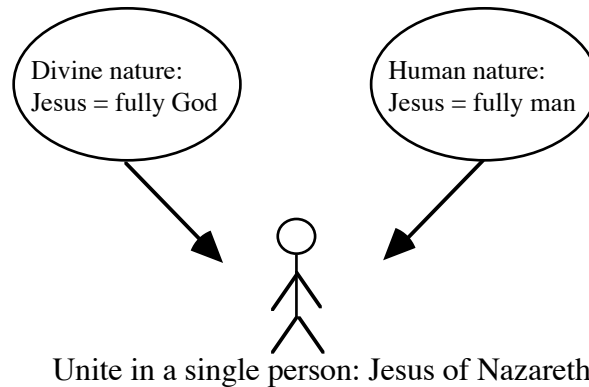
With whom do you identify in this story? How would you have responded? Compare Luke 10:38-42 to get a more detailed portrait of these two personalities.

Have you ever been in a situation where you were either frustrated or saddened by the outcome? How, then, did you pray?

After Jesus died, rose and ascended to heaven, the church took a few hundred years to be able to articulate who Jesus was. In time the church came to proclaim Jesus to be *fully God* and *fully man*. These two natures were combined in a single *person* according to the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD).<sup>1</sup> Jesus was not *God* on Monday and *man* on Tuesday.

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<sup>1</sup>For the theologians in our midst, the Chalcedonian definition reads, *Following the holy Father, we all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ to be one and the same Son, perfect in divinity and humanity, truly God and truly human, consisting of a rational soul and a body, being of one substance with the Father in relation to his divinity, and being of one substance with us in relation to his humanity, and is like us in all things apart from sin (Hebrews 4:15)... [He] is to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation. This distinction of natures is in no way abolished on account of this union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature is preserved, and concurring into one Person and one subsistence, not as if Christ were parted or divided into two persons, for he remains one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ...* (from Alister McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, 1995, p. 148)



As we think about Jesus it is difficult not to stress one side or the other. We find ourselves thinking of Jesus as more God than human or more human than divine. Historically, *liberal* theologians have thought of Jesus as a man, but they had difficulty thinking of him as God. Evangelicals tend to reverse this error. We tend to have a difficult time with the genuine humanity of Jesus. We have a tough time picturing the son of God learning his math equations, getting sweaty and angry during a soccer game and struggling with verbs and nouns during his grammar lesson in Hebrew school.

Notice what this chapter does to the *evangelical* error in our understanding of Christ. Notice especially verses 32-44.

Verse 33 is significant. John uses the word *embrimaomai* which appears in the NIV and ESV as *deeply moved*. It means *to be deeply agitated*, literally *to snort with indignation* (cf. Bruce, p. 246). What is Jesus indignant about? Why is he troubled? Why would John emphasize this side of Jesus' reaction? This is a detail he could have left out.

Describe how you respond when a close friend or family member experiences tragedy.

How can we (you) cultivate a spirit which bears the same sensitivity to pain and suffering as Jesus had?



In verses 45-57 we learn that the raising of Lazarus is the proximate cause of Jesus' crucifixion. These verses are filled with wonderful irony (not surprising in John's gospel).

We learn in verse 49 that Caiaphas was high priest *that year*. Caiaphas was, in fact, high priest of the temple from AD 18—36. The office was for life. John's reference to *that year* is simply to point out who was high priest when Jesus was tried in Jerusalem.

The irony of Caiaphas' counsel (verse 50) is multi-layered. The high priest went into the temple annually to atone for the sins of the people (Hebrews 9:7). Here he recommends that the real high priest, Jesus, forfeit his life for the safety of Israel. Caiaphas is worried that the Romans will destroy the Jerusalem temple, so he advises the destruction of the true Temple of God (John 2:19).

What is the dynamic here? Why are the Jews so unreceptive to Jesus?

Blaise Pascal, a seventeenth century philosopher and mathematician, said,

Men never delight in doing evil as much as if they can do it for religious reasons.<sup>1</sup>

The Jews are being very religious in their attempt to kill Jesus. Think about our times and even your own life. Can you cite examples of *doing evil for religious reasons*?

What have you gleaned from John 11 that could change the way you live? What steps can you take to make that change?

With this story the section which some commentators call *The Book of Signs* in John's gospel comes to a close. From this point on John will focus on the glory of Christ revealed in his crucifixion. Chapter twelve begins *The Book of Jesus' Passion*.

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<sup>1</sup>Pensees, p. 894.

*Sermon Notes...*

## Study Fifteen

### Triumph and Tension

#### John 12:1-50

As we begin John 12, Jesus leaves his hideaway in Ephraim<sup>1</sup> and goes to Bethany. Jesus will commute to Jerusalem from this small town during the last week of his life.

In John 12 the evangelist will use three incidents to take us to his final comment on the public ministry of Jesus.

- I. Mary's anointing of Jesus in Bethany: vss. 1-11
- II. The "Triumphal Entry" into Jerusalem: vss. 12-19
- III. The arrival of the Greeks to question Jesus: vss. 20-36

"Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still wouldn't believe in him." (vs. 37)

Let us consider each of these events.



#### I. Mary's anointing of Jesus in Bethany: verses 1-11

Some commentators make note of the difference between the beginning and the close of Jesus' public ministry. In the Cana miracle (John 2) Jesus provides good wine for the wedding party. Conviviality fills the air. Here, Mary provides Jesus with perfume which anticipates his imminent death and burial (verse 7). The light has come into the world and now the darkness attempts to put out the light.

Read these verses.<sup>2</sup> What surprises do you find?

The perfume poured on Jesus was *pure nard*. It came all the way from India from the root of a nard plant and was worth *three hundred denarii*, about a year's income for a wage earner. Put this into our times. How much is it worth in our dollars? \$25,000.00? \$40,000.00? \$70,000.00? No matter what we consider *middle income*<sup>3</sup> this is a tremendous and extravagant gift! Mary

<sup>1</sup>Interestingly we still don't know for sure where this town was located.

<sup>2</sup>There are parallels to this story in the synoptics though the details differ. See Luke 7:36-39, Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9. It seems likely that at least Matthew and Mark are recording the same event. Carson accounts for the differences saying, "...it is reasonable to suppose that what actually happened was comprehensive enough to generate the accounts of both John and Matthew/Mark, including the differences that initially seem so odd." (Carson, p. 427)

<sup>3</sup>Surveys show we usually consider middle income to be just a little more than we are earning...

throws economic caution to the wind (the nard could have been sold to provide for the children's college) and dumps her perfume all over Jesus!

When John tells us the whole house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume, is he making a theological point or is he simply recording what happened in Bethany (cf. Mark 14:9)?

What can you learn from Mary's extravagance? What does the story teach about worship? About giving? About service? Consider J. B. Phillips' rendering of I Corinthians 15:58:

*Let nothing move you as you busy yourselves in the Lord's work. Be sure that nothing you do for him is ever lost or wasted.*

Explain Judas' response. What was going on in his heart? What would a contemporary example be where a person challenged such an act of worship?

SBCC has over the years given money away to the poor. We have supported ministries like World Relief, Opportunity International, and Samaritan's Purse. Our money is turned into food and placed in the hands of the indigent poor. How would you defend this habit of ours to someone who used this passage (verses 7-8) to say *giving to the poor is a waste of money*?

Verses 12:9-10 shows the increasing popularity of Jesus (they found him!) and the increasing hatred of the Jews. Sin breeds sin. In 11:45ff. Jewish leaders plotted to kill Jesus. Now they figure they had better kill Lazarus as well. In time it will be Stephen (Acts 7), James (Acts 12), Peter, Paul Sin is never satisfied.

## **II. The *Triumphal Entry* into Jerusalem: verses 12-19**

The significance of the Triumphal Entry is evident in that all four Gospels record the event. The excitement over Jesus' miracles had reached its zenith. Jerusalem is packed during Passover. Josephus estimates that during the Feast, the population of Jerusalem swelled to about two and a half million people.<sup>1</sup> The crowds investigate his whereabouts in Bethany and, hearing he is coming to Jerusalem, they take palm branches to celebrate his arrival. What is going on here?

The action of the crowd looks back to the Maccabean revolution. Palm branches were symbols of the Jewish state and were used to welcome a king.<sup>2</sup> When Simon Maccabaeus conquered Jerusalem, palm branches were used for his welcome (I Maccabees 13:51<sup>3</sup>). When his brother Judas Maccabaeus purified the temple after the desecration of Antiochus Epiphanes, he was honored with palm branches (II Maccabees 10:7, see pp. 29, 65).

As Jesus comes to town from Bethany the people recite a portion of the Hallel (Psalm 113-118) which was sung daily during the Feast of Tabernacles. The cry *Hosanna!* which means, *Save us now!*<sup>4</sup>, was the cue for *every male worshipper to wave his 'lulah' (a bunch of willow and myrtle tied with palm)*. (Milne, p. 180) These words from the Hallel were understood as a prophecy of the coming Messiah (cf. Psalms 118:25-26). But the people go further. They add words not found in the Psalm, *Blessed is the King of Israel!* Their frenzied expectations of Jesus are made explicit. Messiah is here! Jesus is king! Good-bye to the Romans!

In the midst of all the brouhaha, however, Jesus throws an amazing curve ball. When Jesus rides a *young donkey* he identifies not with Judas Maccabaeus who rode into Jerusalem on a war-horse as a military power, but with the gentle king of Zechariah 9. His donkey ride is an *acted piece of exegesis [Bible interpretation], a silent testimony from holy scripture against a false messianism*. (Newbigin, p. 154)

If we take the Zechariah passage as a whole it is clear that it is a promise of the gift of "peace to the nations" through the universal rule of Yahweh, and that the triumph of Yahweh will not be brought about by the military power of Israel. It is thus a prophetic word against the kind of political messianism represented in the popular reception which Jesus is receiving. (Newbigin, pp. 153-154)

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay notes that during one Passover a census of the number of lambs sacrificed was taken (how do lambs fill out those forms?) and it came to 256,500. There had to be at least ten people per lamb so the number would be over 2.5 million! (Barclay, II, p. 134)

<sup>2</sup>Palm branches appeared on the coins minted by the Jews during their revolt against Rome (cf. Bruce, p. 259)

<sup>3</sup>The books of Maccabaeus are found in the Apocrypha, a collection of writing between the Old and New Testaments which is considered by Roman Catholics, but not Protestant Christians, to be divinely inspired.

<sup>4</sup>Other renderings of *Hosanna* are *Give salvation now* or *Give victory now*.

His disciples didn't understand *all this* until the resurrection (verse 16). But the Pharisees are insensed, *The whole world has gone after him*.

In less than a week the people who honor Jesus so exuberantly will crucify him with commensurate passion. Why? Why are they so fickle? Do you ever see the same trend in your life? Do you swing from worship to disobedience in a short time period? What is it in the heart of the believer that could cause such a swing?

### III. The arrival of the Greeks to question Jesus: verses 20-36

Verse 20 is closely connected with the despair of the Pharisees in verse 19. Indeed, even the Greeks are interested in Jesus.

In John we have observed that the words of Jesus interpret his actions. Here the pattern continues. Mary's anointing of Jesus in verses 1ff. is now explained with the *kernel of wheat* sermon.

Read these verses. Verse 23 has been long expected, *The hour has come*. Previously Jesus has said, *Not yet, my 'hour' hasn't yet arrived...*<sup>1</sup> But now the time has come for Jesus to fulfill his purpose in redemption.

Note the agony of Jesus (verses 27-28). Does John substitute this section for the agony of the Garden of Gethsemane recorded in the synoptic gospels? Why is Jesus so troubled at the prospect of death? What is the drama in the death of Jesus?

In a letter to his friend Owen Barfield (April 1932) C. S. Lewis, then a new convert to the Christian faith, pondered our question. He wrote,

What is it to an ordinary man to die, if once he can set his teeth to bear the merely animal fear? To give in — he has been doing that nine times out of ten all his life... But in Gethsemane it is essential Freedom that is asked to be bound, unwearied control to throw up the sponge, Life itself is to die. Ordinary men have not been so much in love with life as is usually supposed: small as their share of it is they have found it too much to bear without reducing a large portion of it as nearly to non-life as they can: we have drugs, sleep, irresponsibility, amusement, are more than half in love with easeful death — if only we could be sure it wouldn't hurt! *Only He who really lived a human life (and I presume that only*

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<sup>1</sup> cf. 2:4; 4:21, 23; 7:30; 8:20.

*one did) can fully taste the horror of death.* (Letters of C. S. Lewis, ed. Walter Hooper, 1966, p. 305, emphasis added)

Students of John's gospel marvel at this section. More than one commentator has called this the *deepest* section of the Gospel. We could ponder these verses for a lifetime for they explicitly tie the resurrection *and* the death of Jesus to the glory of God!

The link made by Jesus between glorification and crucifixion is fundamental to John's presentation of the Easter drama. The death and resurrection of Jesus are not divisible into a defeat at Calvary which was righted by the subsequent powerful, victorious act of the resurrection. Rather, *both* death and resurrection represent one inseparable event in which Jesus achieves the glory of God... the essence of the glorifying of God lies in the cross itself. (Milne, p. 186)

Look carefully at verses 30-32. Make a list of the things Jesus' death will accomplish. (Challenge: you might find as many as four.)

What do these things mean to your life?

As the chapter comes to a close the lines are again drawn. The light has come. The Jews, the Greeks and the reader of John's gospel must decide (verses 35ff.)! Are we going to walk in the light or continue to prefer the darkness?

It would be enough if we simply pondered together what Jesus has done for us in this gold mine of a chapter. But look back to what Jesus said in verse 25. To enjoy the fruit of Jesus' work on the cross we must emulate his *un-self fulfillment*. What does Jesus mean when he says we must *hate* our lives? Is it bad to enjoy life?

Practically speaking, what does this verse mean? Is there something you should do differently?

Respond to the following statement by Eugene Peterson:

We need God under our feet and God in our lungs. We need creator and creatures and community. God is the great continent of reality on which we live. If we deny him in practice by attempting to live in the ocean of the self, we are soon fatigued and require all kinds of artificial aids to keep us afloat—pieces of driftwood, life jackets. It is not our proper environment. We are forever getting our lungs full of water, getting rescued, receiving artificial respiration. Then we go out and start it all over again. Why don't we simply come out of the ocean of the self and stand on our own two feet on the dry land of the kingdom of God?

If, in fact, "there is not God," the self is both immediate and ultimate reality and we are stuck in it. But the self, like the womb (in itself an oceanic kind of existence), is something we must get out of if we are going to become a person. (Earth and Altar, p. 110)

Consider the artificial supports and comforts in your life. What are they? Share these with your homegroup. Pray for one another that you will be able to live in the security extended by God to those who believe!



## Study Sixteen

### Clean Feet

### John 13:1-35

The unmistakable drama of Jesus' march to the cross continues in John 13. The time is noted by John, *it was just before the Passover...* (verse 1). Jesus' *hour* (ESV) has come (the NIV misses this significant word in John substituting the word *time*). The cross is at hand.

The next five chapters of John are unique to the fourth gospel. Jesus' ministry to this point (ch. 2-12) has been public. Now all attention is focused on the disciples. The *upper-room* discourses of Jesus with his disciples show the loving care of the shepherd for his sheep. Rudolf Bultmann says, *The noise of the cosmos has died away; the stillness of the night prevails.*<sup>1</sup> But in spite of such *stillness* Jesus is definitely preparing his disciples for ministry in the world after Pentecost. The very word *world*, or *cosmos* (κόσμος) occurs over 40 times in these chapters. John will use these chapters to explain, before the fact, the significance of the death of Jesus.



Chapter 13 takes us to the last night of Jesus' life. John's narrative jumps from Sunday (12:1) to Thursday (or Wednesday?) night. The synoptic writers fill us in on the events of Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week. In those gospels the writers point out that Jesus is eating a Passover meal with his disciples. There Jesus gives a new significance to this meal when he says the bread and wine refer to his own body and blood (cf. Mark 14:12-26; Matthew 26:17-30 and Luke 22:7-23).<sup>2</sup> In John's gospel we have instead another *sign* of our Lord's purposes, the washing of the disciples feet. Luke (22:24) gives us a significant detail which brings John's unique telling of the story to life, *A dispute also arose among them, which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest.* As the disciples argue about their greatness, Jesus sets a stunning example.

<sup>1</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 1971, p. 458. Bultmann calls this section of his commentary, *The Revealer's Farewell To His Own*.

<sup>2</sup>Commentators point out this is not the formal Passover meal. The disciples, after all, expect to celebrate that meal with the rest of Jerusalem on Friday evening (cf. 13:29).

Like so much of John's gospel this is a chapter where the *elephant can swim and the child can wade*. Read this chapter. Jot down your thoughts as you read. How are we to understand Jesus' foot-washing service?

How would Jesus' act of foot-washing make you feel?

This was a particularly humble task, included in a list of works which a Jewish slave should not be required to perform. As they commence the meal with feet as yet unwashed, since apparently none of the disciples are prepared to fulfil the duty (one does not wash the feet of peers!), Jesus himself rises, divests himself of his outer clothing, girds himself with a towel, and proceeds to wash and then dry his disciples feet. (Milne, p. 196)

Notice what John does with this story:

First, the foot-washing is explained in verse 1. Jesus *loved them to the end* (ESV) or, as the NIV has it, he *showed them the full extent of his love*. The Greek verb can be translated either quantitatively or qualitatively.

Second, we have the very brief description of the event itself (verses 4-5).

Thirdly, the discussion with Peter shows the spiritual significance of the foot-washing (verses 6-11).

Fourthly, Jesus tells the disciples they should emulate this act of service with one another (verses 12-20).

Throughout the story we hear the recurring theme of Judas and his imminent betrayal of his Messiah (verses 2, 11, 18, 19).

What do you make of Peter's obstinance? Why doesn't he want his feet cleaned? The Greek text is strong and, perhaps, comical. Literally the text reads, *Lord, you? of me? wash the feet?* (cf. Michaels, p. 246) Is Peter afraid to be vulnerable? Does he avoid his own sinfulness?

Can you make sense of Jesus' theological answer to Peter in verses 8ff.? (Get ready, this is where the elephant can swim.)

In what sense are the disciples clean?

What is the first bath which had previously cleansed the disciples (verse 10)?

What is the significance of foot washing? What is it so theologically important to compel Jesus' words in verse 8?

The experience of worship in large groups is exceedingly popular in the evangelical church of America. People will travel some distance and pay substantial sums of money to go to a worship concert, or to participate in a worship event. People fly from around the world to Toronto to get a *blessing*, to laugh in the Spirit, to be slain by God. We probably wouldn't expect such a crowd at a seminar on *How to Wash Feet in the Post-Modernist World*. A book on John 13 (Towel and Bowl has a nice ring to it) wouldn't sell very well. As a matter of fact, the book would have a very difficult time finding a publisher. Think about verses 12ff. How can we apply Jesus' admonition *wash one another's feet*. Name some of your favorite foot-washers. Whom have you observed functioning as a servant? What is it about them you would like to emulate?

Think honestly. If you find yourself lacking in servanthood, what is prohibiting you in that area?

Are you growing in your willingness to be a footwasher? What stimulates you toward servanthood? Spend some time in your group encouraging one another in this area. How would you like to grow in this area? How can your group pray for you?<sup>1</sup>

Enjoy Newbigin's insight into this text.

But what are the implications of this? If Jesus had said: *Since I have washed your feet, you must wash my feet*, then we would be fighting with one another for the privilege of being first with the basin and the towel. The old order of preeminence would have been restored, thinly disguised under the name of *service*. The *Chief Minister* would have become the old ruler under a new name.

But Jesus says something which negates that possibility. *You ought to wash one another's feet*. This is something which subverts and replaces all normal patterns of authority. It would be impossible to draw a *management chart* in which A is subject to B and B is subject to A. Yet this is what is called for. (Newbigin, p. 170)

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<sup>1</sup>You might not want to pray about this because God might answer. Late in life C. S. Lewis, then Professor of Mediaeval Literature at Cambridge University (!) found himself tending, daily, to the needs of his wife, Joy Davidman Lewis. His energy was depleted and the task was consuming. Lewis reflected to a friend, *... a new element of beauty as well as tragedy had entered my life. Certainly God had taken me at my word—I have for many years prayed 'Lord take me out of myself, to seek and serve thee in others.'* (From *And God Came In*, by Lyle W. Dorsett, 1983, p. 128)

Consider the following verses on servanthood. How do these texts illumine Jesus' example?

- Romans 12:10
- Ephesians 4:32, 5:21
- Philippians 2:3
- Colossians 3:13
- I Peter 4:9-10, 5:5
- Galatians 5:13, 6:2

What in the above verses stands out and encourages you personally in the area of servanthood?

Verse 20 introduces one of the main points of these chapters; that of being sent. Jesus will return to and expand this theme in 17:18 and 20:21. As the *hour* of Jesus comes, the time of his *sent ones*, that is *apostles*, arrives as well.

In verse 21 Jesus is *troubled in spirit*. The same verb is used in 11:33. The disciples are eating their supper in a reclining position which was a sign of the formality of the meal. Those sitting on the right and left of Jesus have positions of honor. One way to re-construct the story is to see John, *the one whom Jesus loved*,<sup>1</sup> on one side of Jesus and Judas on the other. John's question (verse 25) and Jesus' response (verse 26) are not heard by the others for they don't understand Jesus' command; *Do quickly what you are going to do*.

Judas *went out*. *And it was night*. (verse 30) But John will not allow the darkness to be interpreted as defeat. The very next words of Jesus stand in stark contrast to the vile act of Judas, *Now the Son of Man has been glorified*.

After Judas leaves Jesus begins a long conversation with his disciples which will take us to his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (13:31-16:33). John omits the *Olivet Discourse* and the parable of judgment (cf. Matthew 24-25). Instead he shows Jesus' intimate concern for the disciples.

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<sup>1</sup>This is the first time we find this reference which most take as John's self-designation (cf. 19:26-27; 20:2-9; 21:7, 20).

What is the *new commandment* in verses 31-35? Are we following this commandment at SBCC? Does the visitor notice that we are people busy *loving one another*? Do you have any thoughts on how we might grow in this area?

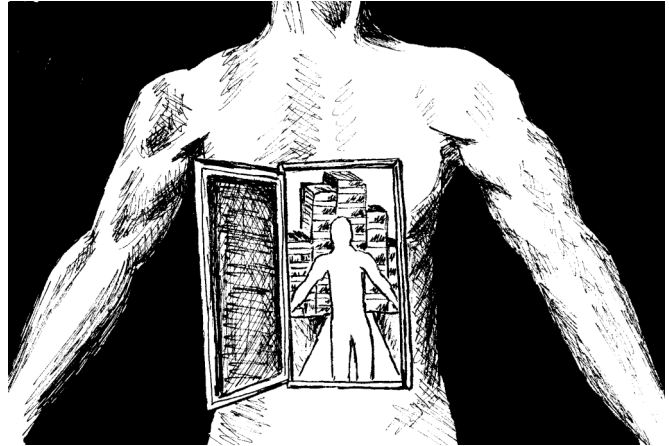
As a homegroup pray that you will do well at loving one another. Pray that SBCC would love one another and that this love would permeate through the many churches in the Christian community of Santa Barbara—and may the result be that people would be drawn to Jesus who is the ultimate source of this love and life!

## **Study Seventeen**

### **Heavenly Condos**

#### **John 13:36-14:14**

The intimate conversation between Jesus and the disciples continues in the upper-room as Jesus continues to prepare the disciples for his departure. Undoubtedly the evening's conversation was choked with emotion. These are the men with whom, for three years, he has traveled, dined, joked and taught. Now it is time to say good-bye. John 13:36-14:31 are structured around several questions the disciples have of their Rabbi on this very dark evening.



We are going to look at John 13:36-14:31 over a two-week period, but it is helpful to read the verses as a unit. Before going on in this study, read these verses. Keep the following outline in mind. As you read make a note of each question. Then summarize Jesus' answer.

1. Peter's question: 13:36-14:4
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Thomas' question: 14:5-7
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Philip's question: 14:8-21
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Judas'<sup>1</sup> question: 14:22-31

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<sup>1</sup>John points out the obvious. This is not Judas Iscariot (who left the upper room in 13:30). We don't know anything about this disciple except that he is mentioned by name in Luke 6:16 and again in Acts 1:13.

Peter's words in 13:37 are both accurate and ironic. They are ironic in that Jesus' reply would come to pass within a few hours. It is interesting to observe that Peter, who is the most vocal of the disciples, isn't heard from again in this upper-room conversation. He must have been shattered upon hearing Jesus' prophecy (verse 38). Each of the four gospels records Peter's denial. Why do you think this is? Are the gospel writers out to get Peter?

Peter's words (13:37) about dying for Jesus are, in the end, accurate. Reliable church tradition tells us Peter was crucified in Rome, upside down, as a martyr for his faith. What happened? How is it that the coward of Good Friday is transformed into the bold preacher we find in the book of Acts?

What are situations where a Christian might deny Christ? Are there more subtle ways we could deny Jesus?

Verse 14:1 shows the obvious state of the disciples' hearts. Jesus is troubled (12:27, 13:21). The disciples know he is leaving them. They are distraught. Here he offers them comfort. *Do not let your hearts be troubled*, (14:1) is followed by one of John's favorite verbs, *believe*.<sup>1</sup> The Greek verb can be translated either as an imperative, *Believe in God!*, or as an indicative *You believe in God...* The NIV translates with a double imperative, *Trust in God, trust also in me*. No matter how we take this verb, the verse again shows the startling (from the disciples' perspective) truth that Jesus and Yahweh were of the same stuff. Both are worthy recipients of the disciples' faith and trust. Jesus will return to this truth later in his conversation.

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<sup>1</sup>cf. John 1:50; 3:12, 15; 4:21, 41; 5:24, 44, 46; 6:29, 35, 47, 64; 7:38; 8:24, 45; 9:35; 10:38; 11:25, 41; 12:37, 44; 13:19; 14:1, 11; 16:31; 17:20; 20:27.



Look over these verses again. Jesus affirms that it is to the disciples' *benefit* that he leave them. Why? What benefits does Jesus promise in these verses?

As we look at this text, notice the comprehensive care Jesus promises.

First there is the promise of a heavenly dwelling (verses 2-4). Jesus uses an image of a first century home where several generations lived together. The Greek word which the NIV renders *rooms* (*monai*) means *dwelling places*, or *a place to stay*. The image is of a large estate (house) with various condominiums set up for the inhabitants. Jesus promises us a heavenly dwelling!

Second there is the promise that the future has begun with Jesus. When he leaves he will send *another* comforter. In other words, the hope of the disciples is not restricted to heaven. It begins with his death and resurrection (verses 5ff., esp. 25ff.).

Newbigin comments:

During the coming discourse Jesus will speak much about “abiding” with the disciples, about their “abiding” in him, and about his “abiding” in the Father. Now, at the outset and as the ground for their reassurance, he tells them that there are many “abiding places” and all of them “in my Father’s house.”... The death and resurrection of Jesus will inaugurate a new possibility—namely, that while we are still on the way, we shall have “a place” where we can already taste the joy of journey’s end, the joy of lovers’ meeting, the joy of being “with the Lord” (I Thessalonians. 4:17). It is because this is so that Jesus can assure his friends that the parting which so grieves them at the moment is only temporary. He is going to prepare a place for them where they may abide with him and he with them. But the “place” is not to be understood simply as the destination of their journey; rather there are many “abiding places” on the way, but they are all within the Father’s house. (Newbigin, p. 180)

When Jesus responds to Thomas’ question he makes the second to last of his *I am* statements in John’s gospel.<sup>1</sup> Our Lord’s claims are stunning in light of our age of pluralism and anti-exclusivism. We pride ourselves in *finding our own way*. Jesus claims not to point to the way, not to enable us to find the way, but to *be* the way! In 1963 Karl Barth was speaking at Princeton Seminary. One student asked, *Dr. Barth, don’t you think God has revealed himself in other religions and not only in Christianity?* The Swiss theologian replied, *No, God has not revealed himself in any other religion*

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<sup>1</sup>cf. p. 2 of the introduction.

*including Christianity. He has revealed himself in his Son. In Jesus Christ God has spoken for himself and we must hear that speech.*

Compare the following verses as you reflect on Jesus' claim in John 14:6:

- Acts 4:12
- Hebrews 10:19-20ff.

Respond to Thomas á Kempis as he reflects on this passage.

Follow thou me. I am the way and the truth and the life. Without the way there is no going; without the truth there is no knowing; without the life there is no living. I am the way which thou must follow; the truth which thou must believe; the life for which thou must hope. I am the inviolable way; the infallible truth; the never-ending life. I am the straightest way; the sovereign truth; life true, life blessed, life uncreated. If thou remain in my way thou shalt know the truth, and the truth shall make thee free, and thou shalt lay hold of eternal life. (The Imitation of Christ, 56.1)

How has John 14:6 given shape to your life? How does the pattern of your life reflect your conviction that Jesus is *the way, the truth and the life*?

Surely one implication of this bold statement is that Jesus—his honor, his glory, and his message—is to be our top priority in life. The focus of the Christian life is not ourselves (what he can do for us). The focus is to be on Jesus himself. How does your Christian faith reflect this priority?

Does our worship as a church reflect this priority?

One of the themes, if not the dominant theme, of the Gospel of John has been the presentation of Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament Judaism. We find this again in Jesus' reply to Philip (verses 9ff). In his anguish Philip says, *Show us the Father, Jesus. Yeah. We want to see Yahweh.* How does Jesus respond?

Review these verses along with John 10:38; 14:20 and 17:21. Think about this on a practical level. *God* is not some vague unfathomable deity. God has become one of us! To know Jesus is to know God the Father. While images of God were strictly forbidden in the Old Testament, we have his likeness in a real man, Jesus of Nazareth!

Consider 14:12-14. What are the discipleship implications of these verses?

There is a question as to what Jesus has in mind when he promises that the disciples will do *greater* works than Jesus. When we consider the feeding of the 5000 and the raising of Lazarus from the dead it hardly seems possible that Jesus had in mind *more sensational* when he said his followers would do *greater* works.

What Jesus means we may see in the narratives of the Acts. There are a few miracles of healing, but the emphasis is on the mighty works of conversion. On the day of Pentecost [Acts 2] alone more believers were added to the little band of believers than throughout Christ's entire earthly life. During his lifetime the Son of God was confined in His influence to a comparatively small sector of Palestine. After His departure His followers were able to work in widely scattered places and influence much larger numbers of men. But they did it all on the basis of Christ's return to the Father. (Morris, p. 646)<sup>1</sup>

What are the boundaries around the prayer promise in 14:13-14? What is it to pray in the name of Jesus? Should we end our prayers with the words, *In Jesus name a-men*?

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<sup>1</sup>Morris quotes J. C. Ryle who wrote, '[G]reater works' means more conversions. There is no greater work possible than the conversion of a soul. (Morris, p. 646)

In this study we have looked at the questions of both Thomas and Philip. What did they miss in their understanding of Jesus? Why did they ask these questions? Are you ever tempted to ask similar questions?

When you (we) have questions regarding our Christian faith, what is the best thing to do? What steps can we take to search for either answers or comfort with those questions which may not be easily answered?

Take some time as a homegroup to encourage one another in your search for the truth of the Gospel. Pray that the Holy Spirit would guide you into all truth. (John 16:13)

**Study Eighteen**  
**A Heavenly Comforter**  
**John 14:15-31**



One problem believers faced in Old Testament times was the absence of spiritual power. God gave the law to the people but they lacked the ability to fulfill its requirements. The law given to Moses was good (Romans 7:16; I Timothy 1:8), but the people lacked the power to live according to its statutes. Consider the time of the Judges. The Holy Spirit of Yahweh would come upon an individual and that person would rise up and give leadership to the nation. When the judge died *everyone again did what was right in his own eyes*. Without the presence of the Spirit, chaos prevailed. This cycle of order and chaos recurs thirteen times in Judges.

Much later in Israel's history the prophets longed for the time when God would pour out his Spirit on every man and woman. The internal prompting of the Spirit would empower the believer to keep the external precepts of the law. Consider the words of Ezekiel the prophet.

*I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God. (Ezekial 11:19-20)*

*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezekial 36:26)*

Accordingly in each of the gospels there is great excitement with the ministry of John the Baptist. He is clearly *filled* with the Spirit but his promise is even more exciting!

*I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (Matthew 3:11)*

*I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. (Mark 1:8)*

In John's gospel we find the same exuberant promise of the coming Spirit. Here the Baptist proclaims,

*I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'* (John 1:33)

In John 14 we see the beginnings of this Spirit baptism. With this in mind we are ready for our text. Read John 14:15-31. Jot down thoughts and questions as you read. What is Jesus aiming for in this conversation?

Jesus promises (verse 16) *another Counselor* (NIV) who will be with his disciples forever! In Greek Jesus used the word *paraklésis* which is unique to John 14-16 and I John 2:1. Literally a *paraclete* is *one called alongside to help*. Our English translations have a difficult time trying to capture the nuance of this word and it is probably helpful to consider all of them to capture the wonder of Jesus' promise. The GNB and ESV renders the word *helper*, the KJV, LB and AV *comforter*, the NRSV and NEB use *advocate*, while the Message renders *paraklésis* as *friend*.

Jesus promises *another paraklésis*, that is, one exactly like himself. Luther termed this the *alter Christus*, another Christ. In other words, though Jesus was physically departing from the disciples he would, in fact, be present in his Spirit *forever*.

F. F. Bruce explains the relation of Jesus' use of *paraklésis* in John's gospel and John's use of *paraklésis* in I John 2:1 (where the word refers to Jesus himself):

[I]n I John 2:1 Jesus' advocacy is exercised in the heavenly court; in our present passage (John 14) it is implied that he had been his disciples' advocate or paraclete on earth. So indeed he had been while he was with them; he had been their champion and helper, the one on whose guidance and support they could rely; but now he was about to leave them. He had been with them for a short time, but the 'other paraclete', his *alter ego*, would be with them permanently, and not only with them but in them. (Bruce, p. 302, emphasis added)

Now read these verses again. Make a list of the benefits of the Spirit based on these verses alone. What does Jesus promise the Spirit will do for his disciples? You should be able to find four, five or six promises/gifts of the Spirit (extra credit for anyone who finds six!!!)

One of the works of the Spirit is the impartation of *peace* to the followers of Jesus (14:27). To what does this refer? Compare:

- Colossians 3:15
- Philippians 4:6-7

Tenney defines this peace as *the calmness of confidence in God*. (Tenney, p. 148) Are you a man or a woman who enjoys the *peace* of God? How does this show in your life and thoughts?

What is your experience of the Holy Spirit from day to day? Which of the translations listed above best describes your experience of the Holy Spirit? When is your experience of Him most intense? When does the Spirit seem most distant? Consider the comment by Michael Green as you formulate your answer.

In a word, it is the task of the Paraclete to universalize the presence of Jesus. In the days of his flesh Jesus was limited by space and time. His physical departure made possible the coming of the Spirit as Paraclete and there would be no barriers

of space and time to prevent disciples being in intimate contact with him. Indeed, they would find the relationship even closer than companionship with Jesus in the days of his flesh. He has dwelt *with* them, but the one whom he promises as another Paraclete will dwell *in* them. (Michael Green, I Believe in the Holy Spirit, 1975, p. 43)

Notice the intimate connection between loving Jesus and keeping his commandments (14:15, 23). Have you ever considered that an act of obedience to God is a sign of your love for Christ? Conversely, when you commit a sin with deliberation, do you understand this act as a statement which says, *I don't love him*?

Does the North American church of today have a proper emphasis in this area? Have you been taught that *obedience* is an act of *loving Jesus*? How does this differ from legalism?

Are there areas of your life where you could be more obedient either to clear scriptural directives or to strong personal convictions requiring change? Will you make the necessary changes and what might they be?

Look at this passage as a whole. Notice the tri-une God, or the trinity in this text. God is one yet he exists in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What does it teach about God?



Verse 14:28 may seem peculiar after so many of Jesus' claims to be one with the Father (John 10:30). What does Jesus mean when he says, *The Father is greater than I*? This is the subordination of the Son to the Father. Michaels explains,

Jesus can still characterize the Father as *greater* because there are certain aspects of their relationship that are not reciprocal or reversible: The Father sent Jesus, Jesus did not send the Father; Jesus goes away to rejoin the Father, the Father does not come to him. Functionally, the Father is *greater*. (Michaels, p. 269, emphasis Michaels')

John goes out of his way to show that Jesus doesn't go to the cross because of an historical accident. The Son of God is not out-foxed by the Jews or the Romans. Many times the Jews wanted to take his life, but his "time had not yet come." Jesus, from the beginning, has been on a mission to defeat the "ruler of the world" (12:31). Here, at the end of chapter 14 we hear something of a battle cry from our Lord, "Rise, let us be on our way."<sup>1</sup> C. H. Dodd points out that in Greek parlance this phrase meant, "Come, let us go to meet the advancing enemy." (C. H. Dodd, The Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel, 1965, p. 409)

The Father with strong intention sent Jesus his Son, followed by the Holy Spirit, in order that we as men and women could be brought back into a right relationship with him. Spend some time in prayer expressing gratitude for God's grace and mercy!

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<sup>1</sup>This is the same phrase, in Greek, which Jesus used in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:42) to gather his sleepy disciples when Judas was approaching to betray Him. In both cases, in the upper-room and in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus is the one in control. He is not *caught*, he goes out to meet his pursuers. We call John 14-16 the *upper-room discourse*. Whether Jesus uttered chapters 15 and 16 before leaving the room or on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane is not clear.

*Sermon Notes...*

## Study Nineteen

### Vine and Branches

#### John 15:1-16:4



The *upper-room* conversations of Jesus fall into two distinct units. First we have what we might call the discourse of comfort in 13:31-14:31. Jesus assures the disciples that he will be with them in the person of the Holy Spirit. The second conversation, separated from the first with the battle cry in 14:31, is the discourse of mission. In this, the last of Jesus' teaching in John's gospel, the disciples learn they are not called to be a *holy huddle* in Jesus' absence. The disciples have a mission. They are to be *fruit-bearers* for Jesus himself.

At the end of our last study we noted that it is unclear where the conversation of John 15-16 takes place. If the disciples did leave the upper-room, then the conversation

presumably took place in route to the Mount of Olives as they made their way across the Kidron Valley. During this walk the disciples undoubtedly would have looked up at the bronze temple doors which were embossed with a great golden vine, the national emblem of Israel. Josephus tells us this vine had *clusters as large as a man*!

Vine/grape symbolism is common in the Old Testament. The nation understands herself as the *vine* of Yahweh. Psalm 80:8-9 reads,

*You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land.*

Notice how Isaiah employs the same imagery:

*I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit... . The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. (Isaiah 5:1-2, 7a)<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>cf. Psalms 80:1-16; Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:2ff.; Jeremiah 2:21; 12:10ff.; Ezekiel 15:1-8; 17:1-6; Hosea 10:1-2.

But the vineyard in Isaiah is a grave disappointment. It didn't produce fruit. The vineyard in Psalm 80 is *burned with fire*. Israel had missed her call to mission. Here, as Jesus crosses the Kidron Valley, we learn that Jesus himself is the vine and his disciples are the branches. Thus the theme of Jesus as the fulfillment of Judaism is presented once again, even as the Son of God makes his way to the cross. The disciples are to carry on with his mission.

The gracious indwelling of God with his people is not an invitation to settle down and forget the rest of the world: it is a summons to mission, for the Lord who dwells with his people is the one who goes before them in the pillar of fire and cloud. (Newbigin, p. 196)

With this in mind read John 15 and 16 considering the following outline. Jot down thoughts and questions as you read.

I. The Priority of Mission (15:1-17)

II. The Price of Mission (15:18-16:4)

III. The Provision for Mission (16:5-33)

Think about a vineyard. Unless we are a viticulturist we don't normally admire the vine itself. Grape vines don't produce beautiful flowers or gorgeous leaves. Instead, the emphasis is on the produce, the grapes. So also the Christian's life is to produce fruit for the *vine grower*, (NRSV) or the gardener (NIV).

What does Jesus say about fruit-bearing in 15:1-17? What do you learn about a grape vine and its branches?

What does this teach about the Christian life?

Does Jesus have the conversion of souls in mind here or does he have in mind things like the *fruit of the Spirit* (Galatians 5)? Consider Earl Palmer's comment, *The fruit of the branches is not more branches (souls won) but fruit—the good results of being with Jesus Christ. Indeed, those good results do win others.* How are we to understand fruit-bearing?

Assume, for purposes of group discussion, that Palmer is correct. Share with your group the fruit in your life. How is this fruit a result of your abiding in Christ?

Pick someone in your group, other than yourself, and write a sentence or two describing what fruit you have observed in his/her life. Spend a few moments reading these sentences.

Who is the most fructiferous Christian you know? What do you admire in this person?

There are two images in 15:2 which may (should) be frightening. The branches which bear no fruit are *cut off*, while fruit bearing branches are pruned (cf. Hebrews 12:11). What does Jesus have in mind here? Have you experienced pruning in your life? What was this like?

Note that Jesus never commands his disciples to *bear fruit*. What does he command? (verse 4)

What does it mean to abide in Christ (15:4)? Is this a statement of mystical union with our Lord? How do you personally abide in Christ? Where is your life in Christ nourished?

Consider Jesus' command in light of the missionary thrust of the chapter. What is the missionary result of this abiding?

Respond to Milne's commentary on 15:5.

Fruit-bearing for God is *not* a human possibility; it is Christ's work through us. The alternatives are starkly expressed: separate from Christ, 'no fruit'; united to Christ, *much fruit*. (Milne, p. 221, emphasis Milne's)

In 15:15 Jesus calls his disciples *friends*. What does it mean to be a friend of Jesus? Is it possible to take this too far, thinking of Jesus simply as our *buddy*? How do we reconcile this *friendship* with John's own reaction to his encounter with the glorified Jesus in Revelation 1:12-17 where John sees the radiant Lord and falls *as though dead*?

Often the Christian faith is *marketed* in North America as something which will make life better. Jesus is something we add to our already good lives to enhance them further still.

But in John 15:18ff. Jesus' followers are promised they will be hated, persecuted, and even killed.

Indeed the relative tranquility enjoyed by evangelical believers in the Western world is unique. It is estimated that in our century alone about 26 million believers have been put to death because of their faith.<sup>1</sup>

Peter Kusmic, a Croatian evangelical leader, indicts the Western church.

So much popular Western evangelical religiosity is so shallow and selfish. It promises so much and demands so little. It offers success, personal happiness, peace of mind, material prosperity; but it hardly speaks of repentance, sacrifice, self-denial, holy lifestyle and willingness to die for Christ. (Peter Kusmic, "How to Teach the Truth of the Gospel," Proclaim Christ Until He Comes, 1990, p. 200)

Have you ever suffered any form of persecution for your faith? How do you think you would respond to the intense persecution Jesus mentions in these verses?

Respond to the following statement by Dr. Michael Green:

You cannot be the disciple of a crucified saviour and have a ball all your life. It simply cannot be done. (unpublished lecture at Regent College, 10/93)

Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) is one of the most well-known missionaries of the modern era. Taylor's life-long burden for the people of China led to his 51 years of work in Asia and to the founding of the China Inland Mission (CIM).

In 1869 Hudson Taylor went through a spiritual crisis. His soul dried up even as he preached, practiced medicine and ran the CIM. It was John 15 which led him out of the spiritual dessert. Contemplating John 15:1 Hudson wrote,

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<sup>1</sup>This is the estimate of David Barrett and F. K. Jansen in a paper read at Lausanne II in Manila, July 1989, cited by Milne, p. 226.

He was rich, truly, but I was poor; He strong, but I weak. I knew full well that there was in the root, the stem, abundant fatness; but how to get it into my puny little branch was the question.

But, after much thought and prayer, Taylor gained a deeper understanding of this text. He wrote in his journal,

As I thought of the vine and the branches, what light the blessed Spirit poured into my soul! How great seemed my mistake in having wished to get the sap, the fulness *out* of Him. I saw not only that Jesus would never leave me, but that I was a member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. The vine now I see, is not the root merely, but all—root, stem, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruit: and Jesus is not only that: He is oil and sunshine, air and showers, and ten thousand times more than we have ever dreamed, wished for or needed. Oh, the joy of seeing this truth!

Hudson Taylor soon found himself in conversation with another CIM missionary, Charles Judd.

Oh, Mr. Judd. God has made me a new man! God has made me a new man! I have not got to *make* myself a branch, the Lord Jesus tells me I *am* a branch. I am *part of Him*, and have just to believe it... I am a member of Christ, and may take all I need of His fulness. I have seen it long enough in the Bible, but I *believe* it now as a living reality. (quotations from J. Hudson Taylor: A Man in Christ, by, Roger Steer, 1990. pp. 233-237)

Vine and branches. Is this for you a truth found in the Bible or is it a *living reality*? Is it something you experience or something you long for?

As a group, end your time together by praying that you would abide in Jesus and bear fruit to his glory!



## Study Twenty

### From Grief to Joy

### John 16:5-33

John 16:5-33 concludes the upper-room conversation of Jesus with his disciples. Here, again, we are treated to the great Paraclete (Holy Spirit) teaching of Jesus which is unique to John's gospel. Before reading further in this study read the biblical text. Keep the following outline in mind:

- I. The Prosecuting Counsel (16:5-11<sup>1</sup>)
- II. The Encouraging Counsel (16:12-15)
- III. The Riddle of Joy (16:16-33)

#### **I. The Prosecuting Counsel: 16:5-11**

Why is it good that Jesus leaves (verse 7)? How do you think the disciples understood this? How do you understand it?

Jesus uses the verb *elenchô* to describe the prosecuting ministry of the Holy Spirit (verse 8). The word is rendered *convict* in the NIV and ESV and *prove* in the NRSV. The Greek verb is a legal term which means *to expose*, *to refute*, or *to convict*. The verb occurs eighteen times in the New Testament and usually has *something to do with showing someone his sin, usually as a summons to repentance*.<sup>2</sup> (Carson, p. 534) Tenney writes,

The Spirit does not merely accuse men of sin, he brings to them an inescapable sense of guilt so that they realize their shame and helplessness before God. This sin applies to three particular areas: sin, righteousness, and judgment. The Spirit is the prosecuting attorney who presents God's case against humanity. He creates an inescapable awareness of sin so that it cannot be



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<sup>1</sup>Recall that one of the names for the Paraclete is *Counselor*, cf. Study 18.

<sup>2</sup>cf. Matthew 18:15; Luke 3:19; John 3:20; 8:46; I Corinthians 14:24; Ephesians 5:11, 13; I Timothy 5:20; II Timothy 4:2.

dismissed with an excuse or evaded by taking refuge in the fact that “everybody is doing it.” (Tenney, p. 157)

Apply this to your own life. What was it like for you when the Holy Spirit created *an inescapable awareness of sin*? Has this *awareness* intensified or diminished since you came to know Christ?

Examine your heart. How do you respond when you feel this awareness of sin?

When he describes this prosecuting ministry of the Holy Spirit we learn that the Paraclete will have the last word. Jesus will be vindicated.

*When he comes, he will confute the world, and show where wrong and right and judgment lie. He will convict them of wrong, by their refusal to believe in me; he will convince them that right is on my side, by showing that I go to the Father when I pass from your sight; and he will convince them of divine judgement, by showing that the Prince of this world stands condemned. (16:8-11 NEB)*

Obviously, Jesus’ death and resurrection are seen from a grand perspective. Here we have no ordinary crucifixion. In Jesus’ death the powers of Satan are defeated. The *ruler of this world* has been condemned. Jesus, in death, conquers the world (cf. 16:33)! The coming ministry of the Paraclete, therefore, must be understood as an event with cosmic significance.

The ministry of the Spirit is a not a vague impartation of spiritual energy, but the specific ministry of proclaiming, and applying to the disciple community, the triumphant procession of Jesus through death and resurrection to the right hand of the Father. The ministry of the Spirit is the unleashing of the powers of the promised kingdom of God in the world. The effects of the kingdom’s coming are clear in the Old Testament. These realities will now be actualized through them in the world. It therefore is *for your good* that Jesus departs, since his departure will obtain these promised blessings. (Milne, p. 229, emphasis Milne’s)

**II. The Encouraging Counsel: 16:12-15**

John says, *When the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all the truth.* What does this mean?

How has the Holy Spirit guided you into that truth?

What is the Christian's part in allowing the Holy Spirit to do this?

Notice the parallels between Jesus' relation to the Father and the Spirit's relation to Jesus in these verses. How many can you find?

**III. The Riddle of Joy: 16:16-33**

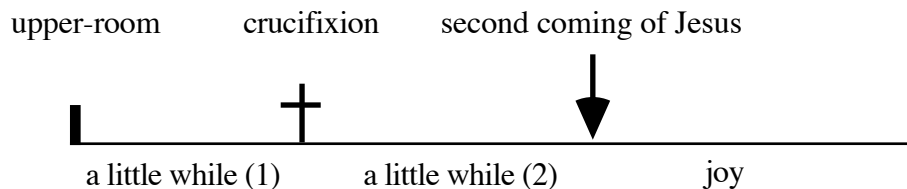
16:16-33 moves from a riddle to a parable and then to *plain speech*. The riddle is in verse 16,

*A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me.*

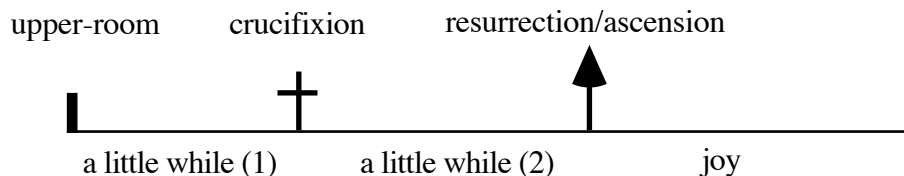
The disciples discuss this on their own and ponder, *What does he mean???* Jesus overhears them and offers a parable about a woman bearing a child (verse 21). Her labor pains are swallowed up in the joy of the child. Finally, Jesus speaks *plainly* to the disciples (verse 29). But how plain are these words? Two views of 16:16 are offered by the commentators. Some see this verse as referring to the grand scheme of Jesus' first and second coming:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>These charts are based on material from Michaels, pp. 285ff.



Others see Jesus outlining the events between the upper room and Pentecost (Acts 1).



In the former view, the joy promised describes the time immediately after the second advent of Jesus. In the latter view, the joy promised by Jesus describes the state of the church as she waits for the future return of Jesus.

Could it be that John is deliberately ambiguous and wants us to see the riddle in both the immediate situation of the disciples and in the larger story of the church? Which do you think John had in mind?

Michaels acknowledges this possibility while seeing John's emphasis on the place of joy in the lives of Jesus' followers throughout the church age.

Though Jesus will one day come again for all the world to see and will raise the dead from their graves (5:28-29; cf. 14:3), this is not the "second coming" that matters in John's Gospel. The emphasis rather is on Jesus' reunion with his disciples by virtue of his own resurrection from the dead (cf. 20:19-23) and his continuing presence with them in their mission through the ministry of the Counselor. Transcending the sadness of persecution and betrayal, Jesus confers a **joy** that **no one will take away** (verse 22). (Michaels, p. 287, emphasis Michaels')

Notice the link between joy and prayer in verses 22-23. Why is this? Why should our prayer life produce joy in our lives?

Have you ever noticed a correspondence between your devotion to prayer and your experience of joy? If so, how?

Think back over these upper-room chapters. Jesus has made many promises of assurance. Which have impressed you? Why? How do these promises, made to eleven disciples almost two thousand years ago, play themselves out in your life today? How do they help when your heart is troubled (14:1)?

Praise be to God who has sent the great Counselor to guide us into all truth. May we live our lives with an appropriate response!

*Sermon Notes...*

## Study Twenty-one

### The Time Has Come

#### John 17:1-26



For many readers chapter seventeen is the highlight of John's gospel. Milne calls this chapter *one of the mountain peaks of revelation*, while Temple sees in it *perhaps the most sacred passage in the four gospels*.<sup>1</sup> In these verses we find the longest recorded prayer of our Lord. The mood is both triumphant and somber. Everything in the gospel story has led to this moment! *Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son...*

Previously Jesus has told his mother, his brothers and his disciples that his *time*, or *hour*, had not yet come (cf. 2:4; 7:6, 8; 8:20; 12:23, 27ff.; 13:1, 31). But now Jesus prepares for his appointed *hour* by praying to the Father.

Milne sees this prayer as the fulcrum of Christian history.

The gifts we exercise, the prayers we offer, the proclamation we share, the acts of compassion and mercy we endeavor, all flow from this primal moment in the shadow of Calvary as Jesus in prayer presents the mission of the church to the Father. (Milne, p. 237)

Read John 17 with the following outline in mind. Make a list of those things which stand out in your mind. Does the prayer bring up any questions?

- I. Jesus prays for himself (17:1-5)
- II. Jesus prays for the eleven disciples (17:6-19)
  1. For their safety (17:11-12, 15)
  2. For their unity (17:11)
  3. For their joy (17:13)

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Milne p. 236. Milligan and Moulton (1898) write, *No attempt to describe the prayer can give a just idea of its sublimity, its pathos, its touching yet exalted character, its tone at once of tenderness and triumphant expectation.* (cited in Morris, p. 716)

4. For their protection (17:15)

5. For their purity (17:17)

6. For their mission (17:18)

III. Jesus prays for future disciples (17:20-26)

Think through the Gospel of John to this point. What themes and key words do you find in this prayer? How does this prayer draw the major themes of the gospel together?

It is safe to say that this prayer represents Jesus' deepest concerns on the eve of his death. What are they?


Where this prayer was spoken is not clear. It is either in the upper-room or on the way to the Mount of Olives. In any event, the prayer is prayed before crossing the Kidron Valley (18:1) and therefore this is not *John's version* of Jesus' prayer of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (compare Mark 14:32-42).

### **I. Jesus prays for himself (verses 1-5)**

Jesus prays for his own glory. What is in mind here? How is it that the imminent death of Jesus will bring glory to himself (cf. II Corinthians 5:17-21)?

Verse three will take eternity to fully comprehend! *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

Knowing God  
Knowing Jesus



= Eternal Life



D. A. Carson says of this verse, *Eternal life is not so much everlasting life as knowledge of the Everlasting One*. (Carson, p. 556) In other words, Jesus doesn't simply promise a quantity of life (living forever), but a quality of life (living with God).

Again, as we have so often seen in John, the Old Testament promises are fulfilled in Christ. In the Old Testament knowing God was the supreme goal and blessing. *Knowing God* was central to the yearnings of the prophet Jeremiah. The prophet longed for the time when the people would walk intimately with God.

*"No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."* (Jeremiah 31:34)

What Jeremiah longed for is the present reality enjoyed by Jesus' disciples! Do you think of *knowing God* as his gift to you? Do you live in constant appreciation of the intimacy you have with God the Father through Christ (cf. Hebrews 10:19-22)? Share with your group your day-by-day appropriation of John 17:3. What does it mean in your life *to know God*?

### II. Jesus prays for the eleven disciples (verses 6-19)

Consider Jesus' prayer for the disciples as a whole. Notice what he doesn't ask for: physical healing, jobs, finances, the protection of Oscar's aunt, the availability of parking spaces. What does he pray for? How should this shape the way in which we pray for one another?

Notice another New Testament example of prayer in Paul's letter to the Colossians. Note the content of his prayer for the church in Col. 1:9-12. Again, what can we do to pray for one another according to this pattern?

Why do we seem to find it easier to pray for one another with regard to health, jobs, relationships, instead of each other's spiritual development?

Consider verse 11. Jesus prays for unity, oneness. E. Stanley Jones said, *You belong to Christ; I belong to Christ; we belong to each other.*<sup>1</sup> But this *belonging*, this unity is often times difficult in practice. While it is easy to *love the body of Christ*, it is sometimes hard to tolerate the person who talks too much (or too little) in homegroup. C. S. Lewis said that in the church God brings us together with *that very selection of neighbors we have been avoiding all week*.

What is the basis of our unity? What does it mean to be united? Surely all Christians of all times will not agree on everything. But we are to be *one* nevertheless. Is our unity based on our gifts, our mutual interests, our mission? Two texts from Paul's letter to the Ephesians should help with our answer.

- Ephesians 2:11-22
- Ephesians 4:1-16

Commentators point out the unity of which Jesus speaks is *created* by God (as opposed to something we manufacture by trying to be united), *observable* to the world (verse 21) and *apologetic* in purpose (the unity of the church compels belief).

Think of a person or of people with whom you could say you have unity. What does that look and feel like?

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<sup>1</sup>Eli Stanley Jones (1884-1973) was a well-known Methodist missionary to India. His 1925 book The Christ of the Indian Road brought him international acclaim.

Evaluate the internal unity of SBCC. Would the outside observer see a united body of believers?

What about the unity of SBCC with the church at large? How do we express our love for, and unity with, brothers and sisters of other congregations?

Practically, how do (or could) you contribute to unity within the body of Christ, either at SBCC in particular or in the Church generally?

The prophets of the Old Testament looked forward to the time of the Messiah as a time of *joy* (cf. Isaiah 35:1-2; 55:11-12). Again, in Jesus, the time is fulfilled. Jesus prays that the *joy* of his disciples would be made complete. Has Jesus' prayer been fulfilled in your life? Is joy an apt description of your countenance? If not, what can be done to appropriate the joy for which Jesus prayed?

In verses 15-18 we read of Jesus' plea for protection for his disciples. This request is surrounded by the call to mission. The disciples were not to sit together and wait for Jesus' second coming. They had a job to do which would inevitably provoke opposition. In these verses we find that the followers of Jesus are to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world.

In the past, evangelical Christians have been criticized for being too *worldly*. Why would this charge be made? Is it fair?

What does Jesus' prayer mean to you? How are we to think *Christianly* about sports, computers, expensive cars, credit cards, movies, vacations, careers, wealth, MTV, etc.? Are there things which you avoid (or should avoid) simply because they are *of* the world? What are they? Should your list match that of the person sitting next to you in homegroup? Why? Why not?

Notice how Jesus' prayer for purity (verse 17) leads directly to mission. The two are closely aligned. Respond to the following:

When the Church is kept in the holy name of God it has a final commitment which is outside the comprehension of the world. Without this radical otherworldliness the Church has no serious business with the world. Archimedes said: 'Give me a point outside the world for a fulcrum and I will move the world with a lever.' If the Church does not rest on a point outside the world it has no leverage with the world... . But this does not mean that they are to find their safety in separation from the world. That kind of otherworldliness is forbidden. They are not to inhabit a ghetto but to go forth on a mission. (Newbigin, p. 231)

### **III. Jesus prays for future disciples (verses 20-26)**

Read these verses again with care. What does Jesus long for with regard to the second generation of disciples? How many yearnings can you find in verses 20-26?

Jesus prays this incredible prayer (John 17) for his disciples and then includes all those who will come to believe because of the disciples' word, which we receive as the New Testament. Jesus is praying for us today! Praise God for this great provision of the truth in our lives!

## **Study Twenty-two**

### **Arrest!**

### **John 18:1-19:16**

The darkness of the last night of Jesus' life becomes darker still as the disciples cross the Kidron Valley and make their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. As we have noted, the exact timing of the events on this night is left unclear by John. We are not sure when the meeting in the upper-room ended. What is clear in 18:1ff. is that Jesus deliberately places himself in a position of vulnerability. Jerusalem was teeming with visitors during Passover. Only the wealthy or the well-connected could find accommodations within the city walls. It appears that Jesus and the disciples were camping out on the Mount of Olives, about one mile from the Temple area. Surely Judas would look for Jesus there.



The irony of the walk from Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley to Gethsemane, is bitter. As the disciples walked down the steps from Jerusalem, they would have passed a conduit carved into the earth for the purpose of carrying the blood of the 250,000 lambs sacrificed at Passover. Here the Lamb of God (2:29) would pass, pausing, perhaps, to see and smell the blood of thousands of sacrificial lambs as he prepared himself to be slaughtered for the sins of humanity.

Read 18:1-19:16 with the following outline in mind:

- I. Arrest in Gethsemane (18:1-11)
- II. Hearing before Annas (18:12-14, 19-24)
- III. Peter's three denials (18:15-18, 25-27)
- IV. Trial before Pilate (19:1-16)

As you read look for the predominant theme of the sovereignty of Jesus over his captors. He is Lord and as Lord he is in control of every step of these events. Make a list of the features of the story which point to Jesus' abiding control over his arrest, trial and conviction.

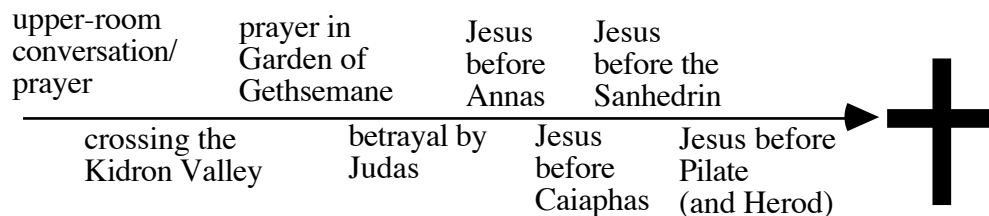
## ARREST!

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John's gospel bears evidence that it was written late, supplementing the works of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Read one or more of their versions of this same story. Look for details they include which John leaves out.

- Matthew 26:47 - 27:31
- Mark 14:43 - 15:20
- Luke 22:47 - 23:25

A chronicle of this night would include the following:



John's gospel leaves out the garden prayer and the trial before the Sanhedrin.<sup>1</sup>

We will see (18:28) that Pilate was in Jerusalem during Passover.<sup>2</sup> This was because, as the Roman governor of Judea, he had the responsibility of keeping Israel in line as a vassal state under the authority of the Emperor (Tiberias). Passover was a time when insurrectionists would seek followers. Accordingly, when Judas approaches the Garden of Gethsemane he comes with both the temple police and a *detachment of soldiers*. The Greek word John uses is the equivalent of the Latin word *cohors* (cohort). A Roman cohort consisted of 1000 soldiers. While an entire cohort may not have been used, a considerable number of well equipped military men come to arrest Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup>The Sanhedrin was the legal branch of the Jews. The trial before this tribunal is recorded in Matthew 26:57-27:1; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:66-71.

<sup>2</sup>Normally the governor lived in Caesarea in the palace built by Herod the Great.

18:5 is thoughtful even as it is humorous. The Roman and Jewish soldiers came to find that year's revolutionary zealot make their arrest and get on with Passover. Instead, they encounter the great *I am* of Exodus 3:14. To make the point unmistakable, John includes Jesus' self-designation three times (verses 5, 6 & 8). The Greek text contains the final '*I am*' of John's gospel. *When Jesus utters these words, the soldiers prostrate themselves in awe and fear.* (Newbiggin, p. 240)

What protection does Jesus request for his disciples as he prepares for his arrest?

Jesus rejects Peter's use of the sword (a bit too late for Malchus) in verse 11. Does this set a precedent for the future of the church?

In John, the trial of Jesus is informal and, as we should suspect by now, full of irony. In this gospel no charges are formally stated. The charges which are stated in the synoptic gospels during the trial before the Sanhedrin (see chart) have all been made clear during the ministry of Jesus (cf. John 1:51; 2:19; 10:24ff., 33, 36).

In 18:12 Jesus is taken to Annas. Annas was high priest from A.D. 6-15. The high priesthood was supposed to be a lifetime appointment, but the Romans deposed Annas and rotated his five sons (along with his son-in-law Caiaphas) in and out of the priesthood after 15 A.D. The Jews hated this imposition and it seems clear from this account that Annas is still pulling the strings behind the scenes.<sup>1</sup>

It is possible that Annas had a score to settle with Jesus. Annas had become very rich in the priesthood by controlling the temple money changers. Years after his priesthood the Talmud denounces Annas for his profiteering.<sup>2</sup> Did Jesus put a temporary halt to Annas' income when he *cleansed* the temple (cf. John 2:13ff.)? If so, Annas may want to get even with the carpenter from Nazareth.

Notice how John weaves together Jesus' trial with Peter's denials. As Peter warms himself beside the enemies of Jesus, he ends up denying his allegiance to Christ. What do you make of this? What is Peter's problem?

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<sup>1</sup>Luke 3:2 sounds as if both Caiaphas and Annas are both high priest.

<sup>2</sup>The Talmud is a collection of Jewish commentaries on the Law.

Have you done this (perhaps in your silence)? What steps can you take to keep from doing this again?

The trial before Annas, Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin is insufficient to crucify Jesus. The Romans reserved the right of capital punishment for themselves and the governor alone was the person who decided on the fate of a criminal. For the Jews, Jesus was a religious stumbling block. They didn't like his message (8:58) and they were jealous of his popularity (12:10-11). But Pilate could not have cared less about such theological disputes. So, the Jews need a political charge. Jesus is an insurrectionist! A pretender to the throne! The ranting and raving of the Jews combined with their unmitigated hatred for Jesus culminate in the ultimate irony.

*We have no king but the emperor! (19:15)*

Note the irony in 18:28. When Jesus is brought from Caiaphas to Pilate the Jews don't enter because they want to remain pure for Passover! Jewish law forbade their entering an uncleansed building.

Pilate, governor of Judah, is seen to be a leader who knows what is right yet lacks the courage of his convictions. On the one hand, he knows Jesus is innocent and declares him so three times (18:38; 19:4, 6). On the other hand, Pilate has been in some trouble with the Roman Emperor Tiberias. He fears losing his position of power and prestige.

Re-read the trial before Pilate (18:28 - 19:16).

- Who is in control?
- We find the Jews' real complaint about Jesus in this section. Why do they want him put to death?
- What do we learn about the kingdom of God from Jesus' response to Pilate in verses 36ff.?
- Much has been made of Pilate's question, *What is truth?* Is this a genuine question or the expression of a cynical politician who has been cajoled into a difficult situation? Is it a put-down of Jesus? What do you make of the question?



What do you think of Jesus' style as a defendant (throughout all four gospels)? In what ways does he surprise you?

In 19:16 Jesus is handed over to the Jews with instructions to crucify him. Pilate surely pronounced the verdict in Latin, *Ibis ad crucem* (*You will go to the cross*). From the Christian's perspective this is the central moment of all history. Newbigin writes,

Thus, with an appalling abruptness, the trial ends. Then the central faith by which Israel lives—that Yahweh alone is Lord—has been publicly denied by the official spokesmen of the nation. The central purpose for which the political order exists—namely, to defend the good and punish the evildoer—has been publicly abandoned by the representative of the imperial power. And all this is because the one who had been presented before them a king is in fact the presence of the light shining in the darkness and his coming into the world necessarily means judgment for the world. The claims of religion and of statecraft to have authority over human affairs have been unmasked. The “powers” have been disarmed (Col. 2:15). Only one claim remains, which can never be withdrawn: that Jesus, the slain lamb, is king. That is the gospel, the gospel of the kingdom of God. (Newbigin, p. 252)

What is the purpose of John 18:1-19:16 in the gospel of John? How has this passage impacted your faith in Jesus? Spend time as a homegroup acknowledging this to God in prayer.

*Sermon Notes...*

## Study Twenty-three

### The Cross

#### John 19:17-42

John's gospel has been full of *signs* which point the reader toward faith in Jesus. With the cross we encounter God's supreme sign to his children. Think about it. All of Jesus' other signs were temporary. The water which was turned into wine was either consumed or it soured and was dumped out on the ground. The food received by the 5000 was eaten, digested and eliminated. Lazarus, though raised from the dead, ended up in a grave for a second time. But the cross produced results for all eternity. Here we come to the core of biblical history: the offering of the Lamb of God for the sins of the world.



John offers a brief account of Jesus' death, though he gives us a few details not recorded in the Synoptics. He spares us the brutal details of the other accounts. For John the cross is the supreme manifestation of the glory of God! Readers of John's gospel look in vain for what is called the *cry of dereliction* (*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*). Jesus is in control. He is busy fulfilling prophecy (19:28). We find nothing in these verses of the darkness which descended on Jerusalem during the crucifixion (cf. Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33). Jesus is *the light of the world* shining in the darkness, especially on the cross (John 13:31; 3:14; 8:28; 12:32).

We should, however, make no mistake: Crucifixion was a horrible way to die. In our society we attempt, when putting a criminal to death, to make the killing as painless as possible. Crucifixion had the opposite goal. Crucifixion was invented by the Persians, honed by the Carthaginians, further developed and popularized by the Romans. Cicero called it *the cruelest and foulest of punishments*.

The unnatural position, growing thirst, exposure to the weather, some loss of blood and impaired breathing contributed to bring about a lingering and painful death. The tension on the arms prevented normal breathing, which caused the lungs to slowly fill with moisture. The victim drowned slowly by internal accumulation of fluid. The action of the heart was seriously affected. Frequently a crucified man might live as long as thirty-six hours, or even longer in an increasing agony, unless by exhaustion or dementia he finally lapsed into unconsciousness. Crucifixion was probably the most diabolical form of death ever invented. (Tenney, p. 181)

After Pilate's verdict, *Ibis ad crucem* (*You will go to the cross*), Jesus had to carry the horizontal cross bar (*patibulum*) through the streets of Jerusalem. (The Romans understood the value of a spectacle in deterring future crimes.) When he reached *the place of the Skull*<sup>1</sup> Jesus would have been completely stripped and nailed to the cross beam. A rope was probably used to hoist his body up the vertical stake which was left permanently in the ground. This rope would be tied behind Jesus' back to prevent his slumping forward as he weakened. His legs would be nailed sideways. A peg may have been present to sit upon (which would only serve to prolong the victim's agony). It is no wonder that years later the Apostle Paul would marvel, *He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross*. (Philippians 2:8)

Read 19:17-42 (you may want to compare to Matthew, Mark and Luke's account of the crucifixion). Be sure to let the story stand on its own. Let us beware lest we *intellectualize* the crucifixion and miss its greatness. What impact does this story have on you? How does this story move your emotions?

The Passover is a dominant theme in these latter chapters of John. Throughout the last week of Jesus' life, John has shown our Lord as the true Passover lamb. Jesus fulfills John the Baptist's proclamation in 1:29. The crucifixion continues this theme of fulfillment. Jesus' bones are not broken (John 19:33) even as the bones of the Passover lamb were not broken (Exodus 12:10 and Numbers 9:12).<sup>2</sup> In John's gospel Jesus is offered a drink at the end of a *hyssop plant* (verse 29). Hyssop is a bush and not what we would expect to be used to extend a sponge to a dying man on a cross.<sup>3</sup> But hyssop was used in the Passover to sprinkle blood on the door frame in order to effect the passing-over of the Lord in his wrath (cf. Exodus 12:21ff.). Here, Jesus, the true Passover lamb, takes the sins of the world on himself.

Jesus, ever in control, decides when to die. After receiving a drink from a stalk of hyssop Jesus says, *It is finished*, and dies. What was *finished*? Compare this to 17:4 along with the following verses:

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<sup>1</sup>John notes that this place is called *Golgotha* in Aramaic (Hebrew dialect). When translated into Latin *skull* becomes *calvaria* from which we get the word *calvary*.

<sup>2</sup>The breaking of the legs of criminals being crucified hastened their death and was considered an act of mercy.

<sup>3</sup>In Mark's Gospel the sponge was extended on a reed.

- Hebrews 9:11-28
- Colossians 2:9-15
- Ephesians 5:1-2
- Romans 3:21-26

In these verses, what stands out most to you and why?

Note the various groups of people involved in Jesus' crucifixion. What are their attitudes and reactions to Jesus?

- Pilate
- The Soldiers
- The Jewish Leaders
- Jesus' Small Group of Followers (verses 25-27)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This small group of 19:25-27 is all that is left of Jesus' followers. We find four women present. Mary (the mother of Jesus), *his mother's sister*, who Matthew and Mark tell us is Salome. Salome and Zebedee are the parents of James and John (therefore Salome is Jesus' aunt). Finally we find *Mary the wife of Clopas* and *Mary of Magdala*. The latter Mary comes from a small town on the west shore of the Lake of Galilee. She had had seven demons cast out of her by Jesus. Her life was radically transformed. The identity of Mary the wife of Clopas is uncertain, but she could be related to Jesus by marriage. Eusebius tells us that Clopas was the brother of Joseph and therefore our Lord's uncle. It also appears John is present at the crucifixion (verse 27).

John, if nothing else, wants to make clear the fact that Jesus really died. By the time of the writing of this gospel there was a heresy (called docetism) which taught that Jesus didn't really die on the cross. One version of this heresy taught that Jesus slipped out of the Romans' sight when Simon of Cyrene (Luke 23:26) helped him carry the cross. The docetists taught that it was really Simon who was crucified while Jesus convalesced on the Mount of Olives.<sup>1</sup> John leaves out Simon's part in the procession to the cross. At the same time he includes the story about the piercing of Jesus' side with a spear. Out of his side flow blood and *water* (John's non-medical, pre-scientific eyewitness account). The point is that Jesus is really dead. His thoracic cage makes no response to this violent overture by the Roman soldier.

Why *blood and water*? At one level, of course, John is telling us Jesus really died on the cross. But at a deeper, more theological, level we should find more here. Water, throughout this gospel has been a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was to be poured out at the death of Jesus.

Consider the following:

*Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (John 3:5-6)*

*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.' 'Sir,' the woman said, 'you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?' (John 4:10-11)*

*On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' 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. (John 7:37-39)*

Milne comments,

Thus to John's amazement the Spirit is symbolically released from the crucified body of Jesus, indicating that by his death the kingdom has come which all may enter through faith in him. Thus, even though dead, he imparts the Spirit who is the power of his kingly reign. No clearer witness to his continuing triumph is conceivable. It is no accident that his death has the effect of moving Joseph and Nicodemus to abandon their secret discipleship as they unite boldly to identify with Jesus and share together in his service. (Milne, pp. 287-288)

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<sup>1</sup>This same error is part of Islam. The Koran reads, ... *they did not kill him, neither did they crucify him; it only seemed to be so.* (cited in Bruce, p. 376)

Ponder, as an individual and as a group, the net effect of Jesus' death for our lives. What did his death accomplish for you?

Read the following:

- II Corinthians 5:14-21

- Hebrews 10:19-25

What better conclusion could we have in our groups than a time of praise, worship, thanksgiving and the celebration of the Lord's Supper? If the Passover observance of the Jews from the time of Moses looked forward to the time of Christ, our Passover, *Communion*, looks back to the finished work of Jesus on the Cross. Celebrate!

*Sermon Notes...*



**Study Twenty-four**  
**My Lord and My God!**  
**John 20:1-31**



We saw in our last study John's concern to dispel any possibility that the docetic heresy, which taught that Jesus didn't really die on the cross, was true. In John's gospel we have a dead corpse on Golgotha. The body is placed in a tomb and the followers of Jesus begin to cope with the fact that the man they thought to be Messiah was gone. John's concern to present the reality of Jesus' death is matched with an equal concern to show that this man really rose from the dead. John will not settle for a resurrection *in the hearts and minds of the disciples*. John's faith is based on an empty tomb and an encounter with the risen Lord!

Thomas, who missed the disciples' meeting with Jesus (20:24), will not believe their report. The doubting disciple insists on seeing and touching the risen Lord.

As we read John 20 we are struck with the authenticity of the account. John makes no effort to invent a risen Lord. Details are included which make no sense if this were the case. In John's late version of the Easter story we read about *running*, *speaking*, *weeping*, and *holding*. A woman, Mary of Magdala, is the first to discover the empty tomb. An invented tale would hardly include this detail as women in the time of Jesus were not to be trusted as reliable witnesses in court. John, writing as a very old man, even includes the fun detail that he was able to beat Peter in a foot race back then! This first-century example of male testosterone doesn't even make a theological point. The Apostle simply wants to set the record straight, *I beat that fisherman fair and square...I even had to wait for him at the tomb...*

Joseph Cambell says the power of a mythical story is to show us *clues to the potentialities of human life* (*The Power of Myth*, 1988, p. 5). John's record certainly shows us of the *potentialities* of life, but here our hope is based on the historical resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Make no mistake: if He rose at all  
it was as His body;  
if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules  
    reknit, the amino acids rekindle,  
The Church will fall.

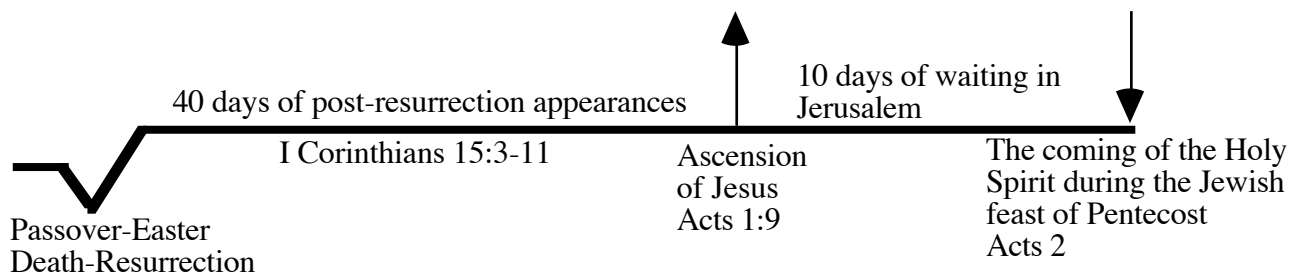
Let us not mock God with metaphor,  
analogy, sidestepping, transcendence;  
making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the  
faded credulity of earlier ages:  
let us walk through the door.

The stone is rolled back, not papier-mâché,  
not a stone in a story,  
but the vast rock of materiality that in the slow  
grinding of time will eclipse for each of us  
the wide light of day.

John Updike, Seven Stanzas at Easter<sup>1</sup>

The Apostle John would heartily agree with Updike's poem. John was a witness and he is earnest that the reader understand; Jesus really rose from the dead.

John 20-21 chronicle the resurrection of Jesus and several of his appearances to his followers during the forty days before his ascension to the Father (Acts 1:1-11).<sup>2</sup>



Unlike the Synoptics, John's account is relatively calm. We have no earthquake (Matthew 28:2), no guards shaking and *becoming like dead men* (Matthew 28:4) or luminous angels (Luke 24:4). Instead, John concentrates on Jesus' assurance to his followers. John's gospel pictures the risen Lord dealing with both individuals and with the disciples as a group.

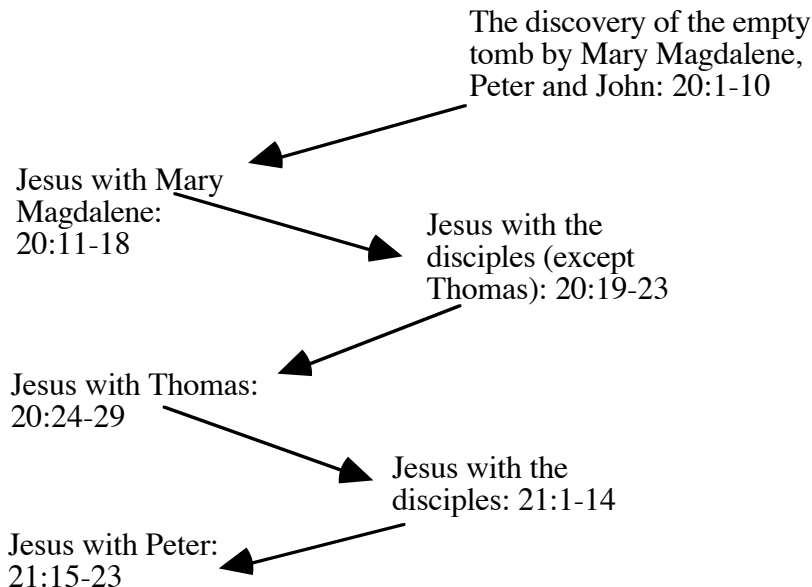
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<sup>1</sup>In less poetic fashion James Denney writes, *The existence of the Church, the existence of the New Testament: these incomparable phenomena are left without adequate or convincing explanation if the resurrection of Jesus be denied.* (Jesus and the Gospel, 1909, p. 112)

<sup>2</sup>The Synoptic Gospels record both Galilaean (Matthew) and Judaeian (Luke) appearances of Jesus after the resurrection. John records both, possibly to reconcile any confusion in the minds of the readers of the first three Gospels.

Read 20:1-31 with the following outline in mind. Notice how the story alternates between groups and individuals. Jot down a few thoughts as you read. What marks do you find in the story which show John's concern to present Jesus as truly risen?

With whom do you identify? Mary? Peter? John? Thomas? Why?



John gives a somewhat unique description of what was found in the *almost* empty tomb (verses 6-7). What Peter and John saw was sufficiently impressive to compel John to *belief* (verse 8). There is no evidence of grave robbers or some sort of chicanery pulled off by Joseph or Nicodemus. Milne writes,

The verb for *folded up* can be translated 'twirled'. What John appears to have seen was the clothes which had been wrapped around Jesus' body lying as if still enfolding it, with the spices adhering to them, and the head turban a little distance away. They appear undisturbed, as though Jesus' body had simply passed through them, 'in much the same way that he later appeared in a locked room'. (Milne, p. 290, quoting Carson, p. 637)

What do you make of Jesus' comment to Mary in verse 17? What is his concern?

Notice both the fear and celebration in verses 19 and 20. The NIV says they were "overjoyed." The ESV says they were "glad." In other words, the resurrection resulted in a celebration by the followers of Jesus! How do you celebrate the risen Lord? Do you think of the resurrection as a historical reality or as a religious sentiment? What difference does this make with regard to the *joy* you express over it?

In 20:21-22 we have John's version of the Great Commission, *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you*. Forty times the fourth gospel refers to the Father *sending* Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Now the disciples are to complete what Jesus began (cf. 14:12; 15:27). Commentators point out that we, his disciples, share *the same* mission as Jesus. *As the Father has sent me*, is in the perfect tense, signifying a past action which continues in the present. *I am sending you* is in the present tense. The followers of Jesus are to carry on his original mission.<sup>2</sup>

With this in mind, think through the mission of the church, the mission of SBCC. What should we emphasize?

Do you feel *sent*? Do you act *sent*? As believers, how can we best continue Jesus' original mission?

Immediately following this commission, we read a few words which have perplexed readers of John, *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit"* (verse 22). What does Jesus mean? Is this John's version of Pentecost Sunday recorded in Acts? Calvin wrestled with this question.

But if Christ then gave his Spirit to the apostles by breathing, it might seem superfluous to send the Spirit afterwards. My reply is that the Spirit was given to

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<sup>1</sup>cf. 3:17; 4:34; 5:23; 6:44; 7:18; 8:29; 10:42; 12:44ff..

<sup>2</sup>Westcott writes, *The apostles were commissioned to carry on Christ's work, and not to begin a new one*. (Westcott, p. 294)

the apostles on this occasion in such a way that they were only sprinkled with his grace and not saturated with full power. When the Spirit appeared on them in tongues of fire (Acts 2:3), they were completely renewed. (Calvin, p. 454)

Bruce makes the fascinating<sup>1</sup> observation that the verb used here (*emphyasô*) was used in the Septuagint <sup>2</sup> in Genesis 2:7 when God made Adam out of dust and breathed life into him. It was also used in Ezekiel 37:9 where Yahweh breathes new life into dead corpses. In both cases God is the life-giver. Here again, Jesus is seen as fulfilling the yearnings of Old Testament Judaism. He *breathes* and gives life (cf. Bruce, p. 392).

Following this statement we have yet another which has caused difficulty in interpretation. Jesus says in verse 23, *If you forgive anyone his sin, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.* It sounds as though the apostles have the power to decide who gets into the kingdom of God and who doesn't. Tenney explains.

The commission to forgive sins is phrased in an unusual construction. Literally, it is: "Those whose sins you forgive have already been forgiven; those whose sins you do not forgive have not been forgiven." The first verbs in the two clauses are aorists (past), which imply the actions of an instant; the second verbs are perfect, which imply an abiding state that began before the action of the first verbs. God does not forgive men's sins because we decide to do so nor withhold forgiveness because we will not grant it. We announce it; we do not create it. This is the essence of salvation. And all who proclaim the gospel are in effect forgiving or not forgiving sins, depending on whether the hearer accepts or rejects the Lord Jesus as the Sin-Bearer. (Tenney, p. 193)

John is the only writer to include the story of Thomas' doubt (Matthew tells us there were others who doubted). Why did the Apostle want this story to be heard? (Look carefully, he gives us a hint in the story itself.)

What do you think of Thomas (compare 11:16 and 14:5)?<sup>3</sup> What kind of a fellow is he? Does he doubt Christ or the witness to Christ? Thomas sets up a specific criteria for his faith, *Unless I see and touch...* Was this a good idea? Do you think Thomas fulfilled his own demand? Did he actually touch the nail imprint in Jesus' hand? Should we ever set up similar criteria for our faith?

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<sup>1</sup>Be careful here, such insights have been known to cause insomnia.

<sup>2</sup>The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament produced three centuries before Christ.

<sup>3</sup>Brown notes that the syntax of Thomas' denial is particularly strong and could be translated, "I'll never believe it unless..." (Brown, II, p. 1025)

The church is a community of believers. How can this community of faith make room for doubters? How can SBCC become a place where the *I'm-not-so-sure* are welcome? Have you ever been through a time of doubt? Are you in such a time right now? What helped (or helps)? How should we respond to our own doubt?

Thomas' response to Jesus' appearance among the disciples is the climax of John's gospel. *My Lord and my God!* No one has yet addressed Jesus with such direct boldness.<sup>1</sup>

In the moment that he came to see that Jesus was indeed risen from the dead Thomas came to see something of what that implied. Mere men do not rise from the dead in this fashion. The One who was now so obviously alive, though He had died, could be addressed in the language of adoring worship. (Morris, p. 854)

With this statement we come full circle in John's gospel. In 1:1 John affirms the *Word was God*. Now Thomas has made this discovery at a personal level. This is John's goal for every reader of his book (20:30-31).

John 20:30-31 contain John's purpose in writing. It is a fitting summary of all that has preceded. Carson writes of verse 31 that *to expound in detail each word and phrase would be to expound the book*. (Carson, p. 661) John wants to compel belief in his readers' lives (see Introduction, p. 1).

What has been the effect of this study in your life? Were you a believer when you began reading John? Are you a believer now? Has your look at this gospel spurred on growth and more intense discipleship? Can you say with Thomas, *My Lord and my God!*? Share your position with your homegroup and pray for one another that you will grow more deeply in love with the Lord your God!

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<sup>1</sup>Many scholars, conservative and liberal alike, think John originally ended at 20:31 and that chapter 21 was added later (perhaps by John himself). If so, Thomas' declaration is the last statement made in the Gospel. A fitting conclusion.

## Study Twenty-five

### Breakfast on the Beach

#### John 21:1-25

Read these wonderful verses which serve as an epilogue to all that has come before. Notice the care Jesus shows to the seven disciples who are fishing in Galilee. What does your first reading of the text bring to mind?



The reader of John's gospel senses a conclusion at 20:30-31. Many students and scholars of this gospel have concluded, therefore, that the original text did end here and that chapter 21 was added soon thereafter.<sup>1</sup> It seems as if John, writing late, wanted to clear up a possible mishearing of Jesus' words to Peter (21:22). By the time of the writing of the fourth gospel, Peter had died in Rome<sup>2</sup> and John was probably the last of the original disciples still living. The church had been living with the expectation of the imminent return of Jesus. John's inevitable death would necessitate reevaluation of the duration of the church's wait!<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps of all the fishing trips ever taken this has been the most scrutinized. Why are the disciples all the way back on the Lake of Galilee (Sea of Tiberias)? Probably all seven of those mentioned (verse 1) are from Galilee. Have they gone home? Is this an indication that they lack faith? Or are they fishing because they need something to eat? What do you think?

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<sup>1</sup>The earliest manuscripts of John support the unity of chapter 21 with the rest of the book.

<sup>2</sup>We know from Clement of Rome that Peter was martyred in Rome (though he does not indicate how Peter died). Tertullian, tells us that Peter was crucified. Eusebius and the apocryphal *Acts of Peter* give us the tradition that, at his own request, Peter was crucified upside down. (cf. Bruce, p. 406)

<sup>3</sup>Even by the time of Augustine (late fourth century) there were those who held that John, though in his tomb in Ephesus, was still alive!

## ***BREAKFAST ON THE BEACH***

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When the disciples meet Jesus on the beach they are in awe of their Lord. This is their third visit with Jesus after the resurrection (verse 14). Peter wants to approach Jesus, but only after donning the proper attire. The other disciples don't recognize Jesus.

[But] they dare not ask, *Who are you?*, for the answer could only be: *I AM*. So they eat what the Lord gives them and the sharing in the meal is the unveiling of the presence. (Newbigin, p. 277)

How would you describe Peter's emotional and spiritual state at this time? He has traveled with Jesus, learned from Jesus, affirmed his loyalty to Jesus and, finally, denied Jesus. What is Peter feeling? Evaluate his spiritual self-esteem? Consider especially verses 7-8.

Can you relate to Peter? Have you ever felt similarly?

Many attempts have been made to find significance in the number of fish caught and of the fact that the net was not torn in the catch (Modern readers, of course, might want to express dismay that the disciples didn't practice our era's *catch and release* technique).<sup>1</sup>

Notice the dialogue between Jesus and Peter (from the NIV):

Verse	Jesus	Peter	Jesus
21:15	<i>Do you truly love me more than these? (agapaô)</i>	<i>Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. (phileô)</i>	<i>Feed my lambs.</i>
21:16	<i>Do you truly love me? (agapaô)</i>	<i>Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. (phileô)</i>	<i>Take care of my sheep.</i>
21:17	<i>Do you love me? (phileô)</i>	<i>Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you. (phileô)</i>	<i>Feed my sheep.</i>

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<sup>1</sup>Jerome, for example, claimed that the Greeks reckoned there were 153 different kinds of fish in the world. Therefore, this number is a prophecy that people from every nation will come to Christ. (For more fantastic interpretations see the commentaries, especially Morris, pp. 866ff.) Morris rejects these saying, *It is much simpler to see a fisherman's record of a fact.*



Notice on the chart that Jesus uses two different Greek verbs for love. This has caused some to see two different questions in the interchange. The case is made that *agapaô* refers to a deeper, more sacrificial love than *phileô*,<sup>1</sup> which describes the love between friends. If this is the case then Jesus' three questions are increasingly devastating. *Peter*, Jesus asks in the third question, *do you even like me?* The NIV, J. B. Phillips and the Living Bible all attempt to bring out this difference. While this makes for great teaching/preaching material we should probably minimize the distinction in the questions. John likes to use synonyms. In this dialogue we find two words for *love*, two for tending the flock (feed, take care of), two for the flock (lambs and sheep) and two verbs for knowing. If the three questions are synonymous then Peter's hurt in verse 17 is due to the threefold repetition of the question. Peter, finally, was drawn back to his failure the night before the crucifixion of Jesus.

Jesus' first question to Peter is confusing (verse 15). What is Jesus' question? There are three possibilities:

1. Peter, do you love me more than these other fishermen love me?
2. Peter, do you love me more than you love these friends of yours?
3. Peter, do you love me more than you love these things (i.e., this boat, the net and all these fish)?

Based on Peter's history the first question was probably intended. Peter had boasted of his unbreakable fidelity to Jesus (13:37) only to become the disciple who denied Jesus publicly. Jesus reinstates Peter, allowing him three opportunities to express his love for his Lord.

It is obvious that Jesus forgives Peter of his transgressions in Jerusalem. The questions to Peter are in the present tense. This communicates to Peter that the present is what is important. He wants Peter to feel forgiven. Why?

Do you feel forgiven? Do you feel like God sees you through the present or through the past?

What would you say to another Christian who cannot get beyond something in his or her past?

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<sup>1</sup>For a wonderful study on the four Greek words for love see C. S. Lewis, The Four Loves.

We should be careful to meditate upon Jesus' threefold reply to Peter during this reinstatement. Jesus welcomes Peter back into the apostolic fold even as he commissions him to care for the church.

Milne writes,

Following Jesus and loving Jesus mean accepting responsibility for Jesus' people, a truth which is in need of rehabilitation at the present time. Commitment to Christ involves commitment to the church of Christ. Jesus Christ is not a 'single' person in the sense that he comes to us without attachment. He is a 'married' person; he comes to us with a bride, whom he loves and for whom he sacrificed himself (Ephesians 5:25). To be in relationship to Christ while ignoring or even despising his bride is no more acceptable than such behaviour would be in human contexts when relating to a married friend; far less so, because the relationship with Jesus has infinitely greater dimensions. Genuine New Testament conversion means not only turning to and accepting Christ. It also means turning to and accepting his bride, the church. Jesus' love for his church remains undiminished even though the church be torn, ill-clad, dirty in places, and generally malnourished and diseased. The church is still his bride, the people for whom he died, and who are therefore the burden of his concern. So he speaks his word today to those who will hear it: *Feed my lambs, Take care of my sheep, Feed my sheep.* (Milne, p. 318)

Does the pattern of your Christian life reflect an interest in the bride of Christ? Is at least a part of your life devoted to *feeding* and *caring* for Jesus' lambs? What changes (if any) should you make in this area?

Think back on the past twenty-five studies we have spent in John's gospel. How has your Christian life changed since we began in chapter one? How has your appreciation for Jesus grown? In what ways has your love for Jesus deepened?

May God continue to bless you in your study of the gospel of John!

## Sources /Abbreviations

<b>Barclay</b>	William Barclay, <u>The Gospel of John</u> (Westminster, 1956), 2 vols.
<b>Barrett</b>	C.K. Barrett, <u>The Gospel According to John</u> (Westminster, 1978).
<b>Brown</b>	Raymond Brown, <u>The Gospel According to John</u> (Doubleday, 1966), 2 vols.
<b>Bruce</b>	F. F. Bruce, <u>The Gospel to John</u> (Eerdmans, 1983).
<b>Calvin</b>	John Calvin, <u>John</u> (Crossway, 1994).
<b>Carson</b>	D. A. Carson, <u>The Gospel According to John</u> (Inter-Varsity Press, 1986).
<b>Hendrickson</b>	William Hendrickson, <u>A Commentary on the Gospel of John</u> (Banner of Truth, 1959).
<b>Michaels</b>	J. R. Michaels, <u>John</u> (Hendrickson, 1989).
<b>Milne</b>	Milne Bruce Milne, <u>The Message of John</u> (Inter-Varsity Press, 1993).
<b>Morgan</b>	G. Cambell Morgan, <u>The Gospel According to John</u> (Revell).
<b>Morris</b>	Leon Morris, <u>The Gospel According to John</u> (Eerdmans, 1971).
<b>Newbigin</b>	Lesslie Newbigin, <u>The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel</u> (Hansel Press, 1982).
<b>Tasker</b>	R. V. G. Tasker, <u>The Gospel According to St. John</u> (Eerdmans, 1960).
<b>Tenney</b>	Merrill Tenney, <u>John: The Gospel of Belief</u> (Eerdmans, 1948).
<b>Tenney</b>	Merrill Tenney, <u>The Gospel of John</u> <i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> , vol. 9 (Zondervan, 1981).
<b>Wescott</b>	B. F. Westcott, <u>The Gospel According to St. John</u> (Eerdmans, 1981).

All Scripture passages have been taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.