

# Notes on the Gospel of John

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*A few of the Scripture quotations are the author's own translation, which is intended to be a word for word translation in order to reflect the original sentence structure.*

# Notes on the Gospel of John

## Human Author

This Gospel, which was written in Greek with an Aramaic “accent,” is anonymous. There is a strong tradition within the early church that it was written by John, and that is confirmed by the use of the expression, “the disciple that Jesus loves.”

Here is the last paragraph of the Gospel:

21:20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”)

vs 21 When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”

vs 22 Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.”

vs 23 Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”

vs 24 This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

vs 25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

Comparing verse 20 with verse 24 makes it clear that the author is “the beloved disciple.” The expression is also used in 13:23; 19:26; 20:2, and 21:7. This is an odd expression. If it is about someone besides the author, then it implies that that person is the one Jesus loves, and He does not love anybody else; but if it is by the author, then it speaks of a strong personal awareness of His love in that person's life. It is easier to explain the expression if the author is using it about himself.

In 13:23-25 and 19:26-27 we see that Jesus has an especially close relationship with “the disciple whom Jesus loves,” and also with Peter (13:23-24; 20:2-9; and 21:7). From Mark 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; and 14:33 we see that Peter, James, and John were in that inner circle. From John 21:20 we know “the disciple whom Jesus loves” was not Peter. From Acts 12:2 we know it was not James, because he is martyred too soon to be the author. So it looks like it is John.

That makes sense, because if the disciple that Jesus loves is not John, then John, who is so important in the other three Gospels, is totally missing from this one! It also would explain why John the Baptist is only called “John,” without the explanation, in this Gospel, but in the other three Gospels he is called “John the Baptist,” even though otherwise the author is very careful about identifying people.

These thoughts about the identity of the author, and about the expression “the disciple that Jesus loves,” point to an important spiritual truth. Whoever this was, and we think it was John, did not think of his own name as that important an issue. He was a lot more impressed with the fact that Jesus loves him. May we all be so impressed with His love.

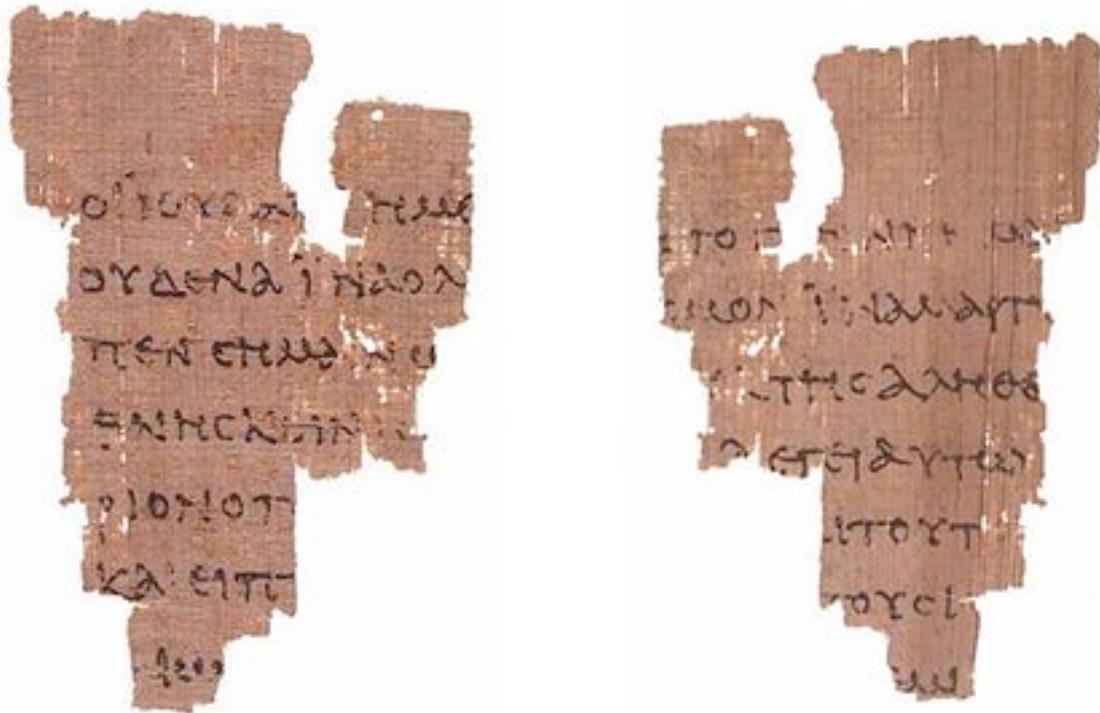
Some object to the idea that the Apostle John was the author, because the style of this gospel is very different from the style of the Book of Revelation. This is a weak objection, because the subject matter of the two books is very different. Let John use one style when he writes about the life of Jesus in Israel, and let him use a different style when he records Jesus' words to him many years later on the island of Patmos! Furthermore, some of the contents of Revelation, especially chapters 2 and 3, were dictated word for word to John by the Lord Jesus. In those passages any personal writing style of John could not be evident at all.

Even though we are convinced John was an eyewitness to almost all the events he recorded, he may have used some information from other eye-witnesses. For instance, there is no indication that John was in Pilate's residence when Pilate tried the Lord Jesus, so perhaps he learned what was said in there from one of Pilate's attendants. Some scholars have attempted to separate and identify John's sources, but Carson (pp. 35-45) explains that any effort to sort out those sources is futile. If John adopted any materials from others, any stylistic distinction of that material was shifted over into John's own style.

### **Year of Writing**

It is simply not possible to determine the date that this Gospel was written. Many suggest 95 AD, but they do not offer any compelling evidence for that assertion. For instance, one piece of evidence about the year of writing is that 5:2 says, "There is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades." The present tense is used. After the army of General Titus of Rome destroyed the temple and much of Jerusalem in 70 AD no Jew could use the present tense like that, *unless* that pool was spared the destruction. However, we do not know whether or not that area of the city was destroyed at that time. *If* it was destroyed (and again that is an assumption), then saying "there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool..." would be like saying "I'm going to the World Trade Center in New York" after 9/11. So from that verb tense some guess that the Gospel might have been written before 70 AD, but again that is based upon the assumption that when the temple was destroyed, so was the Sheep Gate and the pool near it.

There is a scrap of an ancient manuscript of the Gospel of John that was found in Egypt, preserved because of the dry climate there. It is called Papyrus 52, and it contains parts of several verses of chapter 18. Because of its style of writing, some scholars date it at roughly 125 AD. How many years did it take from the time John originally wrote the Gospel, to the time that manuscript was copied out in about 125 AD? If the Gospel of John was written before 70 AD, there would have been more than enough time for copies to be made, and copies of copies to be made, and for one of them to make its way to Egypt. However, we simply do not know how many decades it took for that to happen. The Apostle John seems to have been a young man (he outran Peter to the tomb, for instance). Perhaps he was born in the year that we now call 10 AD. He would have been about 20 years old by the time of the event recorded in this Gospel. By the year 100 AD he would have been 90 years old. If the Apostle John wrote this Gospel, and this author believes he did, then it is safe to say he wrote it in the first century. More accurate guesses as to the time of writing are very speculative.



It is important to realize that the Gospel of John was written by an eyewitness. It is not a fabrication. It was not written by a church committee 100 years after the events of the Gospel, to meet some needs they happen to have at that time.

### **The Purpose of the Gospel of John**

**John 20:30** Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

**20:31** 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.

The Gospel of John has a strong evangelistic purpose, as is affirmed by the first half of 20:31, quoted above. (This is in contrast with the John's First Epistle, which was written for believers – note 1 John 5:13, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”)

It is possible that the second half of 20:31, “and that by believing you may have life in His name,” refers to the abundant life of John 10:10, “I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly.” If so, then the second half of 20:31 is about how we can have an abundant Christian life. It is about discipleship. That would fit well with the emphasis of chapters 13-17, where the Lord is not longer evangelizing, but He is preparing His disciples for the life He wants them to have once He is gone and the Spirit comes. Note the discussion in this commentary under John 20:31. (Perhaps John 10:10 itself likewise speaks of evangelism in the first half of the verse, and discipleship in the second half of the verse so that both 10:10 and 20:31 mirror the two-fold purpose and two-fold outline of the book.)

The Gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is strongly emphasized throughout the first twelve chapters of the Gospel of John. There it is repeated over and over again with words and through events. Faith in Jesus, the One sent by God the Father, is the only way a person can be made right with God.

Then right after the Lord finishes washing the disciples' feet in chapter 13, there is a transition from evangelism to discipleship. There in the Upper Room the Lord is no longer talking with them about gaining salvation; He is talking with them about being His followers.

To think about who the Gospel was first meant to evangelize and disciple, we need to think about what those early readers understood. The casual reader will notice that common Hebrew and Aramaic terms like "Rabbi" (1:38), "Messiah" (1:41), "Cephas" (1:42), and "Passover" (6:4), all easily understood by Jews, are explained so that non-Jewish readers are not completely bewildered. This suggests that whether or not the Gentiles were the readers that John primarily intended, he was thinking that they need to be able to understand. However, a more careful reading of passages like the Lord's teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum (6:25-59), His invitation to thirsty people during the Feast of Tabernacles (7:37-38), and John's omission of the trial before Caiaphas (18:24-28) suggests that John especially wrote for Jews, because Gentiles would miss some of the richness of those teachings. Note also that in 19:13 it is a Greek word, "λίθόστρωτος/lithostrōtos" (meaning "stone pavement") which is explained by the Aramaic word "Gabbatha" rather than, as above, Aramaic words that are explained with Greek words.

It seems best to conclude that John wrote to evangelize and disciple Jews and non-Jews, and it is simply not clear whether he intended one or the other of those audiences as his primary audience.

The Gospel of John is a very well-balanced work. It has a strong evangelistic section, which flows easily into a strong discipleship section. It can be read and understood by Jews and non-Jews.

### **Jesus' Purpose for Coming to Earth in the Gospel of John**

If that is the purpose of the Gospel of John, we should look and see Jesus' purpose in coming to earth, as presented in the Gospel of John. Jesus refers to the Father as the One who sent Him, or to Himself as the One sent by the Father *over forty times*. (In Matthew the term is only used in connection with Jesus twice, Mark once, and Luke 4 times, and in *none* of those verses does it actually say the Father sent Him!) In the Gospel of John He is very aware of the fact that He has been sent to earth to do a particular task, and He exults in that task, He revels in that task, and completing it on the Cross is His glory.

8:29 And He who **sent** Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to Him.

12:49 For I have not spoken on My own authority; the Father who **sent** Me has himself given Me commandment what to say and what to speak.

20:21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has **sent** me, even so I send you."

So, the Lord Jesus came to earth because the Father sent Him.

We see in many verses that Jesus' purpose was to reveal God the Father:

1:18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known.

14:9 ...Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father

17:6 I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of the world. They were yours; You gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your word.

17:26 I have made You known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

18:37 ...You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

All the verses listed above point to the same consistent purpose, which was to manifest God. He is the Logos, the Expression of God.

The Gospel speaks of another purpose for Jesus' coming, and that is to die as our Savior.

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!"

It may be that the at the beginning and end of Jesus' prayer in ch 17 He is saying that both these purposes are united. In other words, the Cross is the perfect declaration of the Father's heart and character.

3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

17:1 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. (He will be crucified soon.) Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you."

17:26 I have made you known to them (in teachings and in signs), and will continue to make you known (by going to the Cross) in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

### **The Historical Accuracy of John's Gospel**

Although many scholars would admit that this Gospel has great theological insight, they might also say that is not necessarily historically accurate. They would suggest that great theological insight can be present despite the presence of errors in historical fact. Morris (pg. 43) rejects this approach. He asks, "What is the theological value of something that never happened?" In a parable we say "the truth of God is like something in this parable," but the Gospels are saying "The truth of God is shown in this event...." People that accept the Bible as the Word of God believe that the Gospel of John has great theological insight, presented through a historically accurate description of events in the life of the Lord Jesus. The conversations and events in the Gospel of John teach important theological truths – but there would be no worthwhile theological lesson if those conversations and events, although presented as historical, never really happened. In myth we may be able to learn good life lessons even if the events never really happened. Whether or not there ever was a man named Achilles, and whether or not he sulked in his wounded pride just as the Iliad presents it, we can learn something helpful about the dangers of pride from that story. Those lessons have the same weight whether or not the story is proven to be myth rather than accurate history. The same cannot be said for the eyewitness testimony of the Gospel of John. If it turns out the Lord Jesus never really had that conversation with Nicodemus, or if indeed He never really rose

alive out of that tomb, then the lessons taught there about eternal life would be invalidated. Again, paraphrasing Morris, "What possible theological lesson can be drawn from stories that pretend to be true, but are actually lies, pretense, or distortions?"

### **The Other Three Gospels**

In reading and studying the Gospel of John, it will be helpful to understand what the Gospel of John is not. It is not a "Synoptic Gospel." The other three Gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels, probably because their view (*optic*) is so *synchronized*. It is interesting to compare John with the Synoptics. The **style** of John is very different from the style of the Synoptics. John takes a lot of space to develop a few conversations deeply; the Synoptics tell about many more conversations, but each are much more brief. John has a much more relaxed style. The **geography** of John is very different from the geography of the Synoptics. The Synoptics emphasize Jesus' ministry in Galilee (Luke also writes about Jesus' time in Perea), and only go to Jerusalem for the last week. But John likes to talk about what happened in Jerusalem during the days Jesus visited there because of the Feasts. Their **vocabulary** is different. John's vocabulary is very simple, with words like light, life, world, darkness, truth, glory, believe, and hour.

There are many events that are not mentioned by John:

Jesus' birth, the first thirty years, John the Baptist's birth and death, the baptism and temptation of Jesus, the transfiguration, the Lord's Supper, the prayer in Gethsemane, the trial before Caiaphas, the ascension, deliverance from evil spirits, children (only one child is mentioned in the whole Gospel of John), lepers, scribes, tax collectors, Sadducees, the list of the twelve apostles, the Sermon on the Mount, calls to repentance, hell, and the parables of the Kingdom.

On the other hand, 90% of what John mentions is not in the Synoptics!

The Synoptics and John sometimes complement each other. Here are some examples:

1. Only John explains how it was that Peter could get into the courtyard of the High Priest. Mark only says that he went in, but without John's explanation (that another disciple was known to the High Priest, and that disciple let Peter in) the reader would wonder how Peter could possibly get past the gate with its gatekeeper and into the High Priest's courtyard.
2. Mark 4:18-22 seems to indicate that those disciples were ready to follow Him at a brief invitation from Jesus, but John 1:35-51 shows that they had already heard Him.
3. In John 21:1 the disciples are in Galilee, but without Matthew 28:10 the reader would not understand that they were commanded to go there. Note also Matthew 26:32; 28:7; Mark 14:28; and 16:7.

It may be that the Synoptics give the public and formal teachings of the Messiah, but John gives teachings more meant for the inner circle, teachings which were more spontaneous rather than formal. Certainly there are many mysteries concerning the fact that there are three Gospels that are so similar, and one that is so different.

### Misunderstandings in the Gospel of John

John likes to record conversations in which Jesus says something, the person He is talking to misunderstands Him, and then He (or perhaps the author, John) clarifies further. These misunderstandings are about important themes in the Gospel of John. Eight of them are about Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. With the help of the clarifications that the reader gets from the author or from Jesus, these misunderstandings can draw the reader to side with Jesus in the conflicts He is involved in. One author's list of the misunderstandings follows. It should be noted that in a few of these passages the three steps mentioned above are incomplete, but overall the pattern is still striking.

2:19-21	this temple
3:3-5	born anew
4:10-15	living water
4:31-34	food
6:32-35	bread from heaven
6:51-53	My flesh
7:33-36	I go... you cannot come
8:21-22	I go away
8:31-35	make you free
8:51-53	death
8:56-58	to see My day
11:11-15	sleep
11:23-25	your brother will rise again
13:36-38	I am going
14:4-6	Where I am going
14:7-9	you... have seen Him
16:16-19	a little while

### Irony in the Gospel of John

Irony is there when 1) words are said that are far from the truth, 2) the speaker himself is unaware of how wrong he is, and 3) the truth and the statement make a humorous, striking, or tragic contrast. For instance, if a person who is about to have a firecracker thrown at him makes a comment about how relaxing it is to rest right here, it is ironic. Here is a list of some of the ironic passages in John:

1:46	Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?
2:10	...brings out the choice wine first... but you have saved the best till now.
4:12	Are you greater than our father Jacob....
6:42	Is this not Jesus... whose father and mother we know?
6:52	How can this man give us his flesh to eat?
7:20	Who is trying to kill You?
7:26	Have the authorities really concluded that He is the Christ?
7:35	Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find Him? Will He go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?
7:42	Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem...?
7:48	Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in Him?

- 8:22 Will He kill Himself?  
 8:53 Are You greater than our father Abraham?  
 9:40 What? Are we blind too?  
 10:33 ...because You being a man make Yourself out to be God  
 11:50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die  
 for the people than that the whole nation perish.  
 12:19 Look how the whole world has gone after Him!  
 12:32-34 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to Myself  
 18:38 What is truth?  
 19:14 Here is your king!

Some of these passages are actually humorous, but all of them help draw us in to side with Christ. We can almost see Jesus smile a quiet smile after hearing the woman at the well say, "Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" in 4:12. When Pilate says, "What is truth?" we almost want to shout at him and say, "The Truth is standing right in front of you!" Similarly, the Jews' reasons for rejecting Jesus were inaccurate (as in 7:41-42 "Still others asked, 'How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?'"") People that have read Matthew or Luke, or are familiar with Christian tradition, would know that He actually was born in Bethlehem, and that the Jews' rejection is groundless.

### **Ambiguity in the Gospel of John**

In John more than in other New Testament writings, there are phrases that seem to be intentionally ambiguous. They seem to have two valid interpretations, and perhaps both are intended.

- 1:5 ...but the darkness did not understand/overcome it...  
 3:7 ...you must be born again/from above.  
 12:24 ...unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

### **Explanations in the Gospel of John**

Another distinct characteristic of the Gospel of John is the many helpful explanations that John provides. Here is a partial list of those explanations:

- 1:38 "Rabbi" (which means Teacher)  
 1:41 "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ)  
 1:42 "You will be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter)  
 2:6 six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons  
 2:21 But the temple He had spoken of was His body  
 4:2 although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but His disciples  
 4:9 For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.  
 5:4 waiting for the moving of the water, because an angel would go down into the pool from time to time and stir up the water. Then the first one who got in after the water was stirred up recovered from whatever ailment he had  
 19:13 the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha)

### **Characters in the Gospel of John**

There are no physical descriptions of people in the Gospel of John. Sarah was pretty, Leah had weak eyes, David was ruddy, Zacchaeus was short, and the rich young ruler was rich and young, but issues of personal appearance are not mentioned in John. (In 8:57 we read that the Jews said of Jesus that He was not yet 50 years of age, and in 21:18 it is implied that Peter is no longer very young and not yet very old, but these are very general descriptions.) This lack of physical descriptions encourages the reader to identify with particular people in the Gospel of John because we do not read that one is short – “Oh, I am not like that person...” or real dark skinned – “Oh, my skin is lighter than that...” We read about conversations that Jesus had with people and we are more able to say to ourselves, “He could have had that conversation with me. I am as sinful (or proud, or eager...) as that person!”

It has been suggested (Culpepper, p. 115) that the various historical people being written about, the various characters, *represent* whole kinds of people. For instance, the (formerly) lame man represents people that cannot be brought to faith even when they experience a miracle, and the (formerly) blind man represents people that come to faith as a result of a miracle, and then endure persecution. The beloved disciple, Mary, and the woman at the well represent ideal disciples, but Thomas represents doubting or pessimistic disciples. Pilate represents people that would like to compromise on the issue of faith in Christ – but of course find compromise impossible. It is important to realize that these characters in the Gospel of John were *real* people, too. For instance, Nicodemus may represent high status men that slowly decide to side with Jesus, but also he certainly was in fact a high status man that slowly decided to side with Jesus.

Almost every character in the Gospel interacts with Jesus, and John does not hide from us the quality of their response. We are indirectly urged to respond well to Jesus, to be like the beloved disciple, the woman at the well, John the Baptist, Mary the sister of Martha, or the man born blind. And in various ways we are shown how foolish it is to reject Jesus or try to compromise with Him. For example, Pilate tried to compromise but instead found himself unjustly siding with the Jews he hated.

### **Conversations in the Gospel of John**

One of the most wonderful things about the Gospel of John is that the conversations Jesus has with various people are so fully recorded. We can learn so much about His heart as we read those conversations. In His conversation with Nicodemus and the woman at the well, we see that He is always focused on the other person's need, and He brings that person along as far as that person allows. This is even true in the case of His conversation with Pilate. Jesus moves as far into the Gospel as Pilate allows, before Pilate turns in scorn and says, “What is truth?” In each of these three conversations (with Nicodemus, the woman, and Pilate) He uses something with which that person is familiar (physical birth, physical water, or kingdoms) to launch into an explanation of how that person can have eternal life. In some cases He does not seem to finish the presentation, but He always wants to move that way. He was not “put off” by Nicodemus's ethnic and religious pride, by the woman's rudeness or her immorality, or Pilate's arrogance. And one of the interesting things in the Gospel is to see how each person will respond to Jesus. We see Nicodemus responding first in confusion, but later in boldness before the Sanhedrin (7:50-51), and finally in faith going to the tomb (19:39). We see the woman at the well starting with surprise and cynicism, but then successfully

proclaiming the Gospel to her villagers. We see Pilate arrogantly refusing to hear Jesus talk about His Kingdom, or about truth.

### **The Presence of the Future in the Gospel of John**

In John 5:25 we read "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live." This is a good example of something called "The Presence of the Future," or "Realized Eschatology," or "Inaugurated Eschatology." The idea is that the long-awaited Messianic Kingdom is, *in one sense*, already upon us, and in another sense, must wait for the Second Coming. Other examples would include:

John 4:23, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."

John 11:23 "Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'"

The Parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13 seem to be a synoptic version of the same truth.

### **Conflict in the Gospel of John**

The conflict in John is always directly connected with unbelief. That conflict grows from only implied in 1:19 (because some were sent to investigate John the Baptist), to pointed but purely local in the cleansing of the temple and the following official response (2:12-22), to brief notes of opposition (4:1, 3, and 44), to sharp rejection in a context of ingratitude (5:1-18), to open murmuring, quarreling, and desertion in chapter 6 (with the first reference to the betrayal by a disciple in 6:64). In chapter 6 He seems to say things that are meant to repel the Jews (especially 6:53-58). By chapter 7 the opposition is open and attacking Him, but unable as yet to kill Him. We read of how foolish their ignorance and misunderstandings are. In chapter 8 the Jews are hotly debating with Him, and at the end of the chapter they try to kill Him, but He escapes. In chapter 9 the conflict is between a wonderful new believer and the Pharisees, and in chapter 10 the conflict is still there, but it is a little bit muted because so much of the chapter is Jesus' teachings. Chapter 11 is the healing of Lazarus and the resulting decision that both Jesus and Lazarus must be killed. Chapter 12 summarizes the conflict. And by chapter 13 Jesus has left His public ministry in order to prepare His disciples for His death.

### **Supposed Contradictions between the Four Gospels**

There are several texts in which critics claim the Gospels contradict one another. In C.K. Barrett's commentary he seems to take each difference between John and the Synoptics as another contradiction. Some of those supposed contradictions will be discussed in the commentary that follows. It is enough here to note that the reader that thinks through what is written out, and is willing to see how the texts can be read without contradiction, will see that there are no real contradictions in the Word of God. These so-called contradictions are just different aspects of the same or similar events, and the various authors have emphasized those different aspects because they have different themes they want to develop.

People that oppose the truth of the Word of God will attempt to point out contradictions between the various accounts of Jesus' life in the four Gospels. Variations like these give those critics opportunity to show what they think of God's Word.

**Outline**

There are many outlines of the Gospel of John, but here is D.A. Carson's:

**I. Prologue 1:1-18****II. Jesus' Self-Disclosure in Word and Deed 1:19-10:42**

A Prelude to Jesus' Public Ministry 1:19-51

B Early Ministry: signs, works, and words 2:1-4:54

C Rising Opposition: more signs, works, and words 5:1-7:52

An Aside: the woman caught in adultery 7:53-8:11

D. Radical confrontation: climactic signs, works and words 8:12-10:42

**III. Transition: Life and Death, King and Suffering Servant 11:1-12:50**

A. The death and resurrection of Lazarus 11:1-44

B. The judicial decision to kill Jesus 11:45-54

C. Triumph and impending death 11:55-12:36

D. Theology of unbelief 12:37-50

**IV. Jesus' Self-Disclosure in His Cross and Exaltation 13:1-20:31**

A. The last supper 13:1-30

B. The farewell discourse: part one 13:31-14:31

C. The farewell discourse: part two 15:1-16:33

D. The prayer of Jesus 17:1-26

E. The trial and passion of Jesus 18:1-19:42

F. The resurrection of Jesus 20:1-31

**V. Epilogue 21:1-25**

A. Jesus appears to his disciples by the sea 21:1-14

B. Jesus and Peter and John 21:15-24

C. The greatness of Jesus 21:25

## Synthesis of the Gospel of John

There are three sections, each of which develops a particular contrast. So there are *three contrasts*, each of which relates easily to the others

After the introduction (1:1-18) the *first contrast* is developed through chapter 7. The point of the comparison is that **Jesus far excels the religion and traditions of the Jews**. A list of events and conversations which John brings up in order to illustrate and emphasize that comparison is given in the commentary under 1:17, which is the initial statement of this first contrast. Once the reader is aware of a few of these contrasts the others are easier to see, because they fit into an increasingly obvious pattern.

This offer of something, actually Someone, which far excels the religion of the Jews (or any religion, for that matter), was laid before the Jews, and is now laid before the reader. An offer like this demands a response; it must be either “Yes, I want what He offers” or “No, I want to stay with the old ways.”

That is exactly what *the second contrast* is. Over and over again from 7:30-31 to 12:18-19 John reports to us how **some believed, and some rejected** the offer. This contrast is also mentioned in the Introduction, in 1:11-13. It is summarized by John in 12:37-43 and by Jesus in 12:44-48. Note 7:11-13, 30-31, 40-52; 9:16; 10:19-21; and 11:45-46.

Remember the first purpose of the Gospel of John – evangelism. Like most of the people we meet in the Gospel of John, the reader has made or is making his decision, and is siding with the rejectors or with the acceptors. John wants to address those of us that have believed, and accepted the offer. From chapter 13 to the end he does that especially by developing *a third contrast* between **Peter and Judas**. Both fail, as we will fail. We are urged to follow the example of Peter in our failure, who turns again to Jesus for more grace.

In summary there is an offer, in which Jesus is shown to be far more wonderful than anything a religion might hold for us, there is a response from the people, and then a comparison between Judas’ and Peter’s failures.

## Comments on The Gospel of John

### I Prologue 1:1-18

The Prologue has a five verse introduction, made up of 61 simple Greek words, touching all kinds of truths about God. They are put so simply that at first they seem commonplace, but when we think about them we see they are very profound. These brief hints of profound themes can make the reader curious to learn more. In fact, all of verses 1-18 introduce ideas that will be developed later in the Gospel.

1:1 begins with **In the beginning**. Genesis begins with these same words. This is probably not a coincidence.

The term **Word** is *λόγος/logos*. That word has many meanings. It is used 330 times in the New Testament. Outside of John 1 and Revelation 19:13 it basically means “word,” “matter,” “reason,” “account,” or “responsibility.” In this text it refers to a Person.

In Greek philosophy the word **Logos** was used with many meanings. As early as 600 BC an author and philosopher named Heraclitus used the term **logos** to refer to the divine wisdom or reason that ordered the universe. Philo, the Jewish philosopher, used the term to refer to ideals, that which existed behind the seen world. In all that **logos** was something that was certainly distinct from mankind, but here in the Gospel of John the **logos** becomes flesh. That would have been shocking or intriguing to a Greek philosopher.

The word **Logos** often appears in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint or LXX). “The Logos of the LORD came to Isaiah...” (Isaiah 38:4). It came to mean the expression of God, and sometimes by figure of speech was used to refer to God Himself. Now in the Gospel of John the **Logos** reveals God perfectly, in fact the **Logos** is God.

The glory and humility of that plan is incomparable. Even the following story is merely a dim reflection: Trinity College in Cambridge has a long held tradition of sending their students to the slums of South London to do community service. They serve in the parish of Camberwell. At night they sleep in the Parish Hall, and by day they do necessary repairs and cleaning in the homes of the poorer people in the area. Over forty years ago, one such student was helping do some repairs of a bed-ridden elderly woman. As the student worked, she asked, “Has anyone every told you that you look a lot like Prince Charles.” Since no one had actually ever said such a thing to him, he replied, “No.” “Well,” she said, “I am surprised. You are the spitting image of him, you are. Even to my poor eyes you look just like him.” It was indeed Prince Charles. (source: PCC church newsletter...)

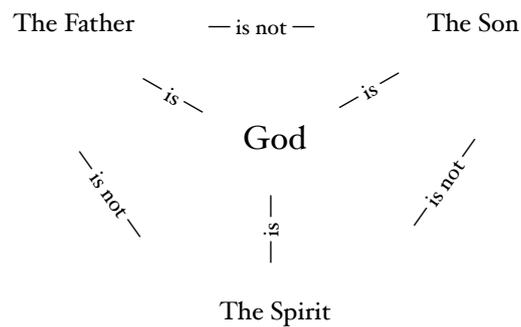
When the Jews of that era would read the Old Testament in Hebrew, an Aramaic translation, called a Targum, would also be read. In the Targums, the Name of God is often replaced by the Aramaic word “*Memra*,” which means Word.

The idea of the fellowship and unity between God and the **Logos** that is spoken of here will be developed as one of the most important themes of the Gospel of John.

It seems strange that the term **Logos** is used three times in 1:1, once in 1:14, and then never again, with that meaning, in the Gospel of John. (Even though it is used 36 more

times in John, it is not used again with that special meaning.) But throughout the Gospel Jesus is shown to be the Expression of God, He is doing what God does, and speaking the words He has from God. This is a major emphasis in this Gospel, and the “seed thought” is right there in 1:1.

The following illustration does not “solve” the mystery of the Trinity and it is probably not very useful when speaking to unbelievers, but it does clarify the situation that the biblical texts put the believing reader:



In other words, we know from various passages that the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Spirit, and yet we also know that the Father is God and the Son is God. This situation is slightly complicated by the fact that often in the New Testament God the Father is referred to simply as “God,” but with that understood, perhaps the above illustration is helpful.

**1:3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.**

The statement is made, and then it is restated in the negative. It is emphatic. This is another connection to Genesis, where we read “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

**1:4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men.**

There is no real **life** outside of Him. Like all the themes brought up in 11-18, this theme can be traced through the whole Gospel.

Psalm 36:9 says, “For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light.”

Colossians 3:4 says, “When Christ – who is our life – is revealed, then you also with Him will be revealed in glory.”

**1:5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.**

The word translated **understood** more often means “win,” “seize,” or “catch.” It means **understood** in Acts 4:13; 10:34; 25:28; and Ephesians 3:18. It is possible that here it means *both understood* and “overcome.”

There is **light**, and there is **darkness**, and the **darkness** cannot win. Here we see the “seed thought” of all the conflict in the Gospel of John.

**1:6 There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John.**

The author is very careful with names. See for example 13:26 (“Judas Iscariot, son of Simon”) and 14:22 (“Judas – not Judas Iscariot”). But here he does not help us by saying “This is not the Apostle John, but John the Baptist.” He does not do that because he will not mention his own name.

**1:7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.**

Both the themes of testimony and of faith are important themes that come up in several ways in the Gospel of John.

**1:8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.**

There are various kinds of witnesses in the Gospel of John:

1. God the Father: 5:31, 34, 37; and 8:18
2. God the Son: 8:14, 18; 3:11, 32; and 8:37
3. God the Holy Spirit: 15:26; and 16:14
4. The Works of the Lord Jesus: 5:36; 10:25; 14:11; and 15:24
5. The Old Testament: 5:39 and 45
6. John the Baptist: 1:7, 8, 15, 19, 32, 34, 3:26; and 5:33
7. Others: the Disciples 15:27, the Samaritan woman 4:39, the crowd 12:17

This is a hint of the way John the Baptist (as he is called in the other Gospels) so consistently puts the Lord ahead of himself. He clearly is not interested in building his own kingdom. He is only interested in the Lord, and His Kingdom. He rejects a significant temptation to which many Christian leaders fall. They would build their own “kingdom,” rather than the Kingdom of God.

**1:9 The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.**

The rabbis said that the Torah was the Light of the World. John disagrees.

There are three possible meanings here.

- 1) General Revelation to every person, as in Psalm 19:1-6 and Romans 1:20.
- 2) Special Revelation to all kinds of people, so that people from every tribe and tongue will come to faith in Him.
- 3) Since Jesus has come into the world, He shines His **light** (He offers the truth) to all kinds of people, and each human being must respond to that **light**, whether by accepting Him or rejecting Him. This explanation is most in line with the theology of John, so it is the best understanding of this verse.

There are several different meanings of the word "world" (κόσμος/*kosmos*)

- 1) adornment or decoration (1 Peter 3:3)
- 2) nature, the physical world (John 1:10; 16:21, 33; and 21:25)
- 3) the earth (John 11:9; 16:21, 33; and 21:25)
- 4) the crowd (John 12:19)
- 5) mankind in general (John 7:4; 12:19; 14:22; and 18:20)
- 6) all of mankind in opposition to God (John 7:7; 15:18; and 16:20)

That last meaning seems to be particularly Christian. It is not known in writings earlier than John and Paul. The third or the fifth meaning of this word must be intended in this verse.

**1:10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him.**

The word translated **recognize** here is γινώσκω/*ginōskō*, the usual word for "to know." Compare Amos 3:2 "You only have I chosen (literally 'known') of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins" and Jeremiah 31:24 "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."

This verse and the next verse contain strong irony. Those that should have accepted Him instead rejected Him.

**1:11 He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him.**

Not only did He come to His creation only to be rejected, He came to **His own**, apparently **His own** people, the nation of Israel, and they too rejected Him.

This is a "seed thought," but the climax of this rejection by Israel in John is found in 12:37-41.

**1:12 Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God —**

Let us not make something that is very simple into something that is complex. The biblical idea of "believe" is very simple. Do you consider something to be true? If you can really say "Yes" then you believe it. If you say "No" or "I'm not sure" then you do not believe it. Amazingly, that kind of faith, in Jesus, is all God requires of us, for Him to save us. There is no biblical support for a "mere intellectual faith" versus a "saving faith," even if such a distinction would make us feel better or solve theological problems for us!

The form used here is literally "believed into His name," ΠΙΣΤΕΥΩ Εἰς/*pisteuō eis*. Some would say that this form means "believe in that person" but that without the preposition Εἰς/*eis* the verb just means "believe that the words of that person are true." However, that distinction cannot be supported by the text. Compare for example this verse with 5:24 which reads simply "believes Him who sent Me" (without Εἰς/*eis*). Believing Jesus and believing in Jesus both bring salvation.

This contrast between not receiving Him and receiving Him is another "seed thought" which is well-developed in chapters 7-12.

**1:13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.**

The literal translation of this would be, "those not out of bloods, and not out of will of flesh, and not out of will of man, but out of God begotten." When a person is born again, it is not a human decision of any sort. It is purely and simply God's decision. This is another "seed thought" which will be developed with expressions like "I chose you...."

**1:14 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.**

Although the incarnation is mentioned indirectly in verses 5, 9, 10, and 11, this is a very clear statement. This event did not take place in a secret place, to be witnessed only by a select few insiders; it was a public event.

His **glory**, in John, is made visible in signs (2:11; 11:4, dan 40), but His **glory** is especially manifested in His death, resurrection, and ascension (7:39; 12:16, 23; and 13:31-32).

He is the ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ/*monogenēs*, "the One and Only," which is correctly translated in the NIV. It means He is the only one of His kind. Although some translations use "Only Begotten," that is an incorrect translation. In order to have that meaning it would have to be related to the verb "to beget," ΓΕΝΝΑΩ/*gennaō*, with the double letter νν/*nn*. That verb is used in 3:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, but not here. This word, ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ/*monogenēs*, is indeed used of an only child or only son or only daughter in Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38; and Hebrews 11:17, but it does not have the idea of "begotten" or "fathered" in it.

The expression **made His dwelling** literally means that "He tented," or "dwelt in His tent." This possibly related to the tent that we refer to as the Tabernacle in the Law of Moses. In fact the physical body of the Lord Jesus is a new Tabernacle, and the glory of God is there!

We should read Exodus 33 and compare it with this. Moses asked to see God's glory, and was allowed to see God's goodness. But those that saw Jesus Christ actually saw God.

**1:15 John testifies concerning Him. He cries out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.'"**

In Jewish culture, the one who came first was the more important, as Abraham was more important than Isaac. But **John** the Baptist and John the Apostle reject this idea, and say

that the Lord Jesus is more important than John the Baptist. The Lord actually **was before** John, because He has existed from eternity past, as He will exist throughout all eternity.

**1:16 From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another.**

This is literally “grace in place of grace,” and seems to speak of an abundance of **grace**.

**1:17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**

This is a key verse in the Gospel of John. This contrast between **the Law** or **Moses** versus **Jesus** is well developed in chapters 2-7. The following events all contain a striking contrast between the old religion and **Jesus Christ**:

1:17	the Law versus grace and truth
1:33	a baptism with water versus a baptism with the Spirit
2:1-10	water in the old religion of stone became abundant good wine
2:14-21	the old temple versus the new temple
3:1-15	physical birth versus spiritual birth
4:1-26	Jacob's well water versus Jesus' living water
5:1-15	healing by an angel in water versus healing by a word from Jesus
6:22-59	bread of earth versus heavenly Bread
7:53-8:12	the Law as the light of the world versus Jesus as the light of the world

It is important to realize that **the Law** has been totally replaced, and is not a valid system of law in our lives now. The covenant God made with Israel through **Moses** was cancelled, with all its regulations. It would be an invalid legal process for someone to go **the Law** of **Moses**, find a regulation or law there, and say that this or that person is guilty because he or she has violated that regulation or law, just as it would be an invalid legal process for someone today to go the laws of the Roman Empire, find a regulation or law there, and say that this or that person is guilty because he or she has violated that regulation or law. No one is innocent or guilty today because they obey or violate the Laws of the Roman Empire. No judge today would make a ruling like that based on the Laws or the Roman Empire, and we must not make a “ruling” like that based upon the **Law** of **Moses**. We must find a legal system that is valid here and now.

According to Romans (see for instance Romans 3:19-21) **the Law** functioned to bring Israel to see that they were incapable of obeying God, and so they needed a Savior. This is indeed how the Lord **Jesus** used **the Law** in such passages as Mark 10:17-22 and Luke 10:25-37. In those conversations He is not trying to help people live better, He is trying to help them see that they have failed to keep **the Law** of **Moses**, and that they need a Savior. We should focus our attention on His **grace**, as indeed the Gospel of John helps us to do.

**1:18 No one has ever seen God, but the One and Only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known.**

This verse gives fuller meaning to the idea that “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” One might ask here whether the term **God** here refers to **God** the Father, as it

often does, or the complete Trinity. However, either understanding fits well with what this verse is saying.

The idea that **no one** can see **God** is clear in the Old Testament. See for instance Exodus 33:20-23. See the comments in 1:14 about **the One and Only**. Here that “seed thought” begins to be developed. The **Son** reveals **the Father**.

The ancient Greek manuscripts that scholars rely upon to make their translations for us do not all agree on the exact wording of this verse. Some say “one and only God” while others say “the one and only Son.” In five of the oldest manuscripts, the reading with “God” is found. In two of the oldest manuscripts, the reading with “Son” is found. (Here “old” means fifth century and older.) The reading with “Son” is found in the vast majority of the manuscripts, most of which are of course written well after the fifth century. The reading with “God” is found in only six Greek manuscripts, but the reading with “Son” is found in over 90 Greek manuscripts! Its presence in those two very old manuscript shows that this textual problem arose prior to the writing of those old manuscripts.

This idea that Jesus Christ **has made God known** is clear in the rest of the New Testament. See also Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:1-2.

That is the close of the introduction. The rest of the Gospel of John explains what has already been stated here in this introduction. In other words, the “seed thoughts” of the introduction will be developed in the remainder of the Gospel of John.

## **II Jesus' Self-Disclosure in Word and Deed 1:19–10:42**

### **A Prelude to Jesus' Public Ministry 1:19-51**

1:24-34 There were Jews at that time that would baptize non-Jews, and Jews that would baptize themselves, but baptizing other Jews was strange.

1:27 Untying the sandal of a rabbi was the one task that a disciple of a rabbi was never to lower himself to do. Other than that, he was like a slave to his rabbi, except that the relationship was voluntary and temporary.

#### **1:29 Lamb of God**

This expression is used only here and in 1:36. It is a different Greek expression in Revelation. See Exodus 12 and Isaiah 53:7, 10.

1:32 John does not report Jesus' baptism, but this verse alludes to it. See Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; and Luke 3:22.

1:33 refers to Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; and 61:1.

### ***A Meditation about John and John***

When I think of my self, and my name, I think of my nameplate on my desk at the office, and I think of Ramses II, the famous 19th century BC Pharaoh, the one Moses knew. He really liked his own name, so much so that he carved it deep into previous kings' monuments (he carved it into their names, taking credit for their monuments!),

and deep into his own, so deeply that no later pharaoh would be able to put his own name there!

John the Apostle is different. He uses the name John about 30 times, but never about himself. We saw how he refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

There is another person in the Gospel of John that must have resonated with John, that is, John the Baptist. Look at 1:19-23. The arrival of this delegation gave John the chance to do what he like to do best.

He was a sort of a Fundamentalist, you know: there may be a thousand questions, but always only one answer. When he was asked about his identity, he talks about Jesus. When he was asked about why he baptizes, he talks about Jesus. If you asked him about the weather, he would talk about Jesus! When you read this passage just think how frustrated they must have been, because they were sent to find out about him, not about Jesus, but John the Baptist only wanted to talk about Jesus.

(Perhaps this should also be qualified with the fact that sometimes the Lord wants us to be forthright about our worldly identity, as Paul was in Acts 16:37. But that passage was not about his heart identity, he was just using his Roman citizenship to help him prosper the Gospel.)

### **Calling the Disciples 1:35-42**

Some would say that this passage and the calling of the disciples in the other three Gospels are contradictory. In those Gospels Jesus takes the initiative, but here in John the disciples take the initiative. In those Gospels it happens on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, but John 1:28 gives the location as "at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing." Some people will be looking for a contradiction on this issue, but the resolution of this problem is simple. None of the Gospels say that they are recording the *only* time Jesus called the disciples. Apparently they needed to be called at least twice. We will see that the cases of so-called contradiction can be solved in this way. The reality of the scenes that the Gospels describe is of course more complicated than any one Gospel describes, but that does not mean that the Gospels' descriptions are inaccurate. They are not complete, but they are accurate in what they describe. Is this not so whenever two or more people tell about any event they witnessed?

When in John 1:39 Jesus says, "**Come, and you will see**" He is speaking as a rabbi would, in response to a young man that would like to become that rabbi's disciple.

**1:42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).**

### **B Early Ministry: signs, works, and words 2:1-4:54**

2:13-22 The Cleansing of the Temple

Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; and Luke 19:45-46 seem to speak of another time when Jesus also cleansed the temple. The event that the Synoptics speak of seems like a

different, later event, because the reaction of the leadership is much more harsh, as is clear in Mark 11:18.

2:13 Three Passovers are mentioned in John, and 5:1 may refer to a fourth.

Solomon completed the first temple in 963 BC, and it was destroyed in 586 BC.

Zerubabel had the second temple built from 537-517 BC.

Herod the Great began the renovation of the second temple in 20 BC.

That renovation work was completed in 64 AD.

General Titus had that temple destroyed in 70 AD.

They were in the Court of the Gentiles. Their business activity there made it an unsuitable place for non-Jews to worship. By setting up all that commercial activity they robbed the non-Jews of their place of worship, a place of worship that was specifically designated for them by the Law. The Lord's love for the nations of the earth is manifested here.

### ***A devotional from John 1-2***

#### **Nathanael, the Wedding in Cana, and the Cleansing of the Temple**

*sign & glory lead to faith, which leads to life.*

That is the crucial progression here, and it is visible in the conversation with Nathanael, in the wedding in Cana, in the Cleansing of the Temple, in the many that believed in Jesus in Jerusalem at the end of John 2, and also in Nicodemus's life, but it gets 'bent' as events progress. What if people want the signs just to have bread? What about believing when there is no sign, as in John 20:29.

- 1) Nathanael experienced a very private sign, there was then faith, and life, and the only opposition was in honest skepticism.
- 2) At the wedding there is a semiprivate sign, there was faith, and life, and the only opposition was His mother's concern for the wedding.
- 3) In the Cleansing of the Temple, there is a pointer or "hyperlink" to the greatest sign, to faith, and to life.

2:13-22 You can just picture the chaos of the cleansed temple, and then these religious leaders arrive in their fine clothes, very calm, and they ask for a sign to show what authority He has. Jesus looks at them, and knows these are the men who will kill Him, so He says (in different words), "Go ahead, kill Me, and I will rise from the dead. Then you will have the greatest sign." But He uses the metaphor of "destroy this temple" to mean His body, and they completely miss the point. However, John does not let the readers miss the point. In verse 22 we read that the disciples did not understand until after the resurrection, then they believed. That means that the "sign" of this passage is the resurrection, and in that Jesus glory was revealed, and they believed. So again, we have sign, glory, faith, and life.

How does the Gospel of John develop? Reading a few passages we can have a better grasp at least a little part of what John, rather the Holy Spirit, has done in the Gospel of John:

In John 20:31 he tells us his intent fairly directly:

**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 20:31

In 1:14 he gives us his claim as to why we should put ourselves into his hands, why we should trust him to give us a faithful account. He says:

**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 1:14

In 2:11 we read a summary of the wedding at Cana event, according to John's perspective:

**This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus *revealed His glory*, and his disciples put their *faith* in Him.**

-John 2:11

So, we have

1. We need to believe and believing we need to grasp more of this Life He has for us.
2. John says, "I've seen His glory!"
3. When they saw His glory in Cana, they believed!

So it is implied for us to read, and believe, grasp more of His life!

The difference here is that we readers may not actually see the sign, we only receive the witness concerning the signs. Thus we are invited to join in the blessedness of those the Lord spoke about in John 20:29.

What I want to suggest is that in the first two miraculous accounts John "teases us," he plays with us to drive us closer to this Jesus whose glory he has seen, this Jesus that he has believed in, this Jesus that he wants us to believe in.

He teases us in this way: he will not let us in on a secret. That bothers us all, if a friend has a secret and we do not know it. What is this secret about?

1:45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.

47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, He said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."

48 "How do You know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree before Philip called you."

(Notice, no miracles here, no healings, no mountains are cast into the sea....)

49 Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."

50 Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. You shall see greater things than that."

51 He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Do you see that there is a secret here? So who is in on the secret? God, Jesus, and Nathanael, but not us! What was it that happened under that fig tree? Why did this good Jew declare that Jesus was the Long Awaited King of the Jews, just because of a simple apparently offhand comment about seeing him under the fig tree? **We do not know, but somehow the glory of God was revealed in a little private way there for Nathanael, and he believed**, just like we readers are supposed to believe.

We as readers are feeling left out! We want to know!

Patience, John teases us. Would you like to be in on a secret? Keep reading, I have a secret for you, too, but not that one....

That revelation of glory is not for you, but we must read chapter 2 verses 1-11, because unlike how he left us out and made us jealous at the end of ch 1, here we get to be "in on things," just like a little bird that flew in and gets to listen in, and we end up knowing more than the master of ceremony or the bridegroom!

1 On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there,

2 and Jesus and His disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

3 When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to Him, "They have no more wine."

4 "Dear woman, why do you involve Me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

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

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

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

8 Then He told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so,

9 and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside

10 and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

11 This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in Him.

This event, this revelation of His glory, is "semiprivate": the disciples, the servants, and the readers are in on the revelation of His glory.

So we have seen the pattern *sign, glory, faith, life* repeat itself in 1:43-51; 2:1-11, 12-22. But then in 2:23-25 there is a problem.

2:23 Now while He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs He was doing and believed in His name.

24 But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all men.

25 He did not need man's testimony about man, for He knew what was in a man.

Of course the issue of their spiritual status should be considered. Were they saved? They believed, and so they were saved. The exact expression used here, **believed in His name**, is also used in 1:12, where it is clearly a salvation expression. The Gospel of John

knows nothing of a faith in Jesus which does not bring salvation. As will be discussed later, there are believers who are not followers, they are not friends of Jesus, and they are not disciples. But John is clear that those that have **believed in His name** have eternal life.

It is true we read that “Jesus did not entrust Himself to them.” They were definitely not model believers. However, we should remember that Jesus does not withhold salvation from believers until they become trustworthy. To require trustworthiness as a condition for salvation would be to add something to faith. In fact, we all probably know a few people that are born-again believers to whom we would not entrust ourselves!

There are the *signs*, there is the *faith*, but Jesus would not entrust himself to them. There is some kind of a problem here, it would be good if we could understand. Ideally if we could meet one of those that were in Jerusalem and hear directly from them, then we might understand better what the problem is.

In fact 3:1-15 is an interview with a man in Jerusalem, and maybe in that conversation we can learn more about what the problem is. Somehow the pattern has been broken.

All faith in Jesus is saving faith, but there are verses in John that show that He is more pleased with some kinds of faith than others. Compare 2:24-25; 4:43-44, 48; 6:26; 10:38; 14:11; 20:27, and 29.

Sometimes the Lord wants to reveal His glory to someone in utter privacy (like with Nathanael), other times He wants to make a big public revelation of His glory. This is not something He wants us to complain about. Just follow Him. What that might mean for you, the rest of us cannot know. Even if we were all from the same street in the same town, and all the same age, still His path for each of us is special and specific. This does **not** mean that truth is relative, and that what is true for you might not be true for me. Jesus Christ is the same forever. But the challenges and temptations and trials and joys, and revelations of His glory that He has for you are not the same as what He has for me. The Bible is the absolute truth of God, but when He says, “you, follow Me,” He is inviting you down a very special and **personal** experience with Him. As He reveals His glory to you, perhaps through the Word, perhaps in personal experience with Him, but always the way He wants to, believe in Him! Grow in faith! Grasp more of the LIFE that He has for you! May the Lord bless you in that walk with the unchanging Eternal One.

Some other comments about the Wedding at Cana (2:1-11):

- Wine was an important part of a Jewish wedding, and running out of wine would be a serious failure. The wine that good people would drink would be diluted at least 1:3, and perhaps as weak as 1:10. That is not much alcohol, but it is some. Bad people would drink full strength wine, which was considered “strong drink,” which is an expression we use now for distilled spirits, which was not commonly known until later.
- Mary’s attitude is not clear in these brief words. We do not know if she just happened to mention the lack of wine to her Son, or if she was hoping for a miracle. If she was speaking to Him on the physical level, but He responds on the spiritual level, this would be in accord with a well-developed pattern in John, for instance in 3:3-4; 4:15, 47; 5:6-7; 6:32-33, 41; and 11:22-24 (Carson, pg. 170.) Morris (pg. 179) suggests that she

thought He might be the Messiah, and she was trying to get Him to show His power, like His brothers in 7:2-9.

- In English Jesus' use of the word "woman" in verse 4 seems rude, but it was respectful in Greek, which is the language this conversation was recorded for us. Compare 19:26.
- The term "hour" in John frequently refers to the death of the Lord Jesus. He may have been wanting to encourage her to think about the coming Marriage Supper of the Lamb, where wine will be abundant (Jeremiah 31:12; Hosea 14:7; and Amos 9:13-14).
- Those were *stone* water jars – stone reminds us of the stone tablets of the Law. They were used for ceremonial cleansing. That water in them might be considered holy water, and some that were devoted to the Law and Jewish ritual might easily be offended if anyone went to those particular water jars and did anything with the "holy water." However, Jesus goes right ahead with this miracle, and shows us He is much greater than Jewish custom. Thus this event becomes a beautiful illustration of the fact that the Law (along with the stone water jars) was given through Moses, but grace and truth (along with that good wine) came through Jesus Christ.
- The master of the banquet's words, "but you have saved the best till now," are ironic. Those words are true, but the man that spoke them had no idea how very true they are. He has no idea in what sense they are true. It is not the wine that is "the best," it is one of the guests at the wedding!

**John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.**

**Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish ruling council**, the Sanhedrin. That body consisted of the high priest, the previous high priest, elders of the tribes of Israel, and important members of the high priest's family. It included both Pharisees and Sadducees. Rome allowed them power to process civil and criminal cases. However, they were not allowed to give the death penalty without permission from the Roman government. The only exception was if a non-Jew went into the area of the temple court that was only for Jews.

**John 3:2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."**

He came very humbly and graciously. It *seems* like he is about to ask the question that was often asked of Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

**John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."**

The Lord's response is abrupt. Nicodemus has not even asked a question. The expression here translated **born again** could also be translated "begotten again" or "begotten from above." Comparing 1:13 and 1 John 3:9, this would seem to be the work of the male, "to beget" rather than the work of the female, "to bear."

The Lord is using a metaphor here, in which being born (or more accurately, begotten) a second time describes the reception of eternal life. It is not enough to be a part of the race of Adam, people must become a part of the race of The Second Adam.

John 3:4 **“How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”**

Nicodemus misunderstands two things. 1) Jesus is talking about God begetting, not bearing (the Greek word γεννάω/gennaō can refer to either begetting or bearing), and 2) this is a metaphor is a spiritual reality, not a physical idea. This is one of the misunderstandings in the Gospel of John, discussed in the Introduction.

John 3:5 **Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.**

The expression **born/begotten of water and the Spirit** seems to refer to the physical and the spiritual birth.

John 3:6 **Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.**

Physical birth of the right parents, Jewish parents, was what was required to be a Jew. Many Jews thought that being a Jew almost guaranteed their participation in the coming Messianic Kingdom.

John 3:7 **You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’**

Here the Lord seems to be scolding Nicodemus, who should have known better.

John 3:8 **The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”**

Man cannot predict or observe what **the Spirit** will do or the birth He brings. Compare Ecclesiastes 11:5, which says, “As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.”

John 3:9 **“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.**

**Nicodemus** is very confused, but the Lord knows that He has to hit him pretty hard.

John 3:10 **“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things?**

Here again the Lord seems to be scolding this man, **Israel’s teacher**, for his lack of understanding.

John 3:11 **I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.**

The first **you** is singular, because the Lord was speaking directly to Nicodemus, but the second **you** is plural (translated in the NIV as “you people,” because the Lord was speaking of the Jews, or the Jewish leaders.

John 3:12 **I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?**

Perhaps the need for human beings to be born again is an **earthly** thing.

In this verse each time the word **you** is used, it is plural. Perhaps the Lord was speaking to the Jewish people through their leader.

John 3:13 **No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man.**

John 3:14 **Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,**

Numbers 21:4-9 symbolized and anticipated the Cross. This is the first hint in the Gospel of John about the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross, through which believers can be given the right to become children of God.

John 3:15 **that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.**

The word here, **believe**, is just **believe**. It means the same thing in English as in Greek. We must not load extra meaning into this word, just because our theological system does not allow simple faith alone to bring eternal salvation.

John 3:16 **“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

This wonderful verse can easily overwhelm us. Perhaps it would be helpful to divide it into its grammatical parts, to help us think more about it, and more deeply appreciate its meaning.

There is a reason:

**For God so loved the world**

There is a result:

**that He gave his one and only Son**

There is a condition:

**that whoever believes in him**

There is an outcome that will not happen: **shall not perish**

There is an outcome that will happen: **but have eternal life**

There are no quotation marks in the original Greek or Hebrew. It is possible that these are the words of John, rather than the Lord Jesus. That would explain the use of the past tense in the word **gave**.

The word used for love here, ἀγαπάω/*agapaō*, is rare in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures). In fact it was rarely used prior to its use in the New Testament. It occurs 37 times in the Gospel of John. (The corresponding noun, ἀγάπη/*agapē*, occurs only seven times in John.) The word means “love.” We know from the Scriptures that God has love for us that is unconditional and divine, but we must not say that these ideas are inherent in the word ἀγαπάω/*agapaō*. If that were so, then no unbeliever would ever be able to use that perfectly good Greek word. See the discussion on 10:17 in which this verb is compared with φιλέω/*phileō*.

The idea that **God** would give **His one and only Son** takes Jewish readers back to a passage they refer to as “The Binding.” In Genesis 22 Abraham binds his **one and only** son to an altar, but Abraham, as ready as he is do make the sacrifice, is stopped at the last moment, and a substitute – a ram – is provided.

The idea that there is only one condition, faith, is reinforced many times in the New Testament. See especially Romans 4:4-5, which reads, “One the one hand, to the one who works, pay is not credited as a gift, but as something owed. On the other hand to the one

who does not work, but believes on Him who declares the ungodly to be righteous, his faith is credited into righteousness.”

**John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.**

Although judging was not His purpose in coming **into the world**, as this theme is developed we will see that judgment happens anyway.

**John 3:18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.**

Again, there are only two possible results for a man's soul, and believing makes all the difference.

**John 3:19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.**

Because the **Light** came **into the world**, the reality of what **men** are becomes obvious. So even though judging was not the Son's purpose, it happens anyway.

The Greek word here translated **loved** is ἀγαπάω/*agapaō*. As noted in the discussion under 10:17, this word certainly cannot mean “God's unconditional and divine love” here.

**John 3:20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.**

This is the response of **evil** towards **the light**.

**John 3:21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”**

And this is the response of those that live **by the truth** towards **the light**.

**John 3:22 After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.**

Here we read that **Jesus baptized** people, but note the comments below under 4:2.

**John 3:23 Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.**

The name **Aenon** means "Spring" in Aramaic, and **Salim** is the Aramaic form of the Hebrew *shalom*. The location cannot be determined with certainty.

**John 3:24 (This was before John was put in prison.)**

This is the only mention of **John** the Baptist being **in prison**. The reader that is familiar with Matthew 14:3-10; Mark 6:16-29; and Luke 3:19-20 will know more details about why he was put there and how he died.

**John 3:25 An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing.**

John 3:26 **They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan — the one you testified about — well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.”**

John 3:27 **To this John replied, “A man can receive only what is given him from heaven.**

**John** is not interested in a competition between himself and the One he has been preaching about.

John 3:28 **You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of Him.’**

John 3:29 **The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.**

John 3:30 **He must become greater; I must become less.**

For both John the Baptist and John the Apostle, the Lord must be exalted!

John 3:31-36

Just as the Apostle John added his comments after Jesus spoke with Nicodemus, so here he adds his comments after John the Baptist’s words. 3:36 is climactic, much as 3:16 was climactic.

John 4:1-42 The Samaritan Woman at the Well

At the division of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, the Levites fled to the Southern Kingdom. When Assyria invaded Israel, the Northern Kingdom, in 722 BC, they moved many of the Israelites out to other lands, and they brought in other peoples to Israel, the Northern Kingdom. Those people brought their foreign gods with them, and they intermarried with the Israelites that remained in the land. Because of their intermarriage with pagans, their descendants were not called Israelites, but Samaritans. The worship of those foreign gods eventually died out. Later, their king forbade them to go to Jerusalem to worship at the temple, and in the year 400 BC they built their own temple on Mount Gerazim. In the year 128 BC some Jews from the south came up and destroyed that temple. For various reasons, including the prominence of Jerusalem in the Old Testament books after the Torah, the Samaritans only accepted the Law of Moses as their Scriptures.

Ephrem the Syrian (quoted by Morris, p. 254) summarizes this passage, “Jesus came to the fountain as a hunter.... He threw a grain before one pigeon that He might catch the whole flock.... At the beginning of the conversation He did not make Himself known to her... but first she caught sight of a thirsty man, then a Jew, then a Rabbi, afterwards a prophet, last of all the Messiah. She tried to get the better of the thirsty man, she showed her dislike of the Jew, she heckled the Rabbi, she was swept off her feet by the prophet, and she adored the Christ!”

John 4:1 **The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John,**

John 4:2 **although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but His disciples.**

Back in 3:22 we read that **Jesus baptized**, but here we read that it was actually **His disciples** that did the baptizing. Although some would be glad to call this a contradiction, it is well within the norms of speech to say that a certain person did something, when in fact his servants did it. Note that in Mark 6:16 Herod the tetrarch said he beheaded John, but in Mark 6:27 we see that it was actually Herod's executioner that did it. Note also in John 19:39 we read that Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of spices to the Lord's tomb, but surely some servants helped him with that heavy load. John 4:2 and John 3:22 do not contradict each other.

John 19:39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds

John 4:3 **When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.**

It seems that He was not interested in any more competition among the followers of John and His followers.

John 4:4 **Now He had to go through Samaria.**

The wording here is very interesting. There were other routes that the Lord could have taken. The route **through Samaria** was much shorter, but religious Jews would not go that way lest they defile themselves through contact with the despised Samaritans. Those Jews would go to the east, down into the Jordan River Valley, and then north through that valley to Galilee. But the Lord would have none of that. **He had to go through Samaria!**

John 4:5 **So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.**

John 4:6 **Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.**

Today **Jacob's well** is still **there**, though it is surrounded by the ruins of an old church building. The **well** still has water. There is no account of this well being dug, but that it was **Jacob's well** is not disputed in the text. The word translated **well** here is πηγή/*pēgē*, which refers to a spring. This spring was underground, and access to it was dug by Jacob's servants.

**The sixth hour** was noon, halfway through a twelve hour day.

John 4:7 **When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"**

Normally women would get the water their household would need at the beginning of the day. Perhaps this woman was avoiding the inevitable scorn she would receive at the public well when other women were there.

John 4:8 **(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)**

This is another explanation by John, given lest the readers wonder why the disciples have not provided their rabbi with a drink of water.

**John 4:9 The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)**

This is in complete harmony with other records about Jewish attitudes towards **Samaritans**.

Out of disdain for the Samaritans, the Jewish rabbis would spit to cleanse their mouths if they ever had to say the word “Samaritan.” In their writings we read that if a Jew were traveling along a road, and happened to find some fruit that had obviously fallen from the load of a previous traveller, that fruit was to be considered kosher, and he could eat it – unless that road was frequented by Samaritans! In another place we read about a Jewish rabbi that got lost on his way to Jaffa, and happened to politely ask a Samaritan woman how he could travel on to Jaffa from there. She rebuked his politeness with words something like, “You are a Jew, I am a Samaritan. You should say, ‘Jaffa – where?’”

**John 4:10 Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”**

The Greek expression **living water** and the expression “flowing water” are the same, so at this point the woman probably was thinking He was simply talking about fresh, clean, flowing **water**.

The Lord is using another metaphor here, in which having a drink of the “water” He gives describes the reception of eternal life. Just as physical water refreshes and sustains physical life, so this “water,” the gospel, brings eternal life.

**John 4:11 “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this flowing water?”**

Here she has misunderstood the Lord Jesus.

A different word is used here and in the next verse for **well**. It is φρέαρ/*phrear*, which refers to a **well** that must be cut or dug to the source of water below. As noted above, if the spring (πηγή/*pēgē*) is underground, a well (φρέαρ/*phrear*) must be dug to access the spring water.

**John 4:12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?”**

This is one of the great ironical statements in this Gospel. What she says is true, but she has no idea how magnificently true it is.

**John 4:13 Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,**

The Lord does not yet answer the woman’s question.

John 4:14 **but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**"

John 4:15 **The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."**

The Lord has interested her, so the conversation is moving forward. However, she is treating Him like a traveling salesman of some magic **water**.

John 4:16 **He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."**

He does not seem to mind being treated like a traveling salesman of magic **water**, but He must move the conversation further forward, so He brings up sin.

John 4:17 **"I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband.**

John 4:18 **The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."**

He has miraculous knowledge about her sin, but it seems like He treats her gently.

John 4:19 **"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet.**

This makes her nervous.

John 4:20 **Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."**

Being nervous, she attempts to divert the conversation into a controversial issue that she thinks will certainly shift this rabbi's attention away from her sin. The **mountain** she is referring to is Mount Gerazim. The well is in the valley at 520 meters above sea level, and Mount Gerazim looks over that valley just to the west, with its peak at 880 meters.

Not only did the **Jews claim that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem**, but as noted above in 128 BC they destroyed the Samaritans' place of worship located **on this mountain**.

John 4:21 **Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.**

John 4:22 **You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.**

The NIV translation "you Samaritans" might be read to have a bit of that Jewish disdain of the Samaritans. However, the word "Samaritans" is not in the Greek original of this passage. The NIV translators probably included it so that the readers would know that the word **you** is plural. It might also be translated "you all worship..." The Lord seems to be referring to the Samaritans. When He says, **we worship what we do know**, He seems to be referring to the Jews. In this verse He is "taking sides" in the ancient Jew/Samaritan controversy, but in the next verse He goes well beyond taking sides!

**John 4:23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.**

This is an example of what is sometimes called “The Presence of the Future” in the Gospel of John. The woman had probably seen lots of religious hypocrisy. Somehow, these words touched her heart.

**John 4:24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”**  
This was probably a radical and completely new idea to this woman. Her experience of “worship” was probably mere physical ritual tied to hypocritical moralism.

**John 4:25 The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”**

She, with her reputation, would never have dared to speak such a sentence to anyone that knew her, but clearly the Lord has touched her heart and she is open to hearing the truth.

In this verse John provides the helpful explanation that **Messiah**, a Hebrew term, and **Christ**, a Greek term, are the same. They both mean “Anointed One,” and refer to the long awaited King of Israel. Jewish readers would of course understand this, but some non-Jews would benefit from this explanation.

**John 4:26 Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am He.”**

Saying this, He very gently proclaims that He is the Messiah. Further, because He uses the Ἐγὼ εἰμι/*egō eimi*, He is also proclaiming that He is God, as is clear when we see that same expression used by God of Himself in the LXX of Isaiah 41:4 and other similar passages.

**John 4:27 Just then His disciples returned and were surprised to find Him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are You talking with her?”**

Perhaps the first question would have been directed at the woman, and the second at the Lord, if they had they dared to speak.

**John 4:28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,**

**John 4:29 “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”**

This verse is translated well. In the Greek there is an impression of doubt. She seems to actually have no doubt at all, but in saying it this way she is inviting the villagers to discover for themselves who this visitor was. Had she said, “He is the Christ,” they might have disregarded her opinion. Perhaps she was learning some of the subtlety that the Lord employed with her only minutes earlier!

**John 4:30 They came out of the town and made their way toward Him.**

**John 4:31 Meanwhile his disciples urged Him, “Rabbi, eat something.”**

John 4:32 **But He said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”**

The Lord uses the word **food** as a metaphor.

John 4:33 **Then His disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought Him food?”**

But the disciples do not understand.

John 4:34 **“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work.**

Here the Lord corrects their misunderstanding.

John 4:35 **Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.**

Possibly as they looked out at the fields surrounding them they saw not only the field, but the villagers coming out to them to meet the man that might be the Messiah. Like most people in an agricultural society, they all knew how long it would be until those fields would be harvested. It was **four months** in this case. But of course the Lord is using the idea of **harvest** here as a metaphor for bringing people to faith in Him.

John 4:36 **Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.**

John 4:37 **Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true.**

John 4:38 **I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”**

4:39-42 Many Samaritans Believe

This woman, of such an unlikely background, became an effective mass evangelist!

John 4:39 **Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.”**

Their faith is better, in at least one sense, than the faith of the Jews in Jerusalem, who believed because of the signs they saw. These **Samaritans believed because of the woman’s testimony**. At this point this may seem like a minor point, but as the discussion under 20:29 shows, this is an important theme in this Gospel.

John 4:40 **So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged Him to stay with them, and He stayed two days.**

He would not entrust Himself to those in Jerusalem in 2:22-25, but He was willing to **stay among the Samaritans for two days**.

John 4:41 **And because of His words many more became believers.**

Their faith is **because of His words**, not because of signs. As noted above, this is an important point in this Gospel.

John 4:42 **They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is Savior of the world.”**

This seems to be a rather unkind jab at the woman. Hopefully, she was so delighted in her Savior’s love for her that it did not hurt (Hodges, pages 42-43).

Their confession that He is **Savior of the world** is an amazing confession, especially this early in the Gospel. Prior to the resurrection, He is called **Savior** only here and in Luke 2:11. This spiritual insight from these despised people, who apparently believed only on the basis of the woman’s word and the words of the Lord, should be compared with the attitude of those in Jerusalem in 2:23-25 and the Galileans in 4:43-54 that needed to see miraculous signs and wonders in order to believe.

### ***Comparing Nicodemus and the Woman at the Well***

John 3 & 4

There are so many contrasts here it is overwhelming:

<u>Nicodemus</u>	<u>The Woman</u>
night	day
inside	outside
Jew	Samaritan
man	woman
rich	poor
city	village
high status	low status
respected	not respected
named	unnamed
religious	sinful
polite	scornful or surprised
doubts	believes
fades away	draws the village to Christ

It is amazing that the man that you would think would be so effective (he has education, status, authority) fails so badly when he meets Jesus, but the woman that is such a terrible woman, whose life is so empty, who has nothing, succeeds, and even brings many of her own neighbors to meet Jesus. Why? What does she have? What is her secret? Perhaps she has a secret longing for God, and she makes the right choice: she believes in Jesus.

Those two people are as different as two people can be. Now, we need to look at how Jesus responded to each of them:

<u>to Nicodemus Jesus is:</u>	<u>to the woman Jesus is:</u>
rude	patient
rigid	fluid: teases, exposes, scolds, inspires, reveals
rabbinic	teasing and then pastoral

So the differences are striking, but really the similarities are even more striking:

both Nicodemus and the woman are proud of their traditions  
 both are given metaphors of eternal life  
 both misunderstand the metaphor of eternal life He gives them  
 both metaphors contain old/new contrasts

What can we learn from those metaphors? To the Jew, Nicodemus, who thought that his physical birth and line of descent as a pure Jew was enough that he really should be able to be in the Kingdom of God, to him Jesus gives the metaphor of New Birth.

1:13 "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" is elaborated upon for us in this conversation. As important as physical birth was in bringing physical life (especially to a Jew!), the New Birth is what brings Real Life.

When Nicodemus walked in the room that night, it is unlikely that Jesus thought to Himself, "Ah, Nicodemus, the perfect person to explain the doctrine of the New Birth to!" It is more likely He was thinking, "How can I tell this man, this particular man, about the Life of God that God wants to give him? He seems to be proud of his physical birth, so...."

To the woman who lived not far from Jacob's well, Jesus gives the metaphor of Living Water. As important as physical water was in bringing physical life (especially to a person in that dry land, where springs that provide drinkable water are almost automatically National Parks), the Living Water is more important. That Living Water from Jesus Brings real life.

Physical birth brings life, physical life.  
 Physical water brings life, physical life.

But the New Birth, and Living Water, bring a new kind of life, the life of God!

Likewise when that woman walked to the well that day, it is unlikely that Jesus thought to Himself, "Ah, The Woman at the Well, the perfect person to explain the doctrine of Living Water to, so that later they will be able to name churches, the Living Water Baptist Church!" Most likely He was thinking something more like, "How can I tell this woman, this particular woman, about the Life of God that God wants to give her? I should use something about this well water, which seems to be her special pride...."

In other words, both to the Rabbi and to the Samaritan woman, Jesus explained that the Life of God is available to them.

Perhaps these two people represent the extreme poles of humanity, humanity that Jesus wants to believe in Him, and to have life abundantly. Jesus knows how to talk with both of them. He understands their needs, and adapts Himself, without compromise, so that He can really reach them. Social regulations about how you talk with whom mean nothing to Him. He can speak rudely if that is what the man needs, He can speak gently

if that is what the woman needs, He can speak of sin of the heart (Nicodemus's racial pride) and He can speak of sins of the flesh (her several "husbands"), if that is what the person He is reaching needs. He never compromises, and He never loses track of where He needs to bring someone.

The message is always the same: God's life for you if you will believe, because of the Cross. No compromise there, in the *content*, but Jesus adjusts *how* He will say it, depending on the situation. The same Truth is always communicated, but the way it is communicated, the illustrations, metaphors, His approach, all vary greatly.

This is our Jesus. This is the Jesus that wants to shine in our lives.

Look over these two conversations. This is the Jesus we serve. He never deals in clichés or stock answers, but He is always trying to move people He meets closer to receiving the life of God. To Nicodemus He explained that He has to be lifted up like the snake in the desert, so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life, the life of God.

To two very different people Jesus gives these metaphors, these illustrations, and both illustrations mean exactly the same thing. The life of God is made available to us. Jesus Christ has to be crucified and raised from the dead to make it available to people like us. He has done that, so that life is available. He does not ask that we reform our lives to prove anything to Him. He did not require Nicodemus to develop a better insight into the Old Testament messianic prophecies. He did not postpone His talk with the woman until she recovered from her sexual addictions. He simply asks that we "believe in Him." If we do, the life of God that is talked about in the Gospel of John, "eternal life," is poured into us; it is ours, and we never again need feel a lack of life.

Perhaps every time Jesus talked with anybody about getting saved He looked in their life, their present situation, and found something He could use as a jumping off point, and we have two examples here, Nicodemus's birth as a pure Jew, and the woman's well water. Then He would take that and make a spiritual application: there is another birth that you need, there is another kind of water that you need. We can do the same.

Whenever we meet someone and share the Good News with them, we should look at them and find something they value in their life, and develop it into a new metaphor about the fact that God is offering to put His Life into us. If you see someone looking for transportation (or someone real proud of the transportation that they own), talk to them about a better place to go and a better way to get there. When they misunderstand (of course they will misunderstand!) you use that misunderstanding to draw them closer to the truth and to Jesus. If you see someone enjoying the fresh air, talk to them about living air that brings eternal life, if someone has been reading a book and you get to talk to them, tell them about the Book that brings eternal life. If two people are enjoying (or one person is missing) a friendship, tell them about the friendship that brings eternal life. It is fine to say things that will be misunderstood, Jesus did. It is not a failure if they do not understand right away, Nicodemus did not.

So, in summary, what we have seen when we look at these two conversations is that without using clichés or stock expressions, Jesus, using appropriate metaphors, tells people that through faith, by trusting in Him, God's Life, Eternal Life, is given to them.

In missions we talk about contextualizing our evangelism. You might say that here in these two chapters we see an example of “micro-contextualization.” The Lord contextualizes, not just to a society, but to an individual!

***How the difference between Water and Food is used in John to teach the difference between salvation and works***

“Comparing the Water of Life and the Food that you know not of” in John 4.

If you ask for a drink of water at a restaurant, you do not pay for it, right?

But if you want to eat rice, you pay.

But the price of a glass of water is not going up. It is still free.

It is the same in my country. If you go to a restaurant, they give you a glass of water, with ice, and you do not pay for that. If you want to eat, and they expect you will, then you will have to pay.

Is it the same in other countries? Most likely in Russia if you have a drink of water, you do not pay, but if you want to eat, whether it is potatoes or caviar, you pay.

That was certainly how it was in Sychar, in Samaria. If you wanted to drink water from Jacob's well, you did not have to pay, and you still do not.

But when the disciples went to the market in town to buy lunch, they had to pay for it.

It was also the same with the water of life that was offered to the woman at the well. She did not have to pay for it. It was offered to her for free, and she accepted it. In fact, she could never pay for it. The Lord said to her in 4:14, "whoever drinks the water I **give** him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I **give** him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Just as there was spiritual water there, there was also spiritual food there.

(Or, more accurately, just as regular water was used as a metaphor to teach about eternal salvation that can be received for free, regular food was also used as a metaphor to teach about the work of ministry that satisfies, that makes us more healthy, just like physical food.) In 4:32-34 the Lord said, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about... My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work."

That food is to do the will of God. That food is to do the work of ministry. This was something new to them, just like the water of life was new to the woman.

At that point in time, at that place, there was a “harvest of souls” that had to be worked, because that was the will of God. In fact, at any point in time, in any place, there is a work of ministry that is the will of God for each of us that know the Father through the Son. Because we know Him, we are to be doing the will of the Father, whether that is washing dishes or telling a new or an old friend about how it is that since Jesus died as our substitute, by believing in Him we can have peace with God. That will of God is knowable, by the Word of God, and by good old wisdom.

Here in John 4 after the Lord explained to the Samaritan woman about the water of life which is offered freely, eternal salvation which is graced upon us if we will believe in the Lord Jesus. After that He explained to His disciples about His food, that is, doing the will of the Father. These two things are not mixed up in the Word.

The water is received freely, without our working for it. We are saved, forgiven, we know the living God, we are brought into His own family as His children.

But doing God's will is very different. Maybe that means, as it did in Sychar that day, hard work when you would rather eat lunch, explaining patiently the Gospel, being insulted, getting tired, thinking of quitting... and remembering that: "Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together" (John 4:36). There is a wage, and there is joy.

These two distinct matters must not be confused.

If you have not drunk of the water of life that is offered to you, drink!

To the woman at the well, that sinful woman at the well, the Lord did not speak to her demanding that she do the will of God and leave her immorality, because He was offering the free gift of God to her.

Listen to Revelation 22:17

"Come!" Whoever is *thirsty*, let him come; and *whoever* wishes, let him take the *free* gift of the water of life."

The water of life is offered to us freely. The cost has been fully paid by the Lord on the Cross. Paid in full. Our efforts to improve our lives are *not relevant* to the issue of our receiving that free gift.

But the food the Lord talks about is different. This doing the will of God is another matter.

"Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together" (John 4:36).

God promises to reward efforts to do His will of God. No work of ministry by the will of God is ever in vain. Some will receive authority over five cities, some over ten.... Our status in heaven is affected by our labors here.

In Revelation 22:12 the Lord says "Look! I am coming suddenly, and My wages are with Me to pay out to each according to his deeds!"

1 Corinthians 3:12-14 says, "If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, grass or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward."

He has a special reward for us as we do the will of the One who sent Him.

Do not mix up evangelism and discipleship.

Her eternal forgiveness is safeguarded in God's strong hand, and daily experiential forgiveness is always available for the asking. She just needs to ask for it. No sin is too

big. It just remains for her to ask for forgiveness. Do not let anyone tell you that there are sins that are so big or so often committed, that they cannot be forgiven by asking. What sin is so big that it cannot be forgiven by the blood of the Messiah? What sin is so big that it cannot be dealt with by the blood of the Lord Jesus?

Upon asking for forgiveness, we are restored into that experiential relationship of friendship with God. The barriers are removed. God does not turn His face from anyone who asks for forgiveness and friendship through Jesus Christ.

If we are stubborn, and do not ask for forgiveness, then we cannot enjoy the experience of fellowship with Him – but our eternal forgiveness is safe with Him.

The only unforgivable sin is the sin of never believing in the Lord Jesus. It alone is unforgivable, because by persisting in it we reject the only grounds for forgiveness: the Cross of Jesus. There is no forgiveness outside of Jesus, but in Him, all sin is forgiven. It is forgiven eternally, when we first believe in Jesus, and it is forgiven in our daily lives, as we confess our sins.

Again, what sin could be bigger than the Cross of Jesus?

The woman found her forgiveness and fellowship with God there. Jesus called it the Water of Life, and it is free.

Inviting others to drink that water is part of the will of God. Jesus called that the Food that they knew nothing about. It is work, and there are wages for doing it.

**John 4:43 After the two days he left for Galilee.**

In 2:24 we read of the believers in Jerusalem, "But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men." However, He spent two days with these Samaritan believers.

4:43-54 The Healing of the Official's Son

Because of the similarities, some interpreters say Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:2-10 are about the same event. Then because of the differences they say there is error in reporting the event. However, it is also possible that a similar but distinct healing is recorded in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:2-10.

At first the official is just needing a miraculous healing for his son, but after the healing he becomes a believer.

**John 4:44 (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.)**

**John 4:45 When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there.**

**John 4:46 Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum.**

**John 4:47 When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.**

**John 4:48 “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.”**

The Lord seems to say this with a tone of disappointment. Here again we see the theme of faith based upon sight. Verse 45 suggested this theme, but here it is strongly stated that any faith in Christ is good, but faith based on testimony is better than faith based on **miraculous signs and wonders**. See concerning this theme in the discussion under 20:29.

**John 4:49 The royal official said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”**

**John 4:50 Jesus replied, “You may go. Your son will live.” The man took Jesus at his word and departed.**

Here the man believes Jesus' statement about a healing.

**John 4:51 While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living.**

**John 4:52 When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.”**

**John 4:53 Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and all his household believed.**

Here **the father** and **all his household** believed in **Jesus** and were saved.

**John 4:54 This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.**

### **C Rising Opposition: more signs, works, and words 5:1–7:52**

There is a textual problem in chapter 5. Among the many manuscripts we have of this text, the majority of manuscripts *include* the explanation given in the King James and the footnote of the NIV, about how they would wait for the stirring of the waters when an angel of the Lord would go in (that is, 5:3b and 5:4). One very old manuscript from the fifth century, Alexandrinus, also has it. However, four very old manuscripts do not have

this passage. If it is original, that passage is another example of the helpful explanations that John gives his readers. If it is not original, then 5:7 hardly makes any sense. Why would anyone care if the water is stirred? But with 5:3b and 5:4 that makes perfect sense.

Read 5:1-15. Especially if we accept the longer reading, there is a contrast here between the old religion (getting healed by the angel in the pool, if you can get into the water first, ahead of everyone else) versus life in Jesus (He can just say a brief word, and healing takes place. This is one of the contrasts that are first suggested in 1:17).

**John 5:1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews.**

This might have been Passover, but it is not possible to be certain.

**John 5:2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.**

The word **Gate** here is not in the original, but it is supplied by the translators, because Nehemiah 3:1, 32; 12:39 suggests that there was a **Sheep Gate**.

In 333 AD a pilgrim found two pools separated by a colonnade (a row of columns supporting a roof). Measured together the dimensions of the two pools were 100 m by 50 m by 100 m by 65 m. The pools had steps at each end to make it easier to get in and out of the water. That might have been the place described in this passage, but it is not certain.

5:1-16 tells about the attitude of this lame man that was healed. He threw the Sabbath violation blame on the One that healed him, he showed ingratitude and ignorance about the identity of Jesus, and he actually made trouble for Jesus, with the result that they began to persecute Him.

In John 5 – up to this point – John gives the impression that Jesus has faced only mild opposition, as when He cleansed the temple. But that changes here.

Is not the man being condescending in verse 7? He certainly does not give Jesus a proper answer to His question.

Now verse 11 is the universal statement of mankind, probably easily translated into every human language: “it’s not *my* fault!”

Verse 13 speaks of an ignorance which suggests tremendous ingratitude.

In verse 15 that ingratitude grows into betrayal, and the persecution begins.

No one thing this man does is so bad, but all taken together it suggests a picture of a weak and thankless man. But Jesus heals him anyway! He also seeks him out to talk with him later. This is true grace, giving ministry even when it causes the servant of God pain and trouble.

**5:19 Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.**

That theme will be stated many more times in the Gospel.

The end of that healing in chapter 5 marks the beginning of serious persecution in the Gospel of John. Jesus' response is that He is doing the Father's will. He is almost saying, "I do not care whether you like what I am doing or not. I am doing it because of the Father, not to please you."

**John 5:25 I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.**

See the notes in the Introduction on "The Presence of the Future."

**John 5:28-29 "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."**

These words almost sound like they are teaching a works salvation. But if we remember that He is speaking to people under the Law, trying to be righteous by the Law, that helps us to understand. This is similar to Romans 10:5, which says, "For Moses writes of the righteousness from the Law, that 'The man doing these things, he shall live by them.'" In other words, there is only a hypothetical possibility that anyone will attain to the resurrection of the righteous by doing **good**. In fact only Jesus Christ attained to that.

Also, if we read that verse in the light of 5:24, "whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life," then we understand that if a person has believed in Jesus then he has crossed over to life, and will not come into judgment at all. The passage is all about the judgment unbelievers will go into. If any of them have done **good**, they will live. But we know from other passages that none have done **good**.

**John 5:30 By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.**

This is a good example of the dependence and obedience of the Son towards the Father.

John 5:31-40

The theme of Testimony, which is presented in "seed" form in 1:1-18, is developed in much more detail here.

**John 5:39-40 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.**

The rabbis taught that "the more studies of the Law, the more life... if a man gains for himself the words of the Law he has gained for himself life in the world to come." But the study of the Scriptures without the work of God in our hearts can be futile. See Luke 24:45 and 2 Corinthians 3:14-16.

The opposition gets increasingly active, and we see this response. The signs He gives and the words He speaks become increasingly clear. But in general Israel rejects Him. The

introductory statement in 1:11 is being fulfilled, but so is 1:12, so we see the contrast between those that accept and those that reject in 7:40, 48-50; 10:19; 12:37, 42, and 47.

As we look at chapter 6 we need to remember that we are "guests" in this passage, which was actually "built" for Jews, to evangelize them. According to 6:4 it was about the time of the Passover, when nationalistic enthusiasm was particularly strong among the Jews. It is not surprising that they wanted to make Him king by force.

At that time they had a three year cycle of Passover readings:

1. Exodus 1-8
2. Exodus 11-16
3. Numbers 6-14

Isaiah 51:6 and Isaiah 54-55 would supplement those readings. Realizing that those passages were in people's minds at this time increases the impact of the Lord's sermon recorded here.

Every Passover the Jews were thinking of the past and future *salvation* that their God had provided and will provide.

They were thinking of the Passover Lamb and its blood.

They were thinking of the *manna*.

They were thinking of the *crossing* of the Red Sea.

They were thinking of Exodus 3:14, the *I AM* passage.

There was great *complaining* in the Passover/Exodus/Wilderness events.

Salvation? He gives salvation!

The Lord Jesus is the Lamb of God!

Manna? – He is the bread of life, and He gives bread to 5000 people!

Crossing the Red Sea? He walks on water (Psalm 77:19-20 makes the connection a bit more clear.)

**I AM?** He says I Am in 6:20!

Complaining? In 6:41 and 60-66 the Jews began to grumble just like in the old days!

Manna, crossing the water, the I AM, complaining, all these themes are common to the Passover/Exodus/Wilderness events and chapter 6 of John. These are all ways of saying that Jesus is the God of the Passover, Savior. The deliverance from bondage in Egypt was a historical picture of the deliverance the same God brings from sin. Psalm 107:4-5, 9, 23, 25-30 emphasize this hunger, manna, and God's help to bring them to safety.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand is the only miracle, besides the resurrection, which is reported in all four gospels. In John it certainly makes a very strong connection between the LORD God who gave the people manna in the wilderness, and the Lord Jesus, who gives them the bread on the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. The Jews now (and perhaps then) pray "Oh LORD God, who brings forth bread from the earth..." and here is the Lord God bringing forth bread for them.

After the Feeding of the Five Thousand they want to make Him King. They like this display of physical power, and they want their physical, political problems solved. But as we see in passages like 6:26, they are not thinking of their own inward spiritual problems

that they should be thinking of. He rejects their efforts to make Him their political leader against Rome. If the disciples were disappointed at that, their disappointment turned to wonder when they saw Jesus that night walking on the water. He shows in that that He is the I Am, and that He is indeed worthy to be King.

In 6:20 He says "ego eimi," (Ἐγώ εἰμι) which is Greek for "I AM" and may be related to the name YHWH in Exodus 3:14, and certainly related to God in several passages in Isaiah, including Isaiah 41:4, in which He says "Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD — with the first of them and with the last — ***I am He.***"

Here in chapter 6 His followers have heard His clear claims, startling claims in a Jewish context. What He says in 6:53 ("...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you") and the following verses seem to be spoken in an effort to get people to leave, not to win them to faith. Many do leave, but some stay (remember 1:11-12?). Chapter 6:70-71 is a little seed thought, a thought that will grow to fruition, that a disciple will betray Him (John tells us, but Jesus did not tell them, that it will be Judas.)

In this "Bread of Life" sermon (6:25-71), note the repetition of key phrases like "comes to Me," "the Father gives (or draws or enables)," "I will raise them up in the last day," and "I came down from heaven."

**John 6:28 Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"**

They are not thinking that Isaiah 55:1-3 was written to them, and applies to them. They are thinking that their works will earn them eternal life if they can just get things a little more clear and perhaps work just a little harder at it.

**John 6:29 Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent."**

The only thing they can "do," the only "work" they can offer, is to **believe** in Jesus.

**John 6:30 So they asked Him, "What miraculous sign then will You give that we may see it and believe You? What will You do?"**

If they were honest, they would admit that the recent feeding of the 5000 was a sufficient sign.

**John 6:35-48**

The Lord opposes their unbelief, opposition increases, and there is complaining, much as in Exodus.

Jesus' sermon in 6:35-51 has the same structure that Jewish sermons had in that era. So although this passage may seem foreign to us, and hard to follow, it was written for the Jews of that era, and they would see the claim He was making. "Do not be satisfied with the old deliverance, receive the real thing!" Jesus spoke in terms that were easily understood by the people in that context, just as any Christian testimony in a cross cultural situation should be presented in a way that is easily understood in that context.

Just as He contextualized His approach to Nicodemus and the woman at the well, here He preaches according to contemporary Jewish form. He chose an Old Testament text, Exodus 16:4 and 15, and He quotes it in John 6:31-33. The rabbis did not need to quote precisely, and they could choose other verses in the context to supplement their message. Then the rabbis (and here Jesus as well) would take important terms from the text, and comment upon them. "Bread," "from heaven," and "eat" are those terms. Then the opening statement ("I am the Bread of Life" in 6:35) is repeated (in 6:48).

Also in chapter 6 we hear the first of the seven I Am passages:

I Am the Bread of Life: 6:35, 41, 48, and 51  
 I Am the Light of the World: 8:12  
 I Am the Door: 10:7 and 9  
 I Am the Good Shepherd: 10:11 and 14  
 I Am the Resurrection and the Life: 11:25  
 I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: 14:6  
 I Am the Vine: 15:1 and 5

There are other passages in which Jesus says, "I Am," but these are the seven I Am passages that have an object. The I Am has no object in

4:26 Then Jesus declared, "**I** who speak to you **am he**."

6:20 But he said to them, "**It is I**; don't be afraid."

8:24 I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that **I am**, you will indeed die in your sins."

8:28 So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that **I am** and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.

8:58 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, **I am!**"

13:19 "I tell you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that **I am He**.

18:5 "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "**I am he**," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.)

18:6 When Jesus said, "**I am he**," they drew back and fell to the ground.

18:8 "I told you that **I am he**," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go."

**John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.**

This is an example of the presence of the future, because in some sense we are no longer **hungry** or **thirsty** in this age, but in a much more complete sense at the end of the age we will **never go hungry** and **never be thirsty**.

**John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.**

This is strong support for the idea that only if God elects someone can that person believe in the Lord Jesus and receive salvation.

**John 6:39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.**

This is strong support for the idea that once we are saved, we cannot lose our salvation.

**John 6:40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."**

Verses 39-40 are powerful statements of eternal security.

Some say that the Bread of Life sermon, especially 6:55, speaks symbolically of the Lord's Supper. However, that is hard to accept for several reasons. It was in the time of the Passover. They were in a synagogue (6:59), not a church, and the purpose is evangelism, not discipleship. It is better to say that both the Lord's Supper and the Bread of Life sermon point to the Cross.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand is preceded by a note saying that the people have come "*because* they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick" (6:2). After that miracle they want to make Him king by force (6:15). After He crossed the Sea of Galilee even though there was no boat for Him, Jesus scolds them for their motivation: "...you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you" (6:26-27). He very much wants them to come to Him for the right reason, not for food, not for a king to crush the Romans, but for eternal life from God.

Not only does He criticize their motives, He also makes His offer increasingly shocking and unpalatable for them. At first all He says is, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (6:35), and He teaches that the reason they do not want to come to Him is because they are not chosen by the Father, as in 6:37, 44, 45, 65 "no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him" (vs 65). But then as the dialogue continues He speaks as if He is trying to alienate people, as in verses 51, 53-56, and 61-62. "For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him" (6:55-56). He does not do this because He wants to see the Gospel fail, but when He speaks the people that the Father has chosen come to Him even if others oppose Him. In that way, He brings judgment. To judge means to differentiate, to make the difference clear. That is why many turn away in 6:66, and in 6:67-71 He speaks to the Twelve, who are chosen (except for Judas, who is singled out in verse 71).

Here are some passages that are about Jesus as Judge:

5:27 And he has given him authority to **judge** because he is the Son of Man.

5:30 By myself I can do nothing; I **judge** only as I hear, and my **judgment** is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

8:15 You **judge** by human standards; I pass **judgment** on no one.

8:16 But if I do **judge**, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.

8:50 I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the **judge**.

12:47 "As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not **judge** him. For I did not come to **judge** the world, but to save it.

12:47 does not contradict the other passages. As He made clear in 3:17-21, His overall purpose in coming was not to judge, it was to save. But just as a light does not shine in order to cast a shadow, but nevertheless a shadow is cast, His coming does force judgement to happen.

6:59-71 again shows the divided response towards the Lord Jesus.

John 6:64 **Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.** Here we see another helpful explanation from John. We also see that John “guards” the Lord Jesus’ omniscience (see also verse 71), so that the reader does not get the impression that the betrayal took the Lord Jesus by surprise.

So the major themes in chapter six are Passover (and the implication that Jesus is the Lord), the Bread of Life that must be eaten, the choosing that the Father has done, and also increased opposition and defection.

There are about six months between Passover (chapter 6) and Tabernacles (chapter 7). Those six months were spent in Galilee, but John does not mention them. He focuses on events in Jerusalem.

Chapter 7 has lots of debate among the people. There is division: some believe and some reject. 7:12, 26-27, 30-31, 40-44, 45-52, but chapter 7 (verses 37-38) also has another great contrast between the old religion and Jesus, in connection with Feast of Tabernacles' water and Jesus Himself.

The Law required the Jews to gather in Jerusalem each year for Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles was the most popular of the feasts. It is described in Leviticus 23:33-43. On the first through sixth or seventh days of the feast water is carried in a procession from the Pool of Siloam to the altar of the temple, where it is poured out. But that procession does *not* happen on the last day, the very day that Jesus says He provides water, the abundant streams of living water. In the Feast of Tabernacles, that water symbolized something in the past (celebration of the water in wilderness), in the present (prayer for rain), and in the future (the promised pouring out of the Spirit), all of which point to Jesus. So His offer in 7:37-38, "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" has especially deep significance for the Jews. (This is one of the passages that shows that this Gospel was written especially to evangelize Jews.)

That offer and the teaching He gave after that caused lots of controversy among the Jewish leaders. Their efforts to have Him brought in for questioning are foiled because the Temple Guards that are sent out to bring Him in came back empty handed and could only say, "No one ever spoke the way this man does." But one man, one of their own number, tried to rebuke the chief priests, saying, "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" That man's name was Nicodemus (7:51).

7:17 **If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.**

To chose **to do God's will** might mean to believe in Him (as in 6:29, "The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent,") in which case He is promising assurance only after faith. However, choosing **to do God's will** also might mean to decide to become a disciple, a follower. In that case this is much like 8:31-32, where we read, "To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, "If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

John 7:19-20 **Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"**

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

This use of irony encourages the reader to take sides with the Lord Jesus. The reader knows He is not demonized, and that they are **trying to kill** Him (Culpepper, pg. 93).

**Illustration: the woman caught in adultery 7:53-8:11**

This is a vivid demonstration of how He is the Light (8:12, 9:5) and they walk in Darkness. Notice how "at dawn He appeared again..." (8:2). Is that symbolic of the fact that He is, as He says in 8:12 and 9:5, the Light of the World?

Notice in 7:53 that "each went to his own home." That may be stated here because they have not been in their own homes recently. They have been sleeping in booths, tabernacles, during the Feast of Tabernacles. The NIV Dictionary explains, "The Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) was an eight-day celebration that took place in the autumn at the final harvest of olives and fruits.... During this feast, the people made shelters, or 'booths,' to remind them of Israel's time in the wilderness when the nation lived in tents." See Lev. 23:42-43. But now the feast is over, and so "each went to his own home." The author of this Gospel clearly understood Jewish culture and religious life. That fits very well with the idea that the Apostle John wrote this Gospel, as discussed in the Introduction.

There is a textual problem here. 7:53-8:11 is missing in the oldest Greek manuscripts (P<sup>66</sup>, P<sup>75</sup>, N, B, and apparently also C and A) but the majority of the manuscripts have these verses. In fact about 75 manuscripts have this passage! Clearly it was added or deleted in the years before existing manuscripts were written, because it was mentioned in a Greek work called *The Didascalia Apostolorum*, which was written in about 230 AD, and it is missing in P<sup>66</sup>, which was copied in about the year 200 AD. Since it already existed in about 230 AD, the existence of the early manuscripts that contain it (listed above) is not very compelling proof. Since the majority of the manuscripts contain it, and since there is no compelling explanation of how a so-called fake passage made its way into all those manuscripts, it seems best to assume that one early scribe intentionally omitted it before 200 AD when P<sup>66</sup> was copied, perhaps because that scribe thought that the Lord was being too forgiving towards an adulteress.

In this chapter it helps to understand that:

1. Jewish legal process required at least two eye witnesses that saw the actual act of adultery.
2. The Torah (Lev. 20:10) requires that the male also be tried.

So something very suspicious is going on here as the Jewish leaders try to entrap Jesus. Was it a coincidence that two eyewitnesses saw the act of adultery? Where is the man? Why is he not also brought to Jesus?

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that in their darkness they conspired to set up this situation in order to trap Jesus with a difficult case. "Never mind the woman – too bad for her. We have to stop that Jesus!"

(It is not known and it does not matter what He wrote on the ground. Writing on the ground gave the people time to realize their sin, their darkness.)

In 8:9 first the older men, then also the younger, realize their darkness. Jesus has succeeded in showing them that He is the Light, and they are in the darkness, in need of Light. However, we see that some were so dark that they were determined to continue to oppose Him.

**8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."**

How very dark were the hearts of those that opposed Him here!

#### **D. Radical confrontation: climactic signs, works and words 8:12–10:42**

In the debate, in the heated conversation that follows the incident of the woman that was nearly stoned, He is more and more clear about His identity (and their condition) and they are more and more heated in their response. In 8:23-24 Jesus describes their condition with complete clarity.

But 8:30-44 has caused a lot of confusion. Some read it and say that we have believers (8:31) that are unsaved (8:44)! That is a very strange idea, especially in the Gospel of John.

The context is an open place, the temple area, and a heated debate between Jesus and the Pharisees (8:13), who are called:

- "them" in verses 21, 27, and 42
- "the Jews" in verses 22, 48, 52, and 57
- "they" in verses 19, 25, 27, 33, 39, 41, and 59

The Greek behind the expression "put their faith in him" in 8:30 is literally "believe to Him," exactly as it is in John 3:16. Those people believed, and, of course, received eternal life.

Augustine understood what was happening in that public argument. (In Augustine's *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 41, paragraph 2 he wrote, "In short, the Jews also so understood and 'answered Him'; not those who had already believed, but those in the crowd that were not yet believers.") The pronoun "they" in 33 points to the hostile crowd, *not* the new believers in verse 31. That may be poor English grammar, but it is perfectly normal Greek. (English grammar requires that a pronoun, like "they," must point back to the 'nearest possible antecedent,' which is why English readers might easily think the "they" of verse 33 points to the new believers in verse 31. But Greek grammar does not require the "they" to refer to the *nearest* people mentioned. In Greek you have to interpret according to the context to decide who is meant by the "they" of verse 33.)

Read 30-33 again, but to understand it more clearly read "they (all those hostile Jews)." This dramatic moment is probably familiar to street evangelists all over the world. The crowd is hostile, the situation is dangerous, but the evangelist – perhaps standing on a higher piece of ground – preaches, and he sees that some believe his words! He has about

ten seconds to give them two sentences of comfort and counsel before the hostile crowd makes any further help for these new believers impossible. There is no opportunity to walk the aisle of the church building and talk with the pastor, there are no quiet and private corners of the church hall to which they can retreat. All Jesus can say to them is verses 31-32, "If you hold...." And the angry crowd interrupts, "We are Abraham's descendants, never been anyone's slaves!"

By 8:41 that hostile crowd of unbelievers is implying that He is an illegitimate child. By vs. 44 Jesus tells them they belong to their father, the devil. By vs. 48 they say He is a Samaritan and demonized. And then He pronounces the "ego eimi," the "I AM" of vs. 58, and they would stone Him in vs. 59. So, we see open declaration of deity and open warfare! The "seed thought" of 1:11-12 is sprouting and growing larger here.

**8:51 I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."**

In John 6:29 Jesus said, "The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent." This is the **word** that must be kept if a man would **never see death**. What besides faith has He commanded of them?

**8:52 At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death.**

The Lord has succeeded in bringing out their character. They will be judged by their own words.

**8:53 Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"**

The expression **Who do you think you are** is literally "Who do You make Yourself?" They are, ironically, saying that He is making Himself to be God, when actually He as God made Himself to be a man! Of course the comment **Are you greater than our father Abraham?** is very ironic as well.

**8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."**

This is a very powerful claim. By saying this He forces them to either give up and worship Him or kill Him. Based upon Genesis 15:17-21 Rabbi Akiba taught that God revealed the end times to Abraham (Carson, pg. 356).

**8:58 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"**

Even though verses 24 and 28 might possibly be taken some other way, once He says this there is no other possible interpretation: He is saying that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There will be no peace between Him and them, unless they radically change their mind and believe in Him.

Chapter 9 is the story of one good man in a crowd of darkness. It illustrates all that has just been said by Jesus in chapter 8. Just notice that in the same way that Jesus got insults and violence, so did this man. This is such a delightful passage.

***Two Men Healed – Comparing the Healings in John 5 and 9***

When we read the Gospels, we read of so many people getting healed, and as we talk with people we hear about God's great grace in their lives, perhaps even in healing them. It is easy to think, "Oh, if I was healed like that, I'm sure I would love the Lord more, and be a better Christian...."

Perhaps that is true. But how was it for them in New Testament times? Did all that were healed then devote their lives to Him? So many got healed, but we hear from so few. In fact, John 5 and John 9 present the *only* healings in John where we get to hear about the reactions of the people healed. Both happen on the Sabbath, and neither healed man is named.

Now John 9 is sort of a living enactment and proof of what Jesus said in John 8, that He is the Light, and that they are liars, even murderers!

The ingratitude of the formerly lame man of chapter 5 contrasts very sharply with the attitude of the formerly blind man healed in chapter 9. In 9:5 Jesus gives one of the important themes of this passage, Light. In this chapter watch for the idea of Light, or truth, and who is seeking light, who is seeking the truth, and who does not care at all about truth.

This man was born blind (vs 1), and he was a beggar (vs 8). This is the first record in the Bible, even in all Jewish history, of a man **born** blind that is healed. What was he thinking as he walked along, mud in his eyes, to the Pool of Siloam? Would he be thinking the same thing that Rabbi Israel wrote: "When He comes to heal the world, He will first heal the blind"? Would he be thinking about Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; or 42:7, that the Messiah will give sight to the blind? Of course we do not know his thoughts on that last dark walk of his.

Verses 6-7 tell how he was healed. Notice that he does not **see** Jesus until later.

Verses 8-9 give the debate in the neighborhood, and the man's short testimony, the beginning of boldness.

Verse 11 is such a clear testimony! This man's clarity of thought and expression is *amazing enough even if you forget that*:

- they were angry with him
- he had a limited education if any at all
- he was experiencing the visual world around him (color, brightness, motion, distance, the sun...) for the first time, and could easily and understandably be distracted from these "details" about how he came to see.

But he was not distracted by this great gift from the Messiah. He knew that the *Giver* is more important than the *gift*.

In verse 12 we see he is honest about the limits of his understanding: "I don't know."

In verse 25 he shows real bravery in speaking with the religious leaders that way.

He may be running out of patience in verse 27.

In verses 28-29 insults are the only thing they have for him, and that is all they had for Jesus in ch 8.

Verses 30-33 show real daring.

Again, in verse 34, they can only come up with insults and force.

Verses 39-41 are a summary and conclusion that helps show how blind the leaders are. Note that 9:41 is restated in 15:24.

So, what a contrast between these two healed men!

The core of the contrast seems to be threefold:

- love of truth vs. disregard of truth
- thankfulness vs. ingratitude
- standing up to vs. giving in to oppositional religious leaders

Jesus is the light of the world. (8:12 and 9:5) and this is how two men respond when that light shines on them.

The reader might be tempted to say that we Christians are like the man in chapter 9, and the unsaved are like the man in chapter 5, but that might be a bit shallow!

Actually, are not we all a little bit like – or a lot like – both men?

Sometimes the Light of the Gospel is so wonderful for us it brings tears to our eyes. Has this happened to you lately? Do you remember tears of joy in your own eyes, maybe when your own children are presenting an Easter or Christmas play that includes the Gospel...

At other times are not our hearts as far from gratitude as that man in chapter 5?

Do what needs to be done to open your heart to that gratitude! This passage, and all of Colossians, teaches us that gratitude is an essential part of the mature Christian life. Note also how the Ephesians in Revelation 2 had "lost their first love."

If there is ingratitude, discontentment, cynicism in your heart, rid yourself of it! Confess it and stay away from it. Decide to be grateful, and practice that decision. Colossians 3:16 might be a good place to start this quest, to learn about who Christ is and what He has done for us, meditate on that, love Him, and worship Him!

Are you worshipping the Lord on your own, or is that a strictly "at church" activity? Worship Him!

The Lord says, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." And Jeremiah 15:16 says, "Your words appeared, and I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for Your name is called upon me, O LORD God Almighty." Are you on a starvation diet?!

Read the Word, not as a Christian obligation, but as a joyful necessity for life, real life, not this thing we call life that is all bound up in ingratitude, discontentment, cynicism, but life!

Let us be less and less like that man in chapter 5, and more and more like the man in chapter 9.

chapter 10

### **The Good Shepherd**

There is no written out transition to chapter 10, but through the metaphors of shepherding, Jesus contrasts Himself (The Good Shepherd) with the leaders of Israel (the bad shepherds), the men of darkness of chapters 8 and 9. They are thieves and robbers, He is the Gate, He is the Good Shepherd. He also uses the metaphor of the Good Shepherd to teach about His sacrificial death. The comment in 10:21 about the healing of the blind man shows that this certainly takes place after chapter 9.

### **Background to the Good Shepherd Theme**

The first readers of the Gospel of John were familiar with the idea that the leaders of Israel were called shepherds. See Isaiah 56:11; Jeremiah 23:1-4; 25:34-38; and Zechariah 11. On the other hand, the Lord is the Shepherd of Israel in Psalm 23:1-4; 80:1; Isaiah 40:11; and Ezekiel 34, especially verses 20-24.

### **Overview of 10:1-18**

vv. 1-5	Jesus is the Shepherd
vs. 6	Explanation from John
vv. 7-10	Jesus is the Gate
vv. 11-18	Jesus is the Shepherd

The two images of the Lord Jesus as the Shepherd and the Lord Jesus as the Gate are hard to hold side by side logically, but this should not trouble the reader. Note that He is also the Bread of Life (6:35) and that He gives the Bread of Life (6:51). He speaks the truth (8:45) and He is the Truth (14:6) (Morris, pg. 499).

**10:3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.**

During this time, a family might have a **sheep** pen surrounded by the various parts of their house, or there might be a **sheep** pen used for several families' **sheep**. In that case, there would be a guard. The guard would of course let the owners go into the pen. Also, the owners could stand outside, and call out their own **sheep**. Some shepherds named each of their **sheep** – each would come out when it heard its owner call its **name**.

**10:4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.**

Middle eastern shepherds go in front of the flock. In like manner, the Lord Jesus **goes on ahead** of us. He never asks more than what He Himself has given. This is also a model to be followed: Christian leaders should never ask of their flock what they themselves do not do.

10:6 **Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.**

Here again is a misunderstanding which will be corrected.

10:7 **Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.**

Here the Lord shifts the metaphor from Shepherd to **Gate**.

10:8 **All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.**

10:9 **I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.**

10:10 **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**

This is about personal salvation through the Lord Jesus alone, but it is also about the **full** and abundant **life** that He would have His followers enjoy. Perhaps the same idea is present in 20:31.

10:11 **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

He has promised **life** to His sheep, and abundant life to those that will follow Him. Here in this verse we see *how* it is He will be able to give others **life**. He **lays down his life**.

10:12 **The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.**

10:13 **The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.**

This is the difference between the Lord Jesus and the leaders of Israel. They really did not care. However, even today there are leaders of the Lord's flock that are just like a **hired hand**. If you are like that, either get a new attitude of love, or get new work!

Morris (pg. 511) explains that according to the Mishnah (the core of the tradition of the Jews, which was later expanded to become the Talmud), a **hired hand** watching another man's **sheep** must stay and fight off a single **wolf**, but if two wolves attack, he may flee and leave the **sheep** to the wolves.

10:14 **“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me –**

10:15 **just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep.**

10:16 **I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.**

This is a hint of the Great Commission. See also 1:10-12; 4:42; and 12:20-26.

10:17 **The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again.**

This is the word ἀγαπάω/*agapaō*, which would suggest that at least some of God's *agapē* love is conditional, here conditional upon the Lord Jesus going to the Cross.

Compare this with Philippians 2:8-9, where we learn that *because* He was obedient, even

to the point of death, even death on a cross, God exalted Him, and gave to Him a Name which is above every name. (Note however that He does *not* say, “The *only* reason the Father loves Me is because I lay down My life.”) The obedience of the Sent One to the command of the One that sent Him is an important theme in the Gospel of John, and will be important to us as we understand what He meant when He said, “As the Father sent Me, so send I you.”

Although this word ἀγάπη/*agapē* and the verb ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* are often said to express “unconditional love” or “altruistic love” in contrast to φιλέω/*phileō* which is said to refer to “the love of friendship and feeling” (*Agape and Eros* by Anders Nygren was a major work with this point of view), in fact the use of these words in the Septuagint and the New Testament shows that it is more complicated than that:

In 2 Samuel 13 the Septuagint uses both ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* and φιλέω/*phileō* for Amnon’s violent and sexual love for Tamar.

Both ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* and φιλέω/*phileō* are used in the expression “the disciple whom Jesus loves” in John.

Both ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* and φιλέω/*phileō* are used to speak of the Father’s love for the Son (John 3:35 and 5:20).

In John 12:43 ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* is used of a love that is not at all altruistic: “for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.”

Also in John 3:19 ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* is used for the love men have for darkness.

Also in 2 Timothy 4:10 ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* is used of Demas’s love for the present age.

Also in Luke 11:43 ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* is used of the Pharisees love of “the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.” (See Matthew 23:6 where φιλέω/*phileō* is used of almost exactly the same love.)

In John 10:17 ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* is used with a condition: “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life....”

Also in John 14:21 ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* is used with a condition: “He who loves me will be loved by my Father....”

Also in John 14:23 there is a similar condition with ἀγαπάω/*agapaō*: “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

Also in Matthew 5:46 ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* speaks of conditional love: “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?”

Also in Luke 6:32 ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* speaks of conditional love: “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them.”

So ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* sometimes refers to conditional or worldly love. There is a great deal of overlap in the meanings of these two words. However, outside of that overlap φιλέω/*phileō* can even simply mean “to kiss,” as when Judas kissed the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:47). See D. A. Carson’s April 1999 *Bibliotheca Sacra* article, “God Is Love.” Be careful when you hear things about Greek words. There are many inaccurate ideas floating around in Christian circles. If you hear something about a Greek word, get out a concordance and see if it is true!

**10:18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”**

Again, John “guards” the Lord’s omnipotence – he helps us understand that despite the horror of the Cross, the Lord Jesus is perfectly in control.

**10:19 At these words the Jews were again divided.**

This word **divided** (σχίσμα/*schisma*) appears also in 7:43 and 9:16, with the same meaning. This is an important theme for John in this section. The preaching and miracles of the Lord in chapters 2-7 caused the people, and even the leaders, to be **divided** because of Him.

**10:20 Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”**

**10:21 But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”**

Again we see a divided response among the people. (The passages that show that divided response are listed in the Synthesis of the Gospel of John and the end of the Introduction.

**10:22-42 The Last Public Debate**

Here we will see familiar themes – sheep, shepherd's voice, sign-based faith, eternal life, the Father-Son relationship, given in such a way that the hearer, and the reader, must decide about Jesus.

**John 10:22 Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter,**

It was indeed after the events just described, but not immediately afterwards.

Tabernacles takes place in September or October, while **Feast of Dedication** takes place in December.

As was prophesied in the Book of Daniel, in 167 BC Antiochus Epiphanes defeated Jerusalem and very much desecrated the temple. Then in 164 BC Jerusalem was freed, and an eight day ceremony took place to dedicate the temple. This is recorded in 1 Maccabees 4:36-59; 2 Maccabees 1:9, 18; and 10:1-8 in the Apocrypha, which is easily found in any Roman Catholic Bible.

**John 10:23 and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon’s Colonnade.**

**John 10:24 The Jews gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”**

They were saying that the problem was His lack of clarity.

**John 10:25 Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me,**

He disagreed about what the problem was.

**John 10:26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.**

He is saying that their lack of faith is because they are not of the elect. Hopefully, that is the reason for any lack of success in evangelism. However, there can be other reasons, like the poor testimony of the preachers, or a poor Gospel presentation.

John 10:27 **My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.**

John 10:28 **I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.**

John 10:29 **My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.**

Verses 28-29 are powerful statements about eternal security. How could we lose our salvation if such care given to this matter by both the Lord and the Father? Some might say that it cannot be taken from us, but we can give it away. But that is not reasonable in the face of these two verses, because in effect, whoever might drive someone to "give away his salvation" *in effect* would have taken that person **out of His Father's hand**.

John 10:30 **I and the Father are one."**

In addition to supporting His statements about eternal security, this is a claim to deity.

John 10:31 **Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him,**

Their reaction demonstrates that they understood full well that the Lord was not just claiming to have the same purposes as God, He was claiming to be fully deity. According to Leviticus 24, stoning was the proper punishment for blasphemy. However, they were ready to bypass the legal details of Leviticus 24:14.

John 10:32 **but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?"**

By His great grace, He is trying to break the momentum of their headlong action.

John 10:33 **"We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."**

However, they are not willing to think through things. The words translated **you... claim to be God** are literally, "because you, a man being, make yourself God." There is of course great irony here. He was not a **man** that was making Himself into **God**, but **God** that had made Himself into a **man**.

John 10:34 **Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'?"**

John 10:35 **If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came — and the Scripture cannot be broken —**

John 10:36 **what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'?**

He directs their attention to Psalm 82:1 and 6, where God calls the leaders of Israel "gods" because, leading the people of God, they were doing the work of God. It is

possible that He suddenly brings up this strange passage to break their momentum, so they would stop and think.

John 10:37 **Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does.**

John 10:38 **But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”**

Again, they are urged to **believe** at least because of the **miracles**. This is second best in His mind, but better than what they are wanting to do.

John 10:39 **Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.**

John 10:40 **Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. Here he stayed**

Jesus and His disciples withdraw from public view. As 11:7 makes clear, they do not do this out of fear. They do it because He has ministry to do and He cannot do it while they are throwing stones!

This place is also mentioned in 1:28. He never avoided saying things that were dangerous, but He did not let them kill Him until His hour had come. Compare 4:3; 5:18; 6:15; 7:30; 8:37, 59; 10:31; and 11:54.

John 10:41 **and many people came to him. They said, “Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true.”**

John 10:42 **And in that place many believed in Jesus.**

So the people continue to be divided (10:19-21 and 39-42), and some keep trying to kill Him (10:31 and 39).

At the end of chapter 10 Jesus' situation is unclear. The Jewish authorities do not like Him, but there is no manhunt. He has withdrawn to an isolated place across the Jordan. But by the end of chapter 11 He is the target of a formal decision: He must be killed. What brought this change about? A great public miracle.

### **III. Transition: Life and Death, King and Suffering Servant 11:1-12:50**

#### **A. The death and resurrection of Lazarus 11:1-44**

11:1 **Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.**

This **Lazarus** was not the **Lazarus** of Luke 16:19-31, who was a beggar, and may only have been part of a story told by the Lord. This **Bethany** is on the east side of the Mount of Olives, about three kilometers east of Jerusalem on the road to Jericho according to 11:18. This is not the same **Bethany** as in 1:28, which was “on the other side of the Jordan.”

11:2 **This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.**

First-time readers of the Gospel of John will not understand this, but this clearly refers to the anointing, which happens later, in 12:1-8. **Mary** was a common name. Moses' sister was named מִרְיָם/*Miryam*, which in Greek became Μαριάμ/*Mariam* and sometimes Μαρία/*Maria*, which later in English became **Mary**.

**11:3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”**

This might seem like an odd statement, but cultures familiar with indirect forms of communication would recognize this as an indirect request for healing. The word for **love** here is φιλέω/*phileō*, but later in verse 5 the word ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* will be used.

**11:4 When He heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”**

Note how **God's glory** and the **glory of God's Son** are intertwined. But who can possibly share in **God's glory**?

This is like 9:3, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”

**11:5 Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.**

The delay here is not because of a lack of concern.

**11:6 Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.**

He waits. A normal healing, as wonderful as that might be, is not what is required now in the plan of God. A resurrection is needed.

**11:7 Then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”**

According to 10:40 they are in “the place where John had been baptizing in the early days,” but it is not clear whether that was the Bethany of 1:28 or the Aenon near Salim of 3:23, so it is not clear how far they had to walk to get to Jerusalem. A standard day's walk for a healthy man then was 40-45 kilometers.

**11:8 “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?”**

The disciples were happy to be so far from danger, but the Lord Jesus did not consider danger when He made His decisions about when and where they would travel.

**11:9 Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light.**

How is this a response? How is the fact that a day has **twelve hours** and that if you walk in those **twelve hours** you **will not stumble**, how is that an answer to their fear of getting killed? In Judea. In Indonesia. In Nepal. In the Philippines? Just as God has set the sun to rise and then set **twelve hours** later, so He has appointed for you so many hours of life in which to serve Him. Use them! Do not be afraid of somehow "dying early"!

An hour was not sixty minutes in that era, before there were clocks or watches. An hour was a twelfth of the **daylight** hours, whether winter or summer.

**11:10 It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.”**

Because He has used the expression "this world's light" in the previous verse, it seems that both of these verses are simply saying that walking while the sun is up is safe, and walking when the sun is down is not safe; likewise serving God during your appointed years of service is not dangerous. You cannot "die early" while serving God, even if you are doing things that others might consider dangerous.

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

By **fallen asleep**, Jesus means **Lazarus** has died. Sleep is a common metaphor for death in the New Testament [Matthew 27:52; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Corinthians 7:39 (see the Greek); 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14, and 15; 2 Peter 3:4 (see the Greek)], but it is less common in the Old Testament (see Job 14:12; Psalm 7:5; 13:3; 76:5; 90:5; Jeremiah 51:39; and Daniel 12:2). That death is as temporary as sleep will be a valuable lesson in faith for the disciples.

**11:12 His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.”**

This is another example of a misunderstanding, and follows the pattern discussed in the Introduction.

**11:13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.**

Here is John's helpful explanation.

**11:14 So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead,**

**11:15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”**

It was good that He was not there when Lazarus died. The result will be that they will **believe**. But did they not already **believe** in the Lord?

**11:16 Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”**

Thomas's comment shows that he did not understand. And we do not seem to understand either, not when it comes down to stepping forward for dangerous tasks! **Thomas** continued to be weak in faith at least until he saw the resurrected Lord. Here at least he was willing to die for the Lord. This is devotion to the Lord, but it is not deep understanding and faith.

**11:17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.**

At that time there was a Jewish superstition that the spirit of a dead person would float around for three days, hoping to re-enter the body. But then when it would smell the decaying body, it would give up and leave. Of course we do not accept that superstition, but if the people there did, it would make this resurrection all the more amazing to them, because **Lazarus had already been dead for four days**.

**11:18 Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,**

**11:19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.**

This seems to have been a well-known family, and 12:3 suggests that they were not poor.

**11:20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.**

John 11:21-26

Martha, of course, wants Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead. But Jesus wants to make this resurrection a parable of all the resurrections He will ever do, so He says "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25a). And just as Lazarus was raised from the dead, so also will everyone be raised who believes in Jesus. The historical events of this passage become like a "parable" that is played out in front of their eyes. It is the "presence of the future." Because Jesus is there, all the life-giving powers that will bring about the end times resurrection are present.

**11:21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died."**

It is possible that this was said as a scolding, but more likely it was spoken in deep sadness. Since this statement is repeated in verse 32 it seems like Mary and **Martha** may have been saying this to one another.

**11:22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."**

This may have been another indirect request for a resurrection miracle. In this quiet setting she has faith, but in verse 39, with all her guests there, her faith waivers.

**11:23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."**

We now can see that this is an ambiguous response, but right then for Martha it must have seemed like the Lord was saying "yes, but not yet" in response to her indirect request.

**11:24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."**

She was willing to live with that level of comfort, if that was what He wanted to give her.

**11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"**

He wants her, and us, to realize what is most important, and that is the Lord Jesus. Also, He is concerned about the level of her faith. He is concerned too about the level of our faith, and the faith of those whom we serve.

Note the two different meanings for the word **dies** or **die**. The first time the word is used it refers to physical death. The second time it is used it refers to spiritual death.

**11:27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."**

She might have wondered why she was being led in a theological lesson, but she loved Him so much that she gladly confessed this, even in the still aching pain of her loss.

**11:28 And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.”**

**11:29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.**

**11:30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.**

**11:31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.**

This was to be a public miracle, with many people there to witness it. This verse explains how they got to the site.

**11:32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”**

**11:33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.**

This is deep emotion, perhaps even anger.

**11:34 “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied.**

**11:35 Jesus wept.**

**11:36 Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”**

**11:37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”**

There is some irony in their statement; not only could he have **kept this man from dying**, but He will raise him from the dead in a few moments.

**11:38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.**

The Jews of that era preferred to bury their dead in caves or rooms carved into the rock.

**11:39 “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”**

If we could only remember never to say **But Lord!**

**11:40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"**

Even though the Gospel of John does not record those words being said, we know from this passage that He did say that.

**11:41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me.**

**11:42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."**

**11:43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"**

**11:44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."**

It is interesting wording to say that **the dead man came out**. Of course it means that **the** formerly **dead man came out**.

### **B. The judicial decision to kill Jesus 11:45-54**

The hard thing to believe is not that Jesus, in a single command, raised Lazarus from the dead. It is how some of them responded: in vs. 45 it is easy to see that some believed; but in vs. 46 some are still opposed to Him! (And in 12:10-11 it is decided that Lazarus also must die – again!!)

11:47 is another of the ironies of the book. It is not visible in the NIV, but in a literal translation you would hear the Pharisees saying to one another, "What do we do (or "what are we doing") because this the man many is doing signs?" Or more smoothly, "What should we do because this man is doing many signs?" The answer of course is that they should believe in Him, or at least in the signs, but that does not occur to them at all.

**11:49 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all!**

**11:50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."**

This is one of the most ironic statements in the entire Gospel of John.

**11:51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation,**

**11:52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.**

This is another of the helpful explanations that John adds. He supplements it with another hint at the not merely Jewish, but global scope of God's salvation plan.

**11:53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life.**

His enemies do not deny the resurrection miracle. What more could the Lord Jesus do to convince them of the truth of what He was saying? But in fact they preferred their "life" in the darkness, just like the Pharisees in chapter 9.

**11:54 Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.**

It was not yet the right time for His death, so He **withdrew**.

The unclear situation at the end of chapter 10 is now perfectly clear. To a lesser extent, the other miracles which John records have done so, but now more fully the great public miracle of Lazarus's resurrection has forced people to make up their minds and take sides. It is as if no one in Jerusalem could possibly still be saying, "Jesus? Oh, I've heard of that rabbi. I wonder if He is a good man." Everyone has been forced to show whether they are with Him or against Him.

### **C. Triumph and impending death 11:55–12:36**

Chapter 12 opens with a party in Bethany. It is six days before Passover. Martha was serving, and Mary pours pure nard as an act of worship, not thinking of cost, not thinking of the impression she would give by letting down her hair. He seizes the opportunity to speak of His coming death, although no one wants to talk about death at a party.

Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 7 also have anointings, but Luke is telling about a different event. The details of the comparisons between the passages are given here as an example of "the Synoptic Problem" and how it works out.

The event that John, Matthew, and Mark talk about was at the home of *Simon* the Leper in Bethany, where Martha was helping by serving, and Lazarus was reclining at the table with Jesus and the other guests. The event that Luke writes about was also, by coincidence, in the home of a man named *Simon*, but he was a Pharisee that needed a rebuke. The event Luke writes about happens in *Galilee*, not *Bethany* near Jerusalem.

In John the objection about the cost of the perfume is only spoken by *Judas*, but in Matthew it is spoken by "*the disciples*" and in Mark it is spoken by "*some of those present*." This is simply not a contradiction. Surely it is possible that Judas initiated the objection, and then some of the others present picked up on his idea and voiced it too. Someone had to speak first. John (in accord with his other comments about Judas) picks up on the fact that Judas first came up with the idea, and ignores the fact that others agreed with him. Matthew and Mark ignore the issue of who initiated the objection.

Matthew and Mark ignore the name of the woman who pours the perfume, but John decides to go ahead and tell us it is Mary. Surely that is not proof of contradiction.

In Matthew 26:13 Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her," but John does not mention that statement.

Likewise, although Matthew and Mark do not record it, John lets us know that Jesus also said, "Leave her alone. For the preparation of My burial she has kept this perfume."

Another difference is that in Matthew and Mark, Jesus' *head and body* are anointed, but John only speaks of how Mary used her hair to anoint His *feet*, a tremendously humble thing to do, all the more if you remember how dirty feet could get there. Is that a contradiction? Not at all. A third of a kilogram of perfume is a great deal of perfume, so there was plenty for head and feet! Matthew and Mark do not say that *only* His head and body were anointed. John does not say that *only* His feet were anointed. John, who tells us that hours before Jesus' arrest His disciples would not even wash His feet with a towel, writes about how Mary anointed His feet with the hair of her own head.

In summary, John, Matthew, and Mark all write about the same anointing, but they describe different aspects of it from different points of view. Luke writes about a different anointing event. Similar observations could be made about the Triumphal Entry in John 12:12-15, although in that case all the accounts speak of one historical event.

The three accounts of the same event are not edited to present a standard version of the event. When various eyewitnesses give their testimony in a courtroom, they are not supposed to have the opportunity to talk to each other ahead of time. If they are allowed to "coordinate" their testimonies ahead of time, their testimony is far less valuable. Real eyewitness accounts will have lots of variety in perspective and in what elements are mentioned. Of course if there is so much variety that there are logical contradictions, that also makes their testimony of no value. That is not the case here.

Above all, we should first and foremost read this passage as a powerful presentation of true worship, true devotion. We can be assured that Mary *never* had reason to regret using that extremely expensive perfume on Jesus!

**12:3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.**

This is one third of a kilogram. **Nard** is a plant that only grew in the mountains of north India, perhaps Nepal.

Because they were at a formal event, they were reclining on couches, **feet** away from the table, and heads towards the table. Normally a person's head would be anointed, not his **feet**.

In order to do this, **Mary** let down her hair. This would have been considered highly inappropriate behavior in religious circles. There is a story of a woman whose several sons had all become high priest in Israel. When she was asked how it is that she would be so favored among all the women of Israel, her answer was that the rafters of her home had never seen her hair. In other words, she was so careful about modesty that even in her own home she guarded her modesty diligently. That was not at all the approach

**Mary** took. She had an opportunity to honor the Lord Jesus, and she seized upon it whole-heartedly, forgetting about societal standards of modesty. She willingly gave up such respectability to worship the Lord. She knew He was worthy of far far more than all the most expensive perfumes in all the Roman Empire.

12:4 **But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected,**

There are many reminders of the Cross in the chapter. This is one of them.

12:5 **“Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.”**

The expression **a year’s wages** was literally “three hundred denarii.” We know from the literal translation of Matthew 20:2 that a denarius was a standard day’s wage for a laborer. It was a silver Roman coin.

12:6 **He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.**

Judas’ concern for the poor was a mask for his greed. The same hypocrisy tragically continues in many places throughout the world.

12:7 **“Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “For the preparation of My burial she has kept this perfume.**

This verse is difficult to translate, but the use of the Perfect Tense for the verb τηρεω/*tērēō*, that is τετηρηκεν/*tetērēken* meaning "she has kept," in the majority of the Greek manuscripts, suggests the meaning **Leave her alone. For the preparation of My burial she has kept this perfume.** Mary kept that expensive oil until that moment, and she wanted to use it that way. It is the appropriate moment, He explains, because His **burial** is drawing near.

This was a surprising thing to say, both because usually people do not talk about anyone's burial at a dinner party, and also because anointings with oil were usually at joyous occasions, not funerals.

Perhaps Mary knew the Cross was near, or perhaps, like Caiaphas, she acted unknowingly but prophetically.

12:8 **You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”**

This is not a statement opposing ministry to the poor. It is a statement emphasizing the nearness of the Cross and the ascension.

12:9 **Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.**

The guests of the dinner party would recline on their benches to dine, but, as was the custom, the community was allowed to enter the house and look in on the party. So **a large crowd of Jews** took advantage of that custom, to see the Lord, **but also to see Lazarus.**

**12:10-11 So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.**

This is a demonstration of the amazing depth of their darkness. What was **Lazarus** guilty of? Did they think they could overpower the One that raised **Lazarus** from the dead, and then also **kill Lazarus**? How could they oppose, with murder, One who was raising people from the dead? They were blindly jealous of His popularity.

### **The Triumphal Entry 12:12-15**

The Triumphal Entry is briefly recorded in 12:12-15. Actually it is recorded in all four Gospels (Matthew 21, Mark 11, and Luke 19). Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell about how the donkey was obtained. Only Matthew brings up the fact that there was a donkey *and* her colt, so that Zechariah 9:9 is fulfilled down to the letter. The other writers only mention one animal (but they do not exclude the possibility that there was a donkey and her colt). The different Gospel writers record different conversations that happened during that turbulent event. See the comments on chapter 12 concerning the anointing at Bethany and the issue of apparently contradictory accounts.

**12:12 The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.**

Josephus wrote that 2.7 million people were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover in AD 66 (*The Jewish Wars* vi. 422-425). Even if that was an exaggeration, it is still a **great crowd** of people.

**12:13 They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel!"**

Those **palm branches** were a traditional part of the celebration of Passover, and also a symbol of victory. The **palm branches** and their shouts indicated they understood that He was the Messiah. However, they did not understand that the Messiah wanted heart changes before He would rule.

In 1 Maccabees 13:51 and 2 Maccabees 10:7 **palm branches** were used to celebrate the Jews' victory, and according to Carson (pg. 432) some coins that were minted to celebrate victories had **palm branches** on them. The expression **Hosanna** (Hebrew: *hoshā'ā nā'*, Aramaic: *hosha' nā'*) means "save us," and came to be an expression of praise.

**12:15 "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."**

This Old Testament passage, Zechariah 9:9, was about the Messiah, the **king** of Israel. When the Lord Jesus got up on that animal, He was saying to the crowd, "Yes, I am the Messiah, the King of Israel."

John brings up several reactions to the Triumphal Entry. As in 2:22, the disciples did not understand until "after Jesus was glorified" (12:16). The eye witnesses to Lazarus' resurrection kept giving their testimony (12:17). Those that heard their testimony "went out to meet Him" (12:18). And finally, the Pharisees are disgusted with His popularity and

frustrated at their inability to stop Him, so one of them makes the ironic statement, "Look how the whole world has gone after him" (12:19).

### ***Devotion on John 12:20-26***

In John 12:20-26 Jesus thinks beyond the present situation, and He expects us to catch up to Him. In this passage we see how important *world evangelism* is to Jesus. The Jewish leaders have decided to kill him, and here are some Greeks that want to meet Him. It is ironic that the Jews, who should have known Him, want to kill Him, but the Greeks, that are not of the covenant people of God, want to meet Him. This irony becomes like a trigger, and He speaks of His work and the salvation of all the nations (read vv. 23-26). He needs to die to bring life to many. We need to be ready to die to bring that life to many. If we love our life, we ruin it. If we hate our life, we gain riches in eternal life. If we hate our life the Father will honor us.

12:23 **Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.**  
This is a clear reference to the Cross.

12:24 **I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."**

This is clearly about Jesus. He is about to be glorified, crucified.

But as we read verse 25 we realise that this is also about us. Remember, He is going to say, "As the Father sent Me, so send I you."

It is about Jesus. When He dies, He produces many seeds, children of God, first fifty, then hundreds, soon thousands, later millions and millions.

But it is about us too. We have some dying to do too. We need to let ourselves be cast down to the soil, perhaps Philippine soil, perhaps the soil of Java or Kyrgystan. If we like Him are willing to die (and He does not make it clear whether He will be asking for a physical death – as He soon asked of Peter, or a spiritual death – as Paul would later write, "I die daily."

He says, "but if it dies, it produces many seeds." It multiplies into many seeds, which also have the opportunity to die and multiply.

*Jesus died to produce the Evangel.*

*Those that truly follow Him are willing to die to produce the Evangelization.*

Verse 25 shows us that it really is about us too, and it encourages us towards this strange goal of dying:

**The man who loves his life will ruin it.**

**...while the man who hates his live in this world will keep it (abundantly) on into eternal life.**

This is not a works salvation passage, it tells us what we already know: self-centeredness wrecks your life, and loving the Lord yields abundant life both now and even into an eternal reward. He is saying that you hurt yourself if you love yourself, and if you put

others' needs above your own you gain riches in eternity. So we need to "hate our lives," be like a "kernel of wheat that falls to the ground," and we will "produce many seed," we will have a rich and productive Kingdom experience!

The Greek word translated **ruin** here is ἀπόλλυμι/*apollumi*. Although it can be used of eternal **ruin** in damnation (as in Matthew 10:28 and James 4:12), it more commonly simply means **ruin**, as for instance with the ruined wineskins in Matthew 9:17.

Verse 26 reaffirms that the dying that has to happen is not only the Lord's, but ours as well:

**Whoever serves Me must follow Me.**

If you want to serve Him, you have to follow Him in His footsteps, and be ready to die. Be a seed like He was a seed, falling and dying to produce many seeds. This is in accord with what He said: "As the Father sent Me (even to die), so send I you (and I will be asking you to die for Me, one way or another).

Verse 26 continues:

"and where I am My servant also will be." What a great reward for being a grain that falls into the obscure soil and dies: being with Him!

Rewards continue in the rest of the verse:

"My Father will honor the one who serves Me."

Again, what a great reward for being willing to fall to the soil and die.

There are three rewards here in this brief passage:

1. abundant Life into eternity
2. being with Jesus
3. being honored by the Father

So in this strange response to the Greeks' request we see that in order for all the Greeks, the Romans, the Franks, the Indians, and the Filipinos to really see Jesus, He must die to produce the Evangel, and His followers, His servants, must die to produce the Evangelization.

Thus He and we will produce many seeds, some of whom will also fall and die, and produce many seeds.

Rather than ruining our lives (which is what we think we will do if we fall to the soil and die), we will be honored by the Father, with the Son, and fully and abundantly enjoy life in eternity.

When we think of the missions work that has happened before us, we see so many servants of the Lord, so many of His followers, dying to themselves, and perhaps physically dying as martyrs.

Flowers are beautiful, fruit is tasty, but seeds are forgotten, they just fall somewhere into the soil and "die."

Likewise in the lives of young missionary candidates, people, especially their parents and their friends, look at them and urge them to stay, to be productive members of society (i.e. make lots of money and have lots of fun), but do not just fall to the ground in some obscure corner of the earth. If they listen to that plea, they ruin their lives. But many have chosen to believe Jesus, to be like Him, to fall to the soil and die. Lots of pain, lots of loss. And lots of seeds have been produced from their willingness to “share in the sufferings of Christ” (Philippians 3:10), to “fulfill in the flesh what is lacking in the affliction of Christ for His body” (Colossians 1:24).

Young or old, we are called to follow in Christ’s footsteps, with His understanding of what glory and humility are all about. What appears to be a strange answer from Jesus is actually a glimpse into His missionary heart. This interpretation is confirmed by verse 32, which says, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”

**12:27 “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.**

Gethsemane is not mentioned in John, but the struggle the Lord went through there is touched upon here.

**12:28 Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.”**

The Father's response here is similar to His response at the baptism of the Lord and also at the transfiguration of the Lord, neither of which is reported by John.

**12:29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.**

**12:30 Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine.**

**12:31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.**

Jewish and Roman leaders would think they were judging Him, but in fact He was judging the **world**. The expression **driven out** here is difficult. It might refer to the same thing that Revelation 12:9 refers to.

**12:32 But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”**

The expression **all men** here can mean “all kinds of men” in Greek. Again we see a reference to the global nature of the plan of God. His plan includes, but is not limited to, the Jews. It includes people from **all** ethnic groups.

The idea of being **lifted up** sounds like it refers to an exaltation, but ironically it refers to the Cross. The irony, however, continues, because the Cross is in fact a point of great glory for the Lord Jesus, because there on the Cross He has completed the task which the Father sent Him to accomplish. He exults in that accomplishment. As they lift Him up to great dishonor, to a horrific and humiliating death, He is exalted as the Obedient One, that declares God’s love and holiness – 3:14; 8:28; and 12:32-33. That one ironic “word play” on **lifted up** sums up a great deal of the theology that John’s Gospel teaches us, which is all about the glory that He sought in obediently doing the humble task that the Father sent Him to do.

**12:33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.**

Again we have an example of a helpful explanation by John.

**12:34 The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?”**

As they thought of their coming Messiah, they preferred not to consider Isaiah 53.

**12:35 Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going.**

The Lord is telling them that they should take advantage of His brief and soon ending presence with them.

**12:36 Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.**

Here the Lord Jesus is imploring them to end their rebellion and turn to Him.

#### **D. Theology of Unbelief 12:37-50**

12:37-50 gives John's and Jesus' summary of faith and unbelief among the Jews. Jesus also again emphasizes that whatever He says is just what the Father has told Him to say. With that this section closes. The public ministry of Jesus is over, and He will spend all the time He has left before His arrest with His disciples and in prayer. This section closes with both John and Jesus repeating the contrast between those that have accepted Him and those that have rejected Him.

### **IV. Jesus' Self-Disclosure in His Cross and Exaltation 13:1-20:31**

The effort to bring Sign and Word to the nation so that many would believe on Him now ends. He spends no more time with crowds, He is with His disciples. The theme of His death and resurrection becomes more and more clear in His words to them.

#### **A. The "Last Supper" 13:1-30**

The setting here is the Last Supper, but John does not write much about what the Synoptics cover. They emphasize the Last Supper, which is hardly mentioned by John. John gives teachings that Jesus spoke in that setting, teachings which are not mentioned in the Synoptics.

##### **1. Jesus washes the feet of the disciples (13:1-17)**

This event happened as Friday was just about to begin. That Friday was the Passover, the 15th of the month of Nisan. (Remember the day begins at sundown according to Jewish reckoning.)

There are seven verses in the Gospel of John (13:1, 29; 18:28; 19:14, 31, 36, and 42) that seem to make that timing impossible, but we will see that they are actually consistent with this timing.

Carson (pg. 457) describes some interpretations that make it so that Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover at the same time as some Jews, *and* Jesus was crucified (as the Passover Lamb of God) at the same time that the Passover lambs of other Jews were being sacrificed. This is an appealing interpretation, but unfortunately it is based on very thin historical evidence: a third century Greek document that argues about certain fasting procedures. It also requires that the Sadducees would allow the Essenes to sacrifice their lambs at the temple (which the Sadducees controlled), according to the supposed Essene calendar (which the Sadducees rejected). Even though this idea is appealing to us as Evangelicals, the truth is the most appealing, let's pursue it!

So it is almost, but not yet, sundown. The Passover has been prepared, and it is almost time to get to the table and eat it. But, there is one thing that has been overlooked. None of the disciples have had the humility to wash the feet of the others. Usually that would have been done by a slave, or the lowest of domestic help (remember that with all the animals around, sandaled feet would be very soiled after walking in the streets of an ancient city), but it seems that no slave had been provided with the room.

This lack gives the Lord the opportunity to teach two important lessons: 1) spiritual cleanness – evangelism in verses 8-10, and 2) humility – discipleship in verses 12-17. Both point to the Cross.

The towel becomes like the Cross: both bring cleansing, both are a model of humility.

Thus it is appropriate that the foot-washing be the transition point between the evangelism of chapters 1-12, and the humility/discipleship of chapter 13 and beyond.

### 13:1 **It was just before the Passover Feast....**

This expression means that it was about sundown, and in a moment it would be Friday, Passover.

Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Compare this with 12:23, and also 2:4 and 7:8.

13:2 It is interesting that the name of Judas would be mentioned here. Perhaps to remind us that Jesus even washed the feet of His betrayer.

### 13:3 **Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God....**

Jesus had no doubt about His position in God, so that made humble obedience possible. Do we understand our position in Christ? If we really do, there will be no task too humble for us, we will never need to guard our dignity or status.

### 13:4 **...wrapped a towel around His waist....**

This "towel" was actually a long cloth that would be worn by slaves as clothing. It was long enough that there was extra cloth that the slave would have to use for his work, in this case, drying feet. Slaves were not given the dignity of having clothes they could try to keep neat looking, and separate towels to use for cleaning. The slave's clothing had extra length to it for that, and he was not expected to object!

That is the "towel" that Jesus put on. He put on slave's clothing.

13:5 **...began to wash His disciples' feet...**

This was shocking and confusing to the disciples. Some Jews felt that the work of foot-washing was so low that not even a Jewish slave should ever have to do it, only a foreign slave! It was so low that it was only appropriate for foreign slaves, girls, or children, but no male adult Jew, slave or not, should be required to **wash feet**.

See the extraordinary humility of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25:41. Also, there is a story about Rabbi Ishmael coming home from worship. His mother wants to wash his feet, but he refuses her, because it is too lowly a task. His mother feels that it is an honor to wash a rabbi's feet, and takes the case to an assembly of rabbis! (Carson, pg. 462)

We should *not* say that Jesus was able to do this humble thing *even though* He is God. There is nothing about being God that contradicts humility, if you properly define humility, which is the attitude that puts the interests of others ahead of our own interests.

13:6 **Peter.. "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"**

Perhaps the others were silenced in their confusion, but Peter never seems to be silenced in confusion.

13:8 **"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."**

Peter rejects Jesus' explanation, and the double negative (οὐ μὴ/ou mē) in his refusal makes it a very forceful refusal. He does not yet understand that the humility of the towel (and the humility of the Cross) are in great harmony with the glory of the Messiah.

But the Lord cannot compromise with Peter. The towel is a symbol of the Cross, and as such it cannot be rejected without destroying the possibility of fellowship between them. Here in the second half of 13:8 the foot-washing seems to refer to salvation.

13:9 Peter's response is again overly enthusiastic.

13:10 **Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you."**

Jesus shifts the metaphor. In verse 8 the foot-washing seems to have meant gaining eternal forgiveness, gaining eternal life; but in verse 10 foot-washing takes on the meaning of obtaining daily forgiveness, as in 1 John 1:7-9. Here in verse 10 gaining eternal forgiveness, gaining eternal life, is symbolized by the idea of a **bath**.

If we have had a **bath**, we are **clean**. If we have once received Jesus as our Savior, we are forgiven forever. If after that **bath** we get our hands or feet dirty, we need to wash up before having a meal with friends. If we who have received Jesus as our Savior sin, we need to confess that sin in order to enjoy daily fellowship with Him.

They all would have been glad to receive this assurance that they were **clean**. **Jesus** wanted to assure them that they were, but there was one at the table that was not. He

would be dealt with in verses 18-30. Until then, the Lord is not clear about the betrayer's identity.

**13:11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.**

None of this happens outside God's sovereignty. None of it happens as a surprise to Jesus or to God.

**13:12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.**

At this point Jesus shifts totally to discipleship. So little has been said up to now about this theme, perhaps so that it would not muddy the clear evangelistic water of chapters 1-12. The closest He got to discipleship before this might be in chapters 4:32-38, 8:30-32; and 12:25-26.

**13:14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.**

This is not meant to become a church liturgy, but an attitude of heart that constantly works itself out into service. It is not enough to wash a few feet, and then ignore the litter on the floor, thinking that picking it up is the work of the cleaning staff!

**John 13:15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.**

**John 13:16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.**

**John 13:17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.**

Having shown them that the foot-washing is a symbol of the Cross and the salvation it provides, He also shows them that it is a symbol of humility, and an unavoidable part of being a follower of Jesus, a disciple.

In all the "if" statements like this in John (that is, 8:31; 13:17, 35; 14:15; 15:7, 10, and 14), the Lord Jesus uses vocabulary and grammar (the **if** is ἐάν/*ean* rather than εἰ/*ei*, and the verb of the "if" clause (**do**) is in the Subjunctive Mood) that never gives a prediction that they *shall do* the things He is asking of them. He says in various places that they are eternally secure in their salvation, but He never says that they shall certainly obey Him. They and we may fail to **do** the things He is asking of us, but He shall not fail to save us.

### **Jesus Tells of His Betrayal (13:18-30)**

Jesus clearly tells them about His betrayal ahead of time so that their faith will not be crushed, and so that they understand the divine plan. It would be too easy to think that man or devil had gotten the upper hand, but with these words, that is clearly not the case. Again, John is including statements that "guard" the Lord's sovereignty.

**John 13:18 "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'"**

This quote from Psalm 41:10 is actually difficult to interpret, but in broad terms it is easy enough to understand: He will be attacked by a friend.

John 13:19 **“I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He.**

Again, John likes to make very sure that his readers understand that the Cross did not surprise the Lord.

John 13:20 **I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.”**

There is a strong contrast between the betrayer and those that are sent by Jesus. Again, there is a strong connection between the Father and the Son, the One who Sent and the One Sent.

John 13:21 **After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, “I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.”**

These words are much more clear than any John has recorded so far about the betrayal.

John 13:22 **His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant.**

John 13:23 **One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him.**

At important meals like this, the Jews reclined at the table, which was, strangely enough, a Greek tradition. (Otherwise they sat on chairs.) It seems as though **Jesus**, in the place of honor, **reclining** on His left elbow (thus able to eat with His right hand), was facing John. It also seems like, but is harder to prove, that Judas was facing **Jesus** (see Matthew 26:25). That would mean that **Jesus** was in the position of honor, Judas was in the second place, and John in the third place.

John 13:24 **Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, “Ask him which one he means.”**

It would be easy for John to quietly ask the question, by just leaning back.

John 13:25 **Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?”**

John 13:26 **Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon.**

If John was in fact in the third place, it would be very easy for **Jesus** to just lean forward a bit and whisper into John's ear, and nobody might even notice.

It was the privilege of the one seated in the place of honor to take special morsels of food like that and give them to whomever they wanted, as an honor to that person.

13:27 **As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. “What you are about to do, do quickly,” Jesus told him,**

Perhaps He said **quickly** so that John would not have time to figure it out, and then tell Peter. Note that the Lord did not command **Judas** to go out and betray Him. **Judas** would never be able to say that he was commanded to do what he did.

John 13:28 **but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him.**

John could have worked it out if he had been a fast thinking man of action, but it was John that knew the secret meaning of the bread that had been handed to Judas, not Peter!

John 13:29 **Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor.**

John 13:30 **As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.** Jesus does not give the identity of the betrayer. Maybe this was so that Peter would not go over and run him through with his sword! And yet He spoke clearly enough so that in hindsight they will know that He knew perfectly well that it was Judas! This was a remarkable way to accomplish His purposes, which seem to have included:

- to honor Judas, giving him one last chance to repent
- to answer John
- to show the disciples and the readers that He was in complete control
- to do all that without giving Peter an opportunity to prevent Judas from betraying Him

### **B. The farewell discourse: part one 13:31–14:31**

The Old Testament has several farewell discourses, including Genesis 49; Joshua 22-24; 1 Chronicles 28-29, and in a sense, all of the book of Deuteronomy.

#### **1. Jesus Foretells Peter's Denial (13:31-38)**

13:31 **When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him.**

The Lord says **Now**, because by sending Judas out, everything is set in motion for His betray, crucifixion, and death. The Cross is Jesus' glory because it represents total obedience, as in clear from 17:4. **God is glorified in** Christ at the Cross because the Cross shows how great His love and justice are.

John 13:32 **If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.**

This seems to be a promise of Christ's resurrection.

John 13:33 **"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.**

At the head of the Passover table, Jesus takes the role of the head of the household, and refers to the disciples as "little children," the diminutive and plural form of the normal word for child. It is a form that a father would use of his own children, and is only used by John in the New Testament. In 7:34 He says something similar to the Jews.

13:34 **"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**

This **new command** had already been given in the Old Testament, but it is **new** because of the standard of **love**. His **love** is the standard by which their **love** must be measured, and by which our **love** must be measured.

13:35 **By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."**

The overall theme that the Lord is teaching on is how to be His disciple.

13:36 **Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later."**

It seems as though Jesus wants to continue in the theme of **love**, but Peter has a problem, so that has to be dealt with before Jesus can return to this theme in 15:9-16.

Jesus' answer is no more clear, but a bit more gentle to **Peter**. The additional comment that he will **follow later** is elaborated upon in 21:18-19, where his death is foretold. It is not the right time to tell **Peter** that he too will die by crucifixion.

13:37 **Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."**

Peter's attitude of surrender is strong, but it is not mature. He is sure of himself, but not sure of Jesus. He does not yet trust Him, or trust that what He is saying is what should happen.

In saying **I will lay down my life for you**, **Peter** is taking the words that were spoken of the Good Shepherd (10:11), and applying them to himself!

13:38 **Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!"**

Jesus repeats Peter's assertion, making it all the more serious. In 18:27 this prophecy will be fulfilled.

## 2. The Promise of the Place to which Jesus is Going (14:1-4)

After predicting both Judas' and Peter's failures, Jesus can move into the teachings He needs to give them before He is betrayed. Chapter 14-16 are primarily Jesus' words, with a few questions and requests from the disciples.

14:1 **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."**

The Lord's words about the betrayal, and Peter's denial, and His departure must have been hard for the disciples to hear. It must have felt like the whole world was falling apart, especially since until that evening they had convinced themselves that they were about to become the reigning Messiah's ruling court. They faced the choice of faith or fear. There is no common ground between the two.

The command to believe is repeated and expanded upon in verses 11-13, and in 16:27-33.

He was asking them to believe in Him, even though He was about to be betrayed by His friend, convicted in several courts, and crucified.

The Greek form of the word **trust** used here can be used for a command, a statement, or even a question, so there are several possibilities for the translation, but since the Lord has told them not to be troubled, the translation above (or the translation "You trust in God; trust also in Me") would make the most sense. In any case there is a striking parallel between faith in the Lord and faith in God.

**14:2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.**

These words were a comfort to the disciples, and were meant to make it easier for them not to be afraid, but instead to trust Him. He is challenging them to believe, He is demanding faith from them.

There are two possibilities about what He meant. Possibly He meant that He was actually literally going to heaven to build a **place** for them, but it seems more likely that He means that His very going (that is, His death, resurrection, and ascension) is what makes their **place** with God.

**14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.**

This work of His is because He loves them, and will not leave them abandoned.

**14:4 You know the way to the place where I am going."**

This sentence seems like it was meant to draw questions from them.

**14:5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"**

Certainly it did draw a question from Thomas. If it is said that he should not argue with the Lord, it can also be said that at least he was honest with his lack of understanding!

**14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.**

Although we normally read this verse as an evangelistic verse, its location in the Gospel of John, well after the transition in chapter 13, and its use as an answer to Thomas, suggests that it is a verse for discipleship. When we as believers feel we no longer know how to move forward, as was the case for Thomas and the others at that point, we need only understand that **Jesus is the way and the truth and the life**. All we really need to know is that **Jesus is the way**.

This is of course another of the seven "I Am" statements of John. He is **the Way**. Even though it is in the context of a discipleship conversation, it is also almost a summary of the evangelistic message of chapters 1-12. (See especially 1:4, 14, 18; 3:15; 5:19, 26; 8:29; 11:25 and 20:28.) He is **the Way** to God. It is not so much that He can show you **the way**, but He is **the Way**.

He is **the Truth**. To follow that **Way**, one must know that He is **the Truth**.

He is **the Life**. He does not just provide **life**, He is **Life**. That which we thought was **life**, before we knew Him, was purely imitation. Note Colossians 3:4, "When Christ – who is our life – is revealed, then you also with Him will be revealed in glory."

Receiving these things required faith from the disciples. The One who claims to be **the Way** is about to be nailed to a Roman Cross. The One who claims to be **the Truth** is about to be crushed by those that love lies. The One who claims to be **the Life** is about to die.

The expression **no one** is emphatic. There is **no** other Savior, **no** other doctrine or duty or effort that will bring a man to **the Father**.

**14:7 If you really knew Me, you would know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him."**

Jesus scolds the disciples whom He loves, for their lack of understanding. He has been telling them, but they have not understood. This is followed by the astounding statement that they have **seen** the **Father**. Because they have seen Jesus, they have seen the Father.

**14:8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."**

Philip is even more daring than Moses was when Moses said, "Show me your glory" in Exodus 33:18.

**14:9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"**

The "seed thought" in the Introduction, "He has made Him known," is being developed here.

**Philip** has known **Jesus**, in one sense, since chapter 1:43. Is it possible to detect a note of sadness in the Lord's voice? The statement is so simple, yet so profound: **Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father**. This is even stronger than 1:18, that Jesus demonstrates the Father. The mystery of the Triune God underlies these statements, certainly the very core nature of God Himself is beyond our understanding, yet Jesus gives us hints here so that we can understand as much as possible about His identity.

**14:10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me? The words I say to you are not just My own. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, who is doing his work.**

This chapter was opened with the words "Believe in God, believe also in Me." The key to their success, the key to peace, is faith in Christ as the One who has this relationship with God. Without such faith it will be impossible to be a disciple, and it will be impossible to have the peace He wants them to have.

The expression **I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me** is certainly hard to understand, but it very strongly suggests that the Lord and **the Father** are one.

**14:11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.**

This should be compared with Jesus' words to Thomas in chapter 20:27 and verse 29. Look also at 1:50; 2:23-25; 4:48; 6:26; and 10:37-38. The limited value of the signs is obvious in chapter 11:45-46, where some saw the resurrection of Lazarus and believed, but some others saw the same thing and just reported it to Jesus' enemies.

This can be summarized in three possibilities: one is that a person believe on the basis of words, and this is the most valued. Two, a person believes because of a sign. Three, a person looks for Jesus just to enjoy the benefit of the signs.

It might also be helpful to note that in John there is no concept of a faith that saves as opposed to a faith that does not save. That is not a valid category for John. Instead, in John, Jesus is concerned that our faith have the best possible source – His word, but faith because of signs is also saving faith, as is made clear enough in this verse, 14:11.

**14:12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.**

The expression **I tell you the truth** is literally "amen amen."

This passage, especially verses 1, 10, and 11, have been urging the disciples (and us, the readers) to greater **faith**. This passage gives one of the benefits of that increased **faith**. Faith is the way to the **greater things** of this verse. But what are those **greater things**? The Acts of the Apostles shows the apostles doing the works the Lord had done, but not apparently *greater* works. So is this verse speaking about **greater** works as in a **greater** number of works, rather than works which are more amazing? That is what Leon Morris says in his commentary. Carson disagrees, saying that a **greater** number of "works" is no big deal, since there were more of them, and they had more years to do them in. He thinks the works done by believers after the resurrection are **greater** because they are in the new era, the era of the risen Christ. Or is Jesus referring to the discipling of the (pagan) nations, the growth of the Body of Christ among the gentile nations?

**14:13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.**

This is an elaboration of the promise of verse 12. We must not let the prayer "in Jesus' name" become a Christian mantra. A prayer that is not asked in accord with Jesus' character will get no better hearing from God just because we add "in Jesus' name" to the end of it! We need to join in His work, with His heart and character, and we need to pray all through that work.

**14:14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.**

This will also be said in 15:7, 16; 16:23, and 24.

This verse is parallel to the next verse. Literally:

If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

If you love me, you will keep My commands.

Verse 14 emphasizes Jesus answering prayers.

Verse 15 emphasizes our heart responsibility.

The one that loves Jesus, prays in His name, because he is so wrapped up in Jesus, that he has less concern for his own human perspective.

In both verse 14 and verse 15, the Greek that is used does not imply any certainty at all that we will indeed pray in His **name**, or love Him.

#### 4. Jesus will go, and the Spirit of Truth will come (14:15-31)

Several themes are repeated in this passage:

- Those that love Him obey Him (verses 15, 21, 23, 24).
- Even though Jesus is leaving, they will have a special relationship with the Spirit (verses 16-17 and 25-26).
- They (and the world!) will know of the unity of Jesus with the Father (verses 20, 23-24, 28, and 31).
- They are commanded to have peace, and believe (verses 27 and 29).

14:15 **"If you love me, you will obey what I command.**

In short, we need to work on loving Him, and the obeying will follow easily!

Note the comments in the discussion on 13:17 concerning the grammar of this verse.

1 John 4:20 says, "If someone says, I love God, and he hates his brother, then he is a liar..." The same point is made in verses 21, 23, and 24. This verse should not be separated from its context. The Lord is discussing doing those greater works. Those works will only be accomplished by those that love and obey Jesus.

14:16 **And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever –**

This promise is in the context of a description of how things will work in the New Age, the Age that would dawn, in one sense, in a few weeks. From our side, love and obedience; from Jesus' side, a request to the Father; and from the Father, the Spirit sent to help us.

This word **Counselor** (Paraklete) refers to a friend who comes to help in a court. In that era that might not have been a professional lawyer, but he would be a very welcome help! (The translation "Comforter" comes from an early English translation, by Wycliffe. Although that translation may be more appealing, it is simply not as accurate as **Counselor**.)

14:17 **the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.** Jesus is the **Truth**, and **the Spirit**, since He comes to speak of Jesus, is the **Spirit of Truth**.

14:18 **I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.**

They certainly feel abandoned. Jesus comforts them, but there are three possible understandings of what He meant in verses 18 and 19:

1) Perhaps He is referring to the coming of the Spirit, who was mentioned in verses 16-17.

2) Perhaps He is referring to the Second Coming, but the expression "before long" in verse 19 makes this difficult.

3) More likely He is referring to His return after the resurrection. This also accords well with 16:16-30

**14:19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.**

He will return for a short time to comfort them Himself, but His enemies will not see Him.

**14:20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.**

There are several verses in John like this, that describe when their understanding will grow:

- when He is glorified (12:16)
- when the Paraklete comes (16:12-15)
- when He is raised from the dead (2:22)

**14:21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."**

This verse is not about every one that is born again, it is about every born-again person that **obeys** Jesus' commands. They will experience this special **love** and insight into Jesus' very nature. This special walk of obedience and its blessings are also hinted at in Ephesians 5:14.

The Greek word ἀγαπάω/*agapaō* is used here four times, but it is not unconditional **love**. Clearly to receive from **the Father** the ἀγάπη/*agapē* love described here, one has to obey the Lord's **commands**.

In 10:17 we read about a kind of love that the Father has for the Son that is because of the Son's obedience. Note the discussion of this verb there. It seems here that there is a love like that available for us. God has unconditional love for us, but there is, according to this verse, some love that is conditional as well.

**14:22 Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"**

This disciple cannot understand how the coming of the Messiah could be unseen by the world, because his ideas about that event were shaped by passages like Daniel 7:13-14 and 7:26-27. That same attitude is visible in the disciples' words in Acts 1:8. They were all expecting the Messianic Kingdom with all its glory and political power. They want Him to **show** Himself **to the world** *as king*.

The question of a disciple becomes a stepping stone for further teaching, as in 14:5-6 and verses 8-9.

(This verse mentions two of the seven men in the New Testament that are named **Judas**, or in Hebrew, Judah.)

**14:23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.**

Their misunderstanding about how and when the Messiah will show Himself to the world does not warrant the Lord's attention right now. He wants to focus their attention on a related but greater issue, that is, how a person can experience God's **love** and presence. (**Jesus** does this by just ignoring the words "and not to the world," and He gives the answer, "Because of love!") Again, it should be noted that this indwelling is not because of grace, but because of a disciple's **love** and obedience. Our salvation is purely and totally by grace through faith (with nothing added, not baptism, not walking down the aisle of a church building, not church attendance), but there are other things in our relationship with God besides salvation. Obedience brings more blessings upon the blessings of salvation. And yes, some people are more obedient than others, and are receiving more of those blessings. In terms of entrance, the Kingdom of God is egalitarian (all enter by the same grace, and our works or social status are irrelevant), but in terms of status in the Kingdom, it is not egalitarian. This verse does not describe a situation in which every believer enjoys the same intimacy with Christ and with God.

**14:24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.**

Part of verse 23 is repeated in a negative form.

**14:25 "All this I have spoken while still with you.**

**14:26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.**

His departure will not end the teaching process the disciples are in.

Carson (pg. 504), Bruce (pg. 305), and Beasley-Murray (pp. 283-84) believe that the word **you** in these two verses refers to the eleven disciples. In the Gospel of John we have read many times about how they failed to understand. The accurate understanding they will receive, as mentioned in 2:22 and 20:9, is a part of the fulfillment of this verse. The special revealing work of the **Spirit** to them assures us that the New Testament is their perfect testimony of Christ, a perfect document. Certainly the **you** of verse 25 refers to the eleven, and it is hard to see how that word **you** can shift in the very next verse to mean "all believers." If so, then the same thing probably applies to the other passages that promise the special work of the Spirit for the disciples, which are 14:16-17; 15:26; and 16:7. If so, these do not represent promises of new revelation to disciples in future generations.

The reader should evaluate whether he accepts the reasoning that Carson, Bruce, and Beasley-Murray put forth, which is:

The eleven disciples were uniquely qualified as eye-witnesses, as is clear in 15:27.

Therefore He could say that the Spirit would *remind* them **of everything I have said to you** (14:26). In 16:12 He says that despite their present inability to understand, the Spirit of Truth will guide them into all truth. This suggests that these promises were specifically given to those eleven men to make their testimony (a major theme in John) perfect and effective. We are among those that benefit from all this as we read the Gospel of John. The application of these passages in our lives would therefore be indirect, rather than direct.

14:27 **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.**

The Paraklete is coming, they will have **peace**. **Peace** is a special characteristic of the Kingdom of God, as in Isaiah 9:6-7; 52:7; 54:13; 57:19; Ezekiel 37:26; and Haggai 2:10. Because of the Presence of the Future, even now we can have **peace**, as this verse, as well as others like Acts 10:36; Romans 1:7; 5:1; and 14:17 clearly teaches.

**Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid** is a command, not a suggestion, and when we worry and we let our **hearts be afraid**, we are in violation of this command. The story of the Vine and the Branches in the next chapter will help us avoid that sin.

14:28 **"You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.**

He has been comforting them, but here He also scolds them a bit. They are thinking of their pain, not His glory.

How is it that **the Father is greater** than the Son? Is that not in contradiction to 1:1, 18; 5:16-18; 10:30; and 20:28? Actually it is in harmony with the dependence of the Son upon **the Father**, as in 1:3-4, 14, 18; 3:17; 4:34; 5:19-30; 8:29; and 12:48-49. A child may say of his **father** that his **father is greater** than he is, and this is true, as far as role is concerned, but as far as basic nature, a **father** and a son are of the same nature. They are not angels, nor are they animals. They are of an equal nature.

The disciples should be **glad** for Him, because He is about to be freed from the emptying of Philippians 2:6-8, and Philippians 2:9-11 is about to be fulfilled.

14:29 **I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.**

He knows how hard the events of the next few hours will be on them, so He repeats what He said in 13:19, because He really wants them to endure the coming events with faith.

14:30 **I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me,**

Here again John includes statements that guard the Lord's omnipotence.

The Lord realizes that He only has a little more time to help them, to prepare them for His betrayal, trial, crucifixion, and burial. He feels the same time pressure in 14:25 and 16:12.

Jesus emphasizes that the devil has no power over Him. He wants them to understand that He is allowing Himself to be crucified because He wants to offer Himself as the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the whole world. This theme, that Jesus is in control, will appear several times during the arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

14:31 **but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. Come now; let us leave.**

When people of **the world** believe in Jesus, they believe that He has come to earth and done exactly what His **Father** has **commanded** Him. This is the obedience of the Son that is so common a theme in the Gospel of John.

The expression, **Come now; let us leave** fits very well with what Jesus has been saying, it is time to let the arrest happen. However, this expression is a bit difficult because He says **let us leave**, but do they **leave**? His talk with them goes on unabated in chapter 15 and 16, and then there is the prayer of chapter 17, after which 18:1 says they left and crossed the Kidron. Here are the possibilities:

1) They did **leave** at the end of ch 14, and so ch 15-17 are spoken while they make their way towards the Kidron. If so, 18:1 refers to leaving the walled city, or the temple grounds. In that case the teachings of the vine and the branches are enhanced by the grapevines they see as they walk along, or by the large carving of a grapevine above the main entrance to the temple. (According to Josephus, Tacitus, and the Mishnah, the bunches of grapes in that carving were as tall as a man!) Mark 2:23-28 and Luke 24:13-31 record some of Jesus' teaching that He gave as He walked.

2) Even though Jesus said, **Come now; let us leave**, they did not **leave** immediately. They are delayed, perhaps just because it takes a while for that many people to get going, perhaps because their attention was drawn away from getting ready, and towards the teaching that the Lord was giving. Perhaps Jesus, in His love for them, decided to give up prayer time in order to give them more attention. If indeed they did not **leave** at this point, then the leaving mentioned in 18:1 is from the Upper Room.

Bible scholars that do not accept the Bible as the Word of God sometimes suggest that these passages be rearranged so that the last verse of chapter 14 is after the prayer of chapter 17. In doing so they demonstrate that they believe their own intellect is superior to the one who wrote the Gospel of John.

### **C. The farewell discourse: part two 15:1-16:33**

#### **1. The Vine and the Branches (15:1-16)**

After the Lord brought the woman at the well to faith, He told the disciples that He had "bread which they did not know," which was to do the will of His Father. He has not talked much about their doing God's will up to this point, but in this passage He will explain about how they need a close personal relationship with Him in order to do the will of God, and have much "fruit."

Likewise in 8:31-32 He said, "If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." At that time the situation did not allow further explanation, but now in these last few moments of peace and calm He will explain to them what it means to abide in Him.

The relationship of the grapevine and the branches of that vine provide a picture which the Lord uses to teach about the relationship they should have with Him.

Passages like Numbers 13:20-24 and Deuteronomy 6:11 remind us that grapevines were common in Israel, and the care they needed was understood at most every level of society. 1 Kings 4:25 says, "During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree." Prior to battle Deuteronomy 20:6 instructs the officers to ask their soldiers, "Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else enjoy it." The mountains of Judea were not conducive to growing wheat, but vineyards grew well there, and in fact they still do grow well there. Today the remains of wine presses can still be seen, where they were carved into the rock. In fact, there is one about ten or fifteen meters from the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem.

In February or March, branches that will not be able to bear fruit are pruned off. Sometimes this pruning is so drastic that all that remains is the main vine, and all the branches are thrown away. In August, after the leaves have appeared, the second phase of the pruning happens: the little sprouts are cut off, so that the sap, which brings the fruit, will only flow into the fruit bearing branches, and not waste its energy on mere leaves, which might be attractive, but do not contribute to fruit bearing.

### Overview of 15:1-8

Jesus is the Vine. We are the branches. Some branches do not bear fruit. They are lifted up (verse 2a) and they are worthless (verses 6-7). Some branches do bear fruit. They are pruned (verse 2b). The difference between those that bear fruit and those that do not is all in remaining in Him and keeping His words in oneself (verse 7). This would simply be delighting in His grace, worshipping Him, meditating on His words. In Ephesian 3:18 the same idea is expressed with the idea of grasping the dimensions of His love, and in Revelation 2 the opposite idea is expressed as forsaking your first love. In Philippians we read the same idea in terms of finding our glory and our boast and our joy in the Lord Jesus.

#### 15:1 **"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.**

Jesus is the **True Vine**. Jeremiah 2:21; Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:2-6; Ezekiel 15:1-8; 17:5-10; and Psalm 80:9-16 describe Israel as the **vine** that does not bear fruit. The metaphor is used to describe Israel's failure, but Jesus is the **True** Israel.

#### 15:2 **He lifts up (αἵρω/airō) any branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.**

The word that the NIV translates "cuts off" (αἵρω/airō) literally means **lifts up**, and in none of the 101 times it is used in the New Testament does it mean "cut off." There is not one knife in the 97 verses that use that verb in the New Testament! These branches are "lifted up." Are they lifted up and thrown away, as are many other things that are lifted up, or are they lifted up and set in a better place? We will have to look at the context to answer that, but the verb itself simply does not tell us!

Who are these branches in Christ that are not bearing **fruit**? Are they people who have believed in Him, but because of sin, they have lost their salvation? No, salvation is not "lose-able" according to Romans 8:31-39. (The expression "nor anything else in all creation" would include the saved person himself, so even if a person, who is a part of creation, wants to separate himself from the love of God, he cannot, he is not able to do that according to Romans 8:39).

Or are they unsaved people? But the text says **every branch in Me**, so these branches, these people are "in Christ," making the idea that they are not really saved very difficult.

Somehow they are saved people that are not fruitful.

Once the metaphors are understood, it becomes clear that there are two possibilities for branches, according to whether or not they are fruitful. The fruitless ones are taken up, and the fruitful ones are pruned back. The explanation about the fruitless branches is continued in verse 6, but the fruitful vines are discussed more in verses 3-5.

The pruning of the fruitful vines is done on literal grapevine branches so that the strength of the plant, its sap, does not waste itself on leaves, but instead flows into **fruit**. It is easy to see how when we are "pruned," when we are disciplined, for instance, by the loss of a favorite possession, it is so that our life's energies will not waste themselves on what does not matter, but pour themselves into eternal fruit. Sometimes we may feel that we are being "pruned" too severely, we may cry out to God our objections, but that is what makes the pruning of the branches of a grapevine such a good illustration. If a person unskilled in working with grapevines watches a skilled worker prune back a grapevine so that it will be productive in the coming season, he will think the worker is actually just trying to kill the whole plant!

And so it is with us. Even though we understand that suffering perfects us, we object, telling our "vine worker" we will die!

So it is important for the fruitful Christian that is being "pruned" or disciplined to understand that he or she is not being judged because of sin, it is just to make him or her even more fruitful.

(Because the verb in verse 2 that is translated "cut off" really just means **lifts up**, some think that the verse is referring to the practice in modern vineyards of lifting up branches that have fallen off the supporting wire or trellis, cleaning the leaves, and gently placing them up higher where the sun will help them be fruitful. The problems with this understands are:

- This understanding ignores verse 6 which seems to say that those fruitless branches have become dry.
- This would make the situation of the fruitful branches painful, and the unfruitful branches pleasant!
- The habit of lifting unfruitful branches up, cleaning them and placing them in the sunniest places is a modern practice, and there is no ancient record of this being done.
- Even if they did lift up some unfruitful branches, the thing that always stands out in the care of grapevines is the pruning.)

15:3 **You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.**

The Lord is not scolding them, but encouraging them that they must always continue to grow in fruitfulness. Again, it is clear that they are believers and already possess eternal life. This is the first condition, the first requirement, for being fruitful!

15:4 **Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.** This is the second condition for being fruitful. There are four "theological" possibilities here:

1. It is possible for truly born-again people to live fruitless lives. If they do, they are not "remaining in Him." This expression in John speaks of "being in daily fellowship with Christ."
2. People that do not **remain** in Him are not saved and never have been, they have never had "saving faith."
3. This verse just speaks of a hypothetical case that really cannot be, because all that are truly saved will certainly remain in Him and be fruitful.
4. Those that did believe in Jesus, but that do not **remain** in Him, and thus are unfruitful, have lost their salvation.

These are the four logical possibilities. We can eliminate 4) above just because of the fact that the salvation which is not obtained by our actions likewise cannot be lost by our actions. If salvation must be held on to by our deeds, then it is in all practical senses a salvation of deeds/works, and not grace.

As we think about 2. and 3. above, look again at verse 2. He says that there are people *in Him* that are unfruitful. That simple statement contradicts 2. and 3., so we are left with 1.

The **vine** and its branches is a wonderful illustration of these truths, but at some point all illustrations break down. This one has one shortcoming, and that is that while a branch cannot make a personal decision to remain connected with the vine, we can make a personal decision to remain vitally connected with Jesus. In fact, that is what the whole passage is driving toward. Verses 1-3 are preparation, verses 5-8 give the development of the idea, but the command of verse 9 is the point of the passage: "remain in My love."

This verse, as well as verse 5 and verse 7 give some of the positive results of remaining in Jesus.

Other New Testament passages that give a similar teaching are: Ephesians 4:15-16; Colossians 2:6-7; 3:1-2; James 4:8; and Revelation 2:4-5.

15:5 **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.**

This is a summary of how to be fruitful. **Apart from Me** might refer to the unsaved, or to saved people that are not in rich daily fellowship with the Lord. In this context it is not likely that it refers to unsaved people. Jesus is with the Eleven, Judas is gone, and He is teaching them about living a fruitful life. Besides, it is pretty obvious that the unsaved can do nothing of spiritual value.

Jesus wants them to understand that their status as believers does not guarantee them fruitfulness.

15:6 **If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.**

Here the Lord returns to the idea of unfruitful branches. This second stage of pruning usually happens a few days before Passover, so it may be that as they walked from the Upper Room to the Kidron, they could see some of those fires still smoldering!

Some people, when they see **fire** in the Bible, automatically interpret it as the fires of hell. The careful student knows that just as not every lion in the Bible is Christ, so not all **fire** is about hell.

There are three ways of interpreting this verse:

1. It is about believers that let themselves become lukewarm in faith; they are saved, but their daily fellowship with the Lord has withered away, and so they are unfruitful. They have left their first love, they sin and they do not deal with that sin by confessing it to the Lord. So the Lord will discipline them. The discipline of the Lord is sometimes pictured as **fire**, but not the fires of hell (Psalm 79:5; 89:46; Isaiah 10:17-19; Jeremiah 4:4; 7:20; 15:14; and 17:27).
2. These people have to be thrown into hell, because although they seem to be in Christ, actually their faith is not real saving faith. Their lack of fruit proves that they do not have the right kind of faith, so they must go to the fires of hell.
3. They have to go into hell, because although they did get saved, they have since committed a sin too great to be forgiven. They lost their salvation.

We should reject 2) because the text is about people that were in Him but did not stay there, instead they wandered away, and we should reject 3) because there is no sin that is too great to be forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God.

If we do not bear fruit, we are "taken up" (vs. 2) and are *likened* to withered **branches** that are tossed into the fire. Saying that some people are as useless as withered **branches** bound for the fire is not the same as saying if you are not useful you are bound for hellfire. This is the fire of 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

11 For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,

13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.

15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

It is not the fires of hell. John 15:6 and 1 Corinthians 3:15 are very similar. These are fruitless but saved people, people that are "in Me" (verse 2).

But the thing that is stressed through the whole passage is abiding, remaining in Christ. Of course a grapevine branch cannot choose to abide, but we can! Keep well connected through prayer, and with the Word, and we can be like grapevine branches that bear lush fruit!

15:7 **If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.**

This is the life experience of those that are fruitful branches. As in 13:17, the **if** here is ἐάν/lean. See the comment on that verse. This is not at all a promise that those that have believed will **remain in** Him, or that His **words will remain in** them. However, it is a promise that *if* those conditions are met, prayers will be answered. This obedience is an important theme in this second half of the Gospel of John, as in 14:15, 21, and 31. Likewise answered prayer is a common theme, as in 14:13-14.

15:8 **This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.**

That obedient, fruitful life full of answered prayer glorifies God. Here the word **disciples** is used of people like this. In fact, discipleship has been the primary theme of this part of the Gospel of John.

15:9-16 is an explanation, with no figures of speech, of "remaining in Him." The Vine and the Branches metaphor is explained here.

15:9 **"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love.**

Although it is true that He will say, "As the Father sent Me, so I am sending you," but we are not Him, so this might seem completely unfair. It would seem that He had much better motivation to obey the command of **the Father** to go. However, that is not the case. The motivation that He had was that **the Father loved** Him, and we see here that in the same way, the Lord has **loved** us. So just as it is written, "As the Father sent Me, so I am sending you," so it is also written, **As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.** We have the same empowering and compelling **love** that He had.

So it is clear that the thing that is needful is to **remain in** that **love**. We were told to **remain in** the Vine, now we are told to **remain in** His **love**. This remaining in His **love** is the core secret of the life of a disciple. It is not hard work, it is not Bible study, it is not hours in prayer, it is not perfect church attendance, it is an ongoing delight in His **love**.

In Revelation 2 we can read the Lord's message to a congregation that has left its first love. They clearly did not **remain in** His **love**.

15:10 **If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.**

As in 13:17, the **if** here is ἐάν/lean. See the comment on that verse.

The **Father's command** was to go and become the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. He **obeyed** that **command**, and has remained **in His love**.

This is not simply saying "I love Jesus" and then going away and dishonoring Him. It is a heart attitude that is then reflected in an outpouring of gratitude-driven obedience.

15:11 **I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.**

The life that He has figuratively called the life of remaining in Him is a life of joy. If a person looks for **joy**, happiness, or contentment for himself, he will not succeed. If he

focuses on God's love, if he obeys Him out of thankfulness for that love, then his **joy** will **be complete**. The issue here is not about a supposed difference between **joy** and happiness, which are after all two *English* words, it is about what a person is seeking in life. Note Philippians 2:2, "complete my joy: be of one mind, having the same love, united in spirit, having the same concern..." and 1 John 1:4, "and these things we write to you, so that our joy might be complete."

**John 15:12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.**

The love we are called to have is a love of the highest quality, **as I have loved you**. The strength to obey His **command**, the strength to **love** one another **as** He has **loved** us comes from remaining in His love.

The word **command** here is singular, as it is in 13:34. In both these texts it is the **command** of all commands. In 14:15, 21; and 15:10 it is plural because it is more general.

**John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.**

This is the standard of **love** which was referred in in verse 12, "as I have loved you."

**John 15:14 You are my friends if you do what I command.**

This **if** is again ἐὰν/*ean*. See the comments on 13:17. There is no promise here that we will do what He commands, but if we do, we are His **friends** (φίλοι/*philo*). This is certainly about discipleship, not evangelism here. True disciples abide in His love, they obey, and they are His **friends**. This is not true of every believer, and it is not a requirement of salvation. Abraham was a believer. God was pleased with his obedience, and he was God's friend (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; and James 2:23). This concept was not brought up in chapters 1-12, because those are about evangelism. Here now we are learning about the life of a disciple. John does not mix these ideas up, and neither should we!

**John 15:15 I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.**

Although the NIV uses the word "servant" here, the word δοῦλος/*doulos* means **slave**. The contrast here is between **slave** and friend. **Slaves** are property to use, **friends** are people we enjoy being with, and with whom we have a common interest. In Roman law a slave was a *res*, a thing, not a person. There were Roman laws protecting **slaves**, but they were more like the laws to protect animals, not laws on human rights (Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, Zondervan, 1984, page 35).

**15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.**

As He continues to explain about being a disciple, He reminds them of what He has already told them in 6:70; 13:18; and 15:19, that they are chosen and **appointed** in order to they would bear lasting fruit. This is very much like what Paul says in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God

prepared in advance for us to do." Also, He again connects this with answered prayer, as in 15:7 and 16:23.

According to Carson (page 524) they are called and appointed in order to:

- 1) go
- 2) bear fruit
- 3) have fruit that remains
- 4) have their prayers answered

**15:17 This is my command: Love each other.**

15:18 – 16:4 The attitude and fruit described above will generate hostility from the world.

**15:18 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.**

This **if** is εἰ/ει, and does simply mean **if**. Whenever we see the **world** hating us, we must remember that it **hated** Him **first**.

**15:19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.**

**15:20 Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.**

This picks up the theme of all that opposition in those earlier chapters, and applies it to the disciples, and to us! This will be further developed at the very end of the Gospel of John, when the Lord Jesus tells Peter that he will be crucified.

These ifs are εἰ/ει. Many of them did persecute Him, and some of them did obey Him.

**15:21 They will treat you this way because of My name, for they do not know the One who sent Me.**

Again we see the strong connection between the **Sent** One and the One Who **Sent** Him. If we understand the Great Commission statement in the Gospel of John, with the related materials, correctly, missionaries today should have that same strong connection with the One Who Sends them.

**15:22-24 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.**

These words are very similar to what was said in 9:41. The disciples knew about that conflict and hatred. Here they would understand that they too will experience similarly unreasonable blindness and hatred.

15:25 **But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'**

This is also a fitting analysis of the conflict in chapter 9. The **Law** upon which they are hoping will testify against them. Passages like Psalm 35:19; 69:4; and 109:3 might be the ones referenced here.

15:26 **"When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.**

This great passage about the coming of the Holy **Spirit** is given in the context of persecution. They will have great help in their struggles. The close relationship of **the Father** and the Son make it no surprise that the **Spirit** will be sent by the Son from **the Father**.

15:27 **And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.**

They will have great help, but they will also have an obligation, a role. As eye-witnesses, they will have a special obligation to give witness to what they have seen. We know, because we have this Gospel in our hands, that they did that work well.

Chapter 14 emphasizes comfort, chapter 15 emphasizes exhortation, and chapter 16 emphasizes prophecy.

16:1 **"All this I have told you so that you will not go astray.**

Before that evening the disciples still expected that He, the Messiah, would very soon establish the long-awaited Messianic Kingdom.

John 16:2 **They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.**

The threat of being put out of the **synagogue** for following Jesus seems to have been active by 9:22. It is also mentioned in 12:42. According to Carson (page 531), one rabbi, in the *Midrash Rabbah*, commented on Numbers 25:6-13 saying, "...if someone sheds the blood of an evil person, it is as though he gives a sacrifice (to God)." That was not the common view, but the first century record shows that Jews persecuted Christians. It is to the shame of the Christian church that in the centuries that followed, that persecution was repaid time and time again.

According to ancient tradition, all the apostles except John died as martyrs.

John 16:3 **They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.**

Here there is a tight connection between not knowing **the Father** or the Son, and persecuting the followers of the Lord.

John 16:4 **I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you.**

This was meant to be a comfort for when the trouble did come. This was the time for them to hear this. Prior to this point, He has been the target, but soon they will become the targets.

John 16:5 **“Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’**

In 13:36 Peter did ask. Barrett (page 485) suggests that the Lord meant "right now none of you are asking." Carson (page 533) says that none of them were really asking. At any rate, it is clear that in their loss and grief they are thinking more of themselves than of His pain.

16:6 **Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief.**

They are not considering Him, or His purposes.

16:7 **But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.**

They have been told that they will be persecuted, they need to know they will have the Paraklete with them. Perhaps somehow the Holy Spirit cannot do His work if Jesus is still there, or perhaps Jesus means that He must go (to the Cross), and then the Paraklete can be sent to them.

16:8 **When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:**

This word **convict** can be translated "show," "shame," "prove," "insult," "accuse," or "refute," but it generally means "show a person his sin so that he will repent." In any case, these four verses are so densely written that they are very difficult to interpret. The following is Carson's understanding.

Verses 9-11 are an expansion of verse 8.

Jesus came to earth and forced a division in the world (15:20) by showing that its works are evil (7:7; 15:22). When Jesus leaves, and the Paraklete comes, the Paraklete continues Jesus' work of forcing this division, showing that the world does evil.

16:9 **in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;**

If individuals would **believe** in Him, they would no longer be part of the world, and their **sin** would be forgiven.

16:10 **in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;**

This is the only place where John's Gospel uses the term **righteousness**, and it is parallel to "sin" in verse 9, so He seems to be referring to their false **righteousness**. Jesus' ministry of exposing the false **righteousness** of the world must be continued by the Spirit, **because Jesus is going to the Father** so He will not be there to do that work Himself.

16:11 **and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.**

The Paraklete will convict the world of its terribly false **judgment**, because at the Cross the devil will be condemned, along with all the false **judgment** that he has encouraged all along.

16:12 **“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.**

Unlike some cults, the Christian faith does not hide any of its teachings. Our libraries are open, our books are published, and our church doors are open. However, some of our teachings will just not make sense to unbelievers. That is clear in the first half of the Gospel of John. Matthew 13:13 also tells us this. However, here in the second half of the Gospel of John, in the discipleship section, we learn that there are things that even believers might not be ready for yet. John 8:31-32 was spoken to believers, as were Hebrews 5:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 3:1-3.

Our teachings are not secret, but they might sound like nonsense to outsiders, or even to believers that are not mature, but still "mere infants in Christ."

**16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.**

However, much of their unreadiness was simply because the **Spirit** had not yet come. See the comments on these promises in the discussion of 14:26.

There is so much here about dependence within the Trinity. We should likewise be dependent upon the Lord and upon the **Spirit**. **He will tell you what is yet to come** could be about the end times, but if so, it is one of only a few such references in the Gospel of John.

**16:16 "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me."**

The first phrase certainly refers to His death. The second phrase seems to refer to His resurrection, but the many hints of His second coming in verses 19-28 suggest that the second coming may also be hinted at here. Perhaps the resurrection is a picture of the Second Coming. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 suggests this.

**16:21 A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.**

**Birth** pangs speak of the end of the age in Isaiah 21:2-3; 26:16-21; 66:7; Jeremiah 13:21; Hosea 13:13; Micah 4:9-10; and Matthew 24:8. However, here the **pain** of **birth** is about His death and resurrection, which are a foretaste of the Tribulation and the Second Coming.

#### **D. The prayer of Jesus 17:1-26**

This prayer is sometimes called the High Priestly Prayer. It is also a celebratory prayer of victory – He has won, He has overcome, He knows that He will succeed in obeying the Father. He will do what He was sent to earth to do. Like the prayer for Lazarus' resurrection, there is a strong element of teaching in this prayer too.

1. Verses 1-5 are about Himself.
2. Verses 6-19 are about the disciples.
3. Verses 20-26 are about all that will believe.

**17:4 I glorified You on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do.**

This verse is not just about Jesus. "As the Father sent Me, so send I you" gives us permission to read this verse and say, "the Lord has sent me, may I get to the end of my life and also say, 'I glorified You on earth by completing the work You gave me to do.'"

Here are some verses that talk about how we too have work given to us to do:

John 21 (Peter is given a different task to do than John); Acts 20:24; 1 Corinthians 3:5; and Ephesians 2:10.

**17:5 And now, Father, glorify Me at Your side with the glory I had with You before the world was created.**

The Lord was obedient, and therefore was given great reward. Of course we do not share in His preexistence, **the glory I had with You before the world was created**, but Philippians 2:5 and 9 imply that we can share in reward if we share in obedience, and there are many other passages that tell us that if we are obedient we will gain great reward. 2 Timothy 4:6-8 teaches this truth as well.

**17:13 "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them."**

Now? It will not be but a moment, and they will cross the little Kidron valley, He will pray, they will fall asleep, and then Judas will arrive with armed men.

The goals of *unity* (vs 11b) and **joy** are probably closely tied. See 10:10 ("I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly.")

**17:14 "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world."**

In the physical realm they are of the world, but Jesus is not talking about that realm. Receiving the **Word** changes them and makes them **hated** ones. And they need protection.

As we read in earlier chapters, He was **hated** by the **world**. Here we learn that His disciples will get similar treatment.

**17:15 "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one."**

The Lord offers no guarantee of isolation or timely rapture, just protection from **the Evil One**, so that he has no automatic victory over our hearts.

Not only are we **not** taken **from** the world, we are actually **sent into** the world!

**17:16 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it."**

Verse 14 is repeated to emphasize it. *We are foreigners.*

**17:17 "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."**

Make them special, distinct. This happens by **the Truth**. The **Word** of God makes us distinct. It is an essential part of discipleship. According to 15:7, the **word** abiding in us is a part of abiding in Jesus.

**17:18 "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."**

As distinct ones, we, like Jesus, are sent into the world. (See 10:36a.) Like Jesus we are

- chosen for a particular task
- made holy, distinct, for our particular tasks
- given tasks in accord with the revelation of God
- put in this dark world to do that task

The theme of how Jesus was sent into this world is a major theme in John's Gospel, and all of that theme fills this verse with more meaning.

17:19 **"For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."**

He has specialized Himself to the will of God, which for Him is the Cross. Again, see 10:36a. Is the sanctification here for us *salvation* or the *sanctification of the disciple*? Or both! He went to the Cross so that we might be made positionally sanctified in Him, perfectly and forever, but also so that we can become holy in our practice, our walk.

John 17:20-26

This passage is all about a prayer for unity through the ages *so that the world will believe the Gospel*.

17:20 **"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,**

This reminds us of the Lord's words to Thomas in chapter 20.

Just as in John 12:23, the Lord is also thinking beyond the present situation. John 10:16; 11:52; and 12:20-26 also show that the Lord has a vision for world evangelization. He understood that He is to become the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the *whole world*.

John 17:21 **that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.**

The unity of the church is to reflect the unity of Christ and the **Father**. The theme of the submission of Christ to the will of God that we have seen over and over again ("I do the will of the One who sent Me...") shows us something of that unity. So has 1:1-2 and 1:18.

1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

1:2 He was with God in the beginning.

1:18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known.

Also in the vine and branch metaphor:

15:1 I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener.

15:10 If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father's commands and remain in His love.

15:15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you.

That expression **that the world may believe that you have sent me** is again a common way He uses to talk about His self-identity and mission.

17:22 **I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:**

**The glory You gave Me** would seem to be the **glory** of humility and submission to the will of God that Jesus exulted in.

John 17:23 **I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**

Again, this passage is all about a prayer for **unity** through the ages so that the **world** will believe the Gospel. The expression **I in them and you in me** reminds us of how He said "As the Father sent Me, so I send you," and "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you" in 15:9.

These final three verses are a summary of the entire prayer, as well as His entire mission as the One sent by the Father.

17:24 **"Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory, the glory You have given Me because You loved Me before the creation of the world.**

What a simple and profound statement of His love for us: He wants the very best for us!

17:25 **"Righteous Father, though the world does not know You, I know You, and they know that You have sent Me.**

In 17:8 He says, "For I gave them the words You gave Me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from You, and they believed that You sent Me...."

17:26 **I have made You known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."**

He has successfully done what 1:18 said He would do, that is, make known the name of the Father.

Is the **will continue** here the coming of the Spirit and His ongoing work of making the Lord Jesus known, or the coming of the Cross?

### **E. The trial and passion of Jesus 18:1-19:42**

John emphasizes Jesus' power as he describes Jesus' arrest. He has recorded the prayer in the upper room, but nothing about the seemingly weak prayer in Gethsemane. In fact, John does not even mention the name "Gethsemane." John alone records how they fell backwards at the I AM, the *ego eimi*, and yet he does not mention the healing of Malkus' ear.

18:1 **When He had finished praying, Jesus left with His disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and He and His disciples went into it.**

**The Kidron Valley** was a "wadi," a stream bed that is dry except during the rainy season. On the other side there was a garden or an orchard, and He and His disciples went into it.

We do not know if they left from the upper room, or from the temple, or from the city gates. The ancient city of Jerusalem was not at all large by modern standards. (By definition a "city" was a walled city as opposed to an unwalled town, and walls were expensive to build.) Their walk may have taken half an hour, if they came from the Upper Room, less if from the temple entrance. The elevation of the temple Mount was 730 meters above sea level. (The top of the Mount of Olives was 60 meters higher than that.) The bottom of the **Kidron Valley** at that point was 670 meters. It was less than one kilometer straight across from the Temple Mount to the top of the Mount of Olives, "as the crow flies." So we know that they descended about 60 vertical meters down to the **Kidron Valley**, but we do not really know exactly how far up the Mount of Olives they went.

This **olive grove** (the Greek word κήπος/kēpos simply means "garden") is of course Gethsemane, which means "Oil Press." So it was probably **an olive grove**, and even today there are some ancient olive trees right there across the valley from the Temple Mount, near the base of the Mount of Olives. There are actually several sites there whose owners claim are the original Gethsemane. That olive grove seems to have been walled in, because in verse 1 they go **into it**, and in verse 4 Jesus comes out of it.

**18:2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples.**

It seems there was a tradition that required them to stay within some extended city limits, and this garden was within those limits, but their usual place to overnight, in Bethany, was outside those extended city limits.

**Judas** and the others chose this quiet time and secluded **place** apparently because they did not want a riot when they took away the popular rabbi.

**18:3 So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.**

The term used here about the group of **soldiers** can refer literally to 1000 **soldiers**, but that is unlikely here because that would be all the **soldiers** that were stationed in Jerusalem at the time. It could also mean 200 **soldiers**, but even that is unlikely. It was a detachment from the main body of **soldiers** that were there in Jerusalem because of the feast. (Rather than proudly saying that this must be an error in the text, we should humbly say that we do not now know exactly how this Greek word was used so many years ago.) The leader mentioned in verse 12 is a *kbiliarkhos*, literally a leader of a 1000. They would stay at the Antonia Fortress, which was just outside the northwest corner of the temple courtyards and wall. Today there is a nunnery built on the site of the Antonia Fortress, and in its basement you can still see the Roman stone floor, with games scratched on it, probably by Roman soldiers.

The **officials** were some of the Jewish Temple Guards, just as in 7:32. In that way Jews and Gentiles are represented here in the arrest of the Son of God. This is the last mention of the **Pharisees** in John's Gospel.

It was a full moon since it was Passover in the Jewish calendar, which was lunar. They may have brought along those **torches** and **lanterns** because it was a cloudy night, but it seems ironic to bring **torches** and **lanterns** to hunt down the Light of the World, especially since He was not hiding. They may have thought they were going to have to search out for someone in hiding among the olive groves and stones of the Mount of Olives.

**18:4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"**

He goes **out** (apparently out of a walled olive grove) with full awareness. He is not dragged out – He is a willing sacrifice. In chapter 10:17-18 He says, "The reason My Father loves Me is that I lay down My life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father."

Asking **Who is it you want?** does two things. First, it centers attention on **Jesus** where it belongs, even to the point that He can reply with the I AM. Secondly, it draws attention away from the disciples, whose only way of escape is through the gateway, in front of which is a large crowd of armed enemies.

The betraying kiss is not mentioned by John, perhaps so that it does not detract from the focus on Jesus' sovereignty in this passage.

**18:5 "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am He," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.)**

The name we pronounce **Jesus** and the name Joshua were one and the same, and it was a fairly common name. Because of that, the clarification **of Nazareth** was reasonable, even if it is obvious to us. It many have a bit of formality to it, a hint of a claim to official duty and authority.

The I AM is spoken three times here; it is intentional and impossible to miss. It is strongly related to the name of God through passages like Isaiah 41:4, in which He says "Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD – with the first of them and with the last – I am He."

Not many hours ago He had given **Judas** the position of second honor after Himself, at the last supper, and He had honored him with the morsel of food. Now Judas' role in all this will not be ignored. Remember that in addition to being the historical person that did betray **Jesus**, **Judas** is also a representative of all betrayers. John will not let the betrayer just fade away into the background.

**18:6 When Jesus said, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground.**

Perhaps it was because of the power of the name. But it is strange, because they only fell to the ground once, even though He says the same expression in verse 8. And why did they draw back before they **fell to the ground**? In other cases where the glory of God is

revealed and people fall to the ground on their faces there is no drawing back mentioned. This certainly emphasizes His power and willingness to be arrested. It is as though some of His glory has "slipped out," like what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration.

**18:7 Again He asked them, "Who is it you want?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."**

He certainly knew, but He is showing that He is not going to run. He wants them to do what they came to do.

**18:8 "I told you that I am He," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for Me, then let these men go."**

He has made them admit that He is the One they are looking for. Now He can give the disciples the opportunity to leave Him. Providing for their physical deliverance from this danger could be a sort of a displayed parable of the provision of spiritual salvation He is about to provide.

**18:9 This happened so that the words He had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave Me."**

Note that these are not Old Testament words that come to fulfillment, but the words of Jesus Himself (17:12), treated with the same weight as the words of the Old Testament Scripture.

**18:10 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)**

**Peter** just could not understand that the Messiah had to suffer. Remember Mark 8:31-33? Jesus was explaining about His suffering and death, and **Peter** rebuked Him. At this point, **Peter** still does not understand. This is Peter's consistent attitude whenever he heard about the Cross or the coming suffering which the Lord would endure. Of course the Cross of Christ is now history, but we know that He said "As the Father sent Me, so send I you." Since He being sent, suffered, should not we, being sent, expect to suffer? Note also the comments under 12:26 concerning Paul's attitude towards suffering. So just as **Peter** was always rejecting the idea of a suffering Messiah, so some believers today reject the idea of widespread suffering for Christ's followers, and instead hope for some kind of escape, perhaps through a major political change in their countries so that persecution and suffering will be removed.

It does seem very strange or awkward that somehow **Peter** cut off the man's **ear** with that **sword**. We do know that Peter's skill was with fishing nets rather than swords!

All four Gospels record this, but only here do we learn the name of the servant. (Perhaps because John had connections with the high priest's family?) Only Dr. Luke records that Jesus healed the ear!

**18:11 Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"**

The rebuke that **Jesus** gave **Peter** was more extensive, but only this part is recorded by John. It focuses on **Jesus** and the Cross. The other part of the rebuke focuses on **Peter** and the nature of violence. (In Matthew 26:52 we learn that **Jesus** also said to **Peter**, "For all who take hold of the sword will die by the sword.") Here in John we see that

**Peter** wanted a Messiah, but he saw no need for a crucified Savior. He did not yet understand about sin and redemption.

**18:12 Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him**

There is representation of both Jew and Gentile; in a sense you might say the whole world **arrested Jesus**.

**18:13 and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.**

From 6-15 AD **Annas** was high priest, until he was deposed by Gratus (who preceded Pilate) even though in the Law a man was high priest for life. Even though the Romans no longer considered him to be the high priest, **Annas** still had great authority because the people resented the Romans moving him out of his position, and because five of his sons and one son-in-law (**Caiaphas**) became high priest after him. From 17-41 AD Annas' family had a "monopoly" on the office of high priest. That is why it sounds like there are two high priests in this passage. John understood the intricacies of the situation perfectly well. If he was the one that was admitted into the high priest's courtyard, then he understood these things from personal interaction with the household! The only mention of **Annas** in the Synoptics is a brief note in Luke 3:2 which speaks of "the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas." That note does confirm that somehow **Annas** and **Caiaphas** shared the office of high priest, but it is appropriate that it is such a brief mention of him, because his role as "the high priest behind the high priest" was of little interest to their Gentile readers. Verse 19 refers to **Annas**. **Caiaphas** waited for his father-in-law's evaluation before making an official recommendation to Pilate.

Verse 13 is a very succinct summary of this complicated high priest situation. John does not mention what was said by the "lesser high priest" **Caiaphas**, because it was of no interest to the Jews he was evangelizing – they understood that it was **Annas** that made the real decisions.

**18:14 Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people.**

They are moving according to their agenda, and God according to His!

**18:15 Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard,**

In Matthew and Mark we read that they ran away, but here we see that they also returned to follow **Jesus**.

Who is this other **disciple**? Probably John. He was often with Peter, and he never mentions his own name.

Could a fisherman's son be **known to the high priest**? That would be hard to imagine these days, but remember, John was a son of a family that could hire others (so his was not a poor family), and Jews respected tradesmen. A rabbi had to have a craft too. (Remember Paul was a tentmaker, and Jesus was a carpenter or stonemason.)

**18:16 but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in.**

Only in John do we learn how **Peter** got past the "security gate."

**18:17 "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" the girl at the door asked Peter. He replied, "I am not."**

Hers is a reasonable question. She probably knew John was His follower, so it was reasonable to guess that John's friend **Peter** was too. She probably meant no harm.

**Peter** has opened the door to fear here. Perhaps he excused the denial because it was in order to be near Jesus. Jesus was on His way to death, **Peter** wanted to follow Him, but not to that destination. This is just like **Peter** in the Garden of Gethsemane and in Matthew 16:21-23, where he says, "may it never be!"

**18:18 It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.** Perhaps John mentions this as a criticism of **Peter**. Why was **Peter standing** there enjoying the warmth of the **fire** with the Lord's enemies? John does seem to like to mention physical things that correspond to spiritual reality. Note for instance that he writes that "it was night" when Judas went out of the room (13:30) and that it was dawn when the Lord appeared in the temple courts (8:2).

**18:19 Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.**

As 18:13 makes clear, this is Annas. Maybe his questions are to determine how much of a threat **Jesus** was, or His followers will be after they deal with Him. Maybe Annas is trying to get data for a blasphemy charge.

**18:20 "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret.**

He had no secret teachings with which they could convict him!

**18:21 Why question Me? Ask those who heard Me. Surely they know what I said."**

The Lord was not evading questions. He was helping Annas see that he is in violation of Jewish law. He should be seeking testimony from the witnesses, not from Jesus. All he needs is two witnesses that will agree in their testimony. Jesus is rebuking his illegal procedure, hoping perhaps that he will realize his sin at some later point.

**18:22 When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded.**

Violence is their only defense, as in 9:28 and 34.

**18:23 "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?"**

He maintains His attitude, and He is patient with the impatient official that struck Him.

18:24 **Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.**

In 18:19 **Annas** is called high priest, but here **Caiaphas** is **the high priest**. This is not a contradiction. It is instead evidence that the author was a Jewish resident of Palestine at the time of these events. He understood how there could be two men called **high priest**. See the comments under 18:13.

**Annas** had to do this, because Pilate would not accept an accusation from this **Annas** who had no authority in Roman eyes.

Here John's attention shifts from Jesus and His faithfulness to Peter and his denial.

18:25 **As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not."**

The expression **stood warming** is repeated. See the discussion under 18:18.

The question is the same, but before it had just been a girl, alone. Now it is several men.

18:26 **One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?"**

Our author, John, seems to know the family situation there pretty well. Is he the "other disciple" that brought Peter into the courtyard?

This accusation is much more powerful. It is from an eyewitness!

18:27 **Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.**

For John, there is no need to mention the curse, the crying. He just wants to contrast Jesus and **Peter**. His sin is committed, the prophecy is fulfilled. **Peter** awaits his restoration.

Pontius Pilate was made governor of Judea in the year 26 AD, and he held that office until the year 36 AD. Through several incidents we can see that he was not very sensitive to the religious situation in Jerusalem, to the point that the people of Jerusalem nearly rioted due to his actions. Several times he is too drastic in his actions, and he had to back down. In the trial of Jesus, he tried to make a compromise between the Lord Jesus, who was clearly in the right and who certainly did not pose a threat to Roman rule, and the Jewish authorities that clearly hated Him and threatened the very political instability that Pilate had to guard. According to Culpepper (p. 143), Pilate is used by John to show us that compromise is impossible in the Christian life.

18:28 **Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.**

The interview with **Caiaphas** is over. What happened there in front of **Caiaphas**? No Jew reading this would bother to ask! The decision was already made in 11:53, and formalized in front of Annas. John felt no need to go into any details of how **Caiaphas** made that decision acceptable to the Roman governor.

They had already eaten the Passover meal, but **eat the Passover** can also refer to participating in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as in Luke 22:1. The Feast of Unleavened

Bread was beginning at that very moment. Even if their ritual uncleanness lasted for only a day, that would be a serious inconvenience for all those leaders.

**18:29 So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"**

**Pilate** goes back and forth between them, as he goes back and forth between truth and lies.

His question formally opens the hearing. He knows what they want, and still he asks for formal charges. He knows it will not be easy for them to make clear and impressive charges. He also must follow procedure. The entire formal court hearing would be written in official court records, and he did not want to be open to accusations of illegal proceedings.

**18:30 "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."**

"Just believe us!" They must have had some frustration in their voice! They must have been thinking, "Pilate had given them soldiers to arrest Jesus, why will he not just finish the job?" Their impoliteness is extreme. One does not speak that way to Roman officials with armed guards.

**18:31 Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected.**

He knows they can not do that! He seems to enjoy reminding them of their impotence. But he is playing a dangerous game with them, and he will lose.

**18:32 This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.**

"Lifted up" was the expression **Jesus** had used in 3:14; 8:28; and 12:32. If the Jews were going to carry out the execution, it would have to be by stoning, but if the Romans did it, it would be by being lifted up on a cross.

### **About the Trial before Pilate:**

When Jesus was tried by Annas, there were questions about His teaching and His followers, but Pilate is not interested in religious teachings. His concern is whether this Jewish Rabbi poses a political threat to the rule of Rome in this province. That is why the theme of "Kingdom" is so prominent in their conversation. A rebel leader might consider himself a king. For example, the Roman Emperor's decree banning circumcision in AD 132 brought on a rebellion, led by Simeon Prince of Israel, who called himself the "Son of the Star" (in Hebrew, Bar Kokhba). He claimed to be the rightful king of the Jews, and was one of many messianic candidates during that era. The Romans eventually put down that rebellion by utterly leveling Jerusalem, later rebuilding it as a Roman city with the normal four quarters (which it still has even today) named Aelia Capitolina, and banning Jews from living in Aelia Capitolina. Rome took such kingly claims very seriously!

**18:33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked Him, "Are You the king of the Jews?"**

When **Pilate** finally saw **Jesus** with his own eyes he knew immediately that He was no rebel leader or guerilla fighter. The word **You** is emphasized in Greek. He might have been expressing surprise or insult.

18:34 **"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"**

It is interesting to consider Jesus' purpose in asking Pilate this question. He was not trying to defend Himself. Perhaps He was trying to draw the man Pilate to faith. If so, then in Jesus' mind this conversation had the same goal as the conversations with the woman at the well and with Nicodemus. With Nicodemus He decided to approach the idea of eternal life with the metaphor of New Birth, with the woman at the well He decided to approach the idea of eternal life with the metaphor of Living Water, and with Pilate He decided to approach the idea of eternal life with the metaphor of His Kingdom.

In the case of Nicodemus he was successful after a long delay.

In the case of the woman at the well He was successful right away.

In the case of Pilate He may have succeeded after some time, but we have no record of Pilate's repentance.

So **Jesus** asks **Is that your own idea** because if Pilate has been thinking about this himself, that would indicate a certain openness, and it would influence how **Jesus** would discuss the idea with him.

18:35 **"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"**

Jesus learns here that **Pilate** did not spend time thinking about this himself, and there is much less openness than there might have been. His answer in fact is full of insult, cynicism, and meanness.

**Pilate** wants to overcome the trickery of the Jews. Cynical **Pilate** rightly guesses that these Jewish leaders have not turned Jesus in to him because they are zealous for the security of Roman rule in Judea. He knows they just want to use him. So **Pilate** asks Jesus, **What is it you have done?**

Jesus is not "put off" by his insult and meanness. He knows what is in the hearts of men, He knows why they need to be saved!

18:36 **Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."**

The Lord is not trying to get Pilate to support Him in His struggle against the Jewish leaders. He would like to get Pilate interested in listening to His presentation of the gospel, so He talks **Kingdom**, and yet a strange **Kingdom**, and with a strange way of defending its King. **Jesus** ignores Pilate's actual question of "What have You done?" because it is not the direction He wants to go to draw Pilate closer to faith and eternal life.

The Jews that are being evangelized as they read this Gospel are also wondering about how it can be that the Messiah can come without His **Kingdom**. The parables of Matthew 13 explained that, but John did not quote them.

18:37 **“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”** You can almost hear the note of triumph in Pilate’s voice here. He seems to think he has won a major concession here.

**Jesus** is reaching for Pilate’s heart in His response. **Pilate**, do you want to hear the **truth**? Have you been longing for more than your empty life. I have it if you want it!

These words of **Jesus** are not about two unrelated things (being a **king**, and testifying to the **truth**). His Kingdom is a Kingdom of **Truth**.

Jesus words, **Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me**, is a challenge to Pilate.

18:38 **“What is truth?” Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.**

Pilate rejects the challenge. He is not up to the idea of hearing about **Truth**. His question, **What is truth?** is full of cynicism. He just wants to look at Jesus as a pathetic failed figure. In fact Jesus is not a threat to Roman security in Judea, but He is a threat to Pilate’s cynical heart, so **Pilate** has to walk away. In this he is similar to the woman at the well, who tries to divert the conversation to the topic of which mountain people should worship on, but the Lord could return her to the topic of the Gospel. He does not do that here with **Pilate**.

**Pilate** is in a difficult and dangerous situation here. He does not want to take up the challenge of hearing about **Truth** from Jesus, so he walks away. But the only direction he can walk to is towards **the Jews**, whom he hates. Just because he does not want to talk to the man that at least on the surface seems to be a troublesome rabbi, does not mean he wants to support the Jewish leaders. (He will find that there is no middle ground, there is no compromise. In that way he will represent those that want to stay in the middle, but end up forced to be enemies of Jesus because they refuse to come to Him.)

18:39 **But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews?’”**

A just and truth-loving governor that has said "I find no basis for a charge against Him" would have then released the prisoner and dealt with the crowd however the crowd had to be dealt with. But Pilate was not a lover of truth and justice.

It is not clear why Pilate brings up this custom of theirs. Perhaps he just could not resist the idea of poking a bit more fun at them, he could not resist insulting them one more time with the fact that he had their King as a prisoner. He would later regret the insult.

18:40 **They shouted back, “No, not him! Give us Barabbas!” Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.**

There would be no help from them in releasing the obviously innocent Jesus. They hate Him.

Pilate is finding there is no middle ground. Take a stand for Jesus, believe Him, or join with the Jews in calling for His crucifixion. Ironically, here is a man judging Jesus, who finds himself being judged. This major theme of John's, first introduced in John's introduction, is developed even more here.

The term **rebellion** used about **Barabbas** can have a wide meaning. Luke 23:19 mentions **rebellion** and murder. John does not actually mention if he was indeed freed. Look also at Matthew 27:26 and Mark 15:15.

In this passage we will see Jesus insulted and abused, but we also see Him in great glory, the glory that He sought: the glory of perfect obedience to the One Who Sent Him.

Pilate thought he was the skilled manipulator. However, it turns out that because there is no middle ground, he ends up being the one manipulated by the Jewish leaders and their mob. In fact, it is obvious that John presents the Jews as more guilty than Pilate. Compare 19:4, 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 dan 16. Thus 1:11 is fulfilled. "He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him."

In this passage we will read about how the Holy One of Israel suffered. We will study some of those details. It becomes more obvious that our Lord possesses great humility. His humility is glorious.

#### 19:1 **Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.**

This was not to punish Him, but to make Him look all the more pathetic or ridiculous, so he could release Him without more trouble from the Jews.

The Romans had three types of whippings:

- 1) *fustigatio* was for light offenses. Someone who had accidentally cause a fire would be given this whipping and a verbal rebuke.
- 2) *flagellatio* was much more brutal, for more serious offenses.
- 3) *verberatio* was still more brutal. It was always given with other punishments, like crucifixion. A *verberatio* was done by several soldiers, with a leather whip that had pieces of bone or metal laced into it to tear the flesh. The offender was whipped until the soldiers were exhausted, or until ordered to stop by their commander. Eye witness reports say that flesh would be torn away so that sometimes bones or intestines would be visible. Sometimes the offender would die from a *verberatio* before the other punishment could be meted out.

Luke 23:16 and John 19:1 report the same *fustigatio*, meant as a light punishment, so that Pilate could then release Jesus. That is why Pilate could say in Luke 23:22, "I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him." That could not be said if the whipping were a *verberatio*. But Matthew 27:26 and Mark 15:15 report the second whipping, a *verberatio*, which so weakened Jesus that He could not carry His own cross very far.

**19:2 The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe**

In accord with Pilate's efforts to insult the Jewish leaders by making Jesus look pathetic, the **crown of thorns** and the **purple robe** were put on Him. Just as the **purple** (Matthew 27:28 says "red," but color names were not that precisely defined then) **robe**, a robe dyed a color similar to the expensive color (**purple**) that only royalty could afford, mocked Him as a near king, so the **crown of thorns** may have been an imitation of the "radiant crown" worn by some kings that looked like rays of light emanated from the king's head. Palm **thorns** were 30 centimeters long, and it may be that they fashioned a **crown** with them so that the long thorns radiated out from His head. At any rate, the **crown** and the **robe** were there to make Him look like a pathetic mock king. The **robe** and the **crown** make very powerful irony: although they did not know it, He is indeed a king.

**19:3 and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they struck him in the face.**

This mock honor is also strong irony.

The reader is invited to shun their foolish mock worship, and be amazed at the love this real **king** shows, in enduring all this so that He can be Savior.

**19:4 Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him."**

**19:5 When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"**

He is no threat! Just look at Him, and go home. Pilate insults them. Here is the man you are getting all worked up about! But his expression is also strongly ironic. **Jesus** is **The Man**, He is the Son of **Man**, **Man** as **man** was meant to be.

**19:6 As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."**

So **Pilate** fails again. They will not just look at Him and go home pitying Him, they are pressing for an unjust crucifixion. He knows they cannot take Him and **crucify** Him – you can almost hear the insult, anger, and fed up attitude in Pilate's voice.

**19:7 The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."**

"Were not going anywhere! You want 'a basis for a charge against Him'? Well if you did not like the insurrectionist charge, how about the idea that He makes Himself a Son of God?" They really did not care about Jesus as a political threat to Rome. This new accusation is actually closer to their real problem with Jesus.

Pilate had a responsibility to govern the local population according to their own laws, as long as the enforcement of those local laws did not work against any Roman interest. The Jews understood that responsibility, and were hoping it would be a "card" they could play to force Pilate to have Jesus crucified.

The law they were referring to was probably the law against blasphemy in Leviticus 24:16.

19:8 **When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid,**

He may have been cynical, but he also seems to have been a deeply superstitious man. He did just have this Man flogged. What if He turned out to be one of those god-men or one of those gods that disguise themselves as men and walk the earth? Certainly He is a strange man. Did not Zeus have relations with a human woman, so that the god-man Hercules was born? And that was just the most famous of that kind of god-man story. There were many other times this sort of thing happened in the Iliad. This son of god could be a very dangerous person! And Pilate just had Him whipped! (Acts 14:11 has a similar incident of the fear of gods coming among men.)

19:9 **and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer.**

How could He answer? What possible words could He speak that would help Pilate understand, unless Pilate changed his attitude about truth and about Jesus? Isaiah 53:7 prophesied this silence 700 years before it happened.

We should understand that the Lord **Jesus** was willing to answer Pilate's question, but Pilate was unwilling to become the sort of person that could understand the answer. His unwillingness was already proven in 18:37-38. Again, there are no secret doctrines in the Christian faith, but there are people that will not understand. Is it possible that our unanswered questions and prayers are unanswered for the same reason?

19:10 **"Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"**

His words were literally "to me You do not speak?" This small-province governor of the lesser nobility of Rome is very aware of the dignity of his person and office, and he finds Jesus silence surprising. "Are You stupid or sullen?" Again there is strong irony here, because it is Jesus that has all authority in heaven and on earth!

19:11 **Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."**

We might literally translate : "You were having no authority over Me not one...." It is a strong correction to what Pilate had said. Also, the Imperfect Tense of "to have" gives the impression that the authority he has is only in this particular setting, not a continuing authority as governor, but as the particular person who has the authority to order a crucifixion at this time and place, by God's particular design for the Lamb of God, the One He sent.

And what is the "it" that was given to him from above? It looks like the authority, but authority is a feminine noun, and the neuter is used. It looks like it would be better to translate, "if *all this* were not given to you from above...."

**Jesus** said, **Therefore the one who handed Me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.** But who is **the one who handed Jesus over to Pilate?** Judas? Perhaps. He **handed Jesus** over to Pilate's soldiers and the Jewish officials. In 13:21 and 18:2 the same term is

used of Judas. It could also be Caiaphas, because it was he that brought the charges and **handed Jesus** directly to Pilate, and it was he that actively sought to destroy **Jesus**, as opposed to Pilate, that simply received Him as an accused. Since in John the guilt of the Jewish leaders is emphasized, it may be that Caiaphas is the one **Jesus** is referring to.

**19:12 From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."**

The verb **tried** is in the Imperfect Tense, indicating repeated effort. In fact it might seem like **Jesus** was not going to be crucified. The political accusation of sedition had failed (because it was ridiculous), and the religious accusation of Him making Himself out to be a Son of God had failed (because it made superstitious Pilate afraid). But there was one more thing they could try. Pilate's emperor, Tiberias Caesar, was a suspicious and cruel man. We cannot be sure of whether these events took place in 30 or 33 AD, but on 18 October of 31 AD Tiberias Caesar turned on his most trusted friend and advisor, Aelius Sejanus, fearing that he was plotting against him. Tiberias had Sejanus and many of his friends executed. This is particularly interesting because Sejanus was known to be Pilate's sponsor before Tiberias. **Pilate** could easily have been on that list of friends of Sejanus that must die. This happened in 31 AD, so it might have been before or after these events. The point is that **Pilate** would have known that Tiberias was a suspicious and cruel man who did not hesitate to have important people executed if they endangered him. **Pilate** already had several negative reports go back to Tiberias about him, and he certainly did not want anybody, even these troublesome Jews, saying to Tiberias Caesar that he was **no friend of Caesar**.

By 70 AD the expression "Friend of Caesar" had become a technical term, almost like a rank or a special society in Rome, but it is not known whether it had that precise meaning at this time.

**19:13 When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha).** This is the turning point in the trial.

The **judge's seat** is the Bema (βῆμα/*bēma*), the raised platform that would be used to pronounce the sentence. Romans 14:10 speaks of the Bema of God, and 2 Corinthians 5:10 speaks of the Bema of Christ.

The **place**, the day, and the time are all given for this historic event. The place is the **Stone Pavement**. The term can also be translated "Mosaic." There is a 300 square meter paved area at the Antonia Fortress which could have been the site, but it is not known if this took place at that fortress. Those huge Roman paving stones are still there, the floor of what is now the basement of a nunnery in Jerusalem, near the Temple Mount.

**19:14 It was the day of Preparation of Passover, about the sixth hour. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews.**

**The Day of Preparation** was a common expression for the day before the Sabbath, so it does not seem to be the day before **Passover**, despite the fact that if it was then Jesus was crucified as the Lamb of God right on **Passover**. We know that they celebrated the

**Passover** earlier, in the Upper Room. But the connection with **Passover** is ironic. Instead of celebrating Israel's release from a foreign oppressor, they have turned a Jew over to a foreign oppressor.

The text literally says, **it was the day of Preparation of Passover**. But the term **Passover** refers not to the Day of **Passover**, but to the week of **Passover**. Luke 22:1 shows that **Passover** can refer to the days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

That it was the **Day of Preparation** right before the Sabbath will be important later, in 19:31-37.

The time is literally **the sixth hour**. In that era people divided the daylight time into 12 periods of equal length, called "hours." Of course in the winter the "hours" would be less than 60 minutes, and in the summer they would be more than 60 minutes, all the more so the further away from the equator people got. This means of keeping time was adequate when there were no clocks or watches. The hours were normally counted from sunrise, so **the sixth hour** was about noon. (The only exception to this was that in Roman contracts the hours would be counted from midnight to midnight. That was only for legal contracts, not general Roman practice. That is clear from the fact that Roman sundials counted the hours from sunrise. It is also clear in many other historical documents.)

The problem with this is that there is an apparent contradiction with Mark 15:25, which says that was crucified at the third hour, or 9 AM. Was He turned over to the soldiers to be crucified at noon, or crucified at 9 AM?

Some solve the problem by saying that John is using the Roman way of counting the hours. However, 1) John is not a Roman, 2) the book was not written especially to Romans, and 3) there is no proof that the Romans used that way of counting the hours for anything except legal contracts.

The other way to solve the problem is to say that people then did not try to be very accurate with the time of day – except in legal contracts! Though this is hard to imagine in modern society, in some parts of the world a farmer, who has been up since just before dawn, will say the equivalent of "good afternoon" after he has been at work in the fields for 5 hours, but at the same moment an office clerk who has hardly started his day's work will say "good morning." This explanation is all the more likely because John even says it was "*about* the sixth hour." Also, it was their custom to limit their comments on the time of day to the third hour, the sixth hour, and the ninth hour. (This is similar to how people with analogue watches will say, "It's quarter past five," but people with digital watches will say "It's five thirteen.") So if it was 10:30 a.m. according to our way of measuring time, it would have been perfectly legitimate to say it was the third hour as Mark did, and it was **about the sixth hour**, as we have here.

Pilate's declaration to them is full of insult. "Here's your king. This is what Rome does to all your pathetic Jewish kings." But his declaration is also ironic. Jesus is in fact their King, He is Pilate's King too. In this way **Pilate** becomes like Caiaphas in 11:49-50. He spoke the truth without knowing it.

19:15 **But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered.**

Pilate's declaration in verse 14 enrages the Jews. They reject Jesus as their **King**, but actually in saying what they said they rejected any but **Caesar** as their **king**. That means despite Judges 8:23 and 1 Samuel 8:7 they have rejected God as their **King**.

Once they make their declaration that they **have no king but Caesar**, it is as if the narration can finally proceed. It is almost as if that was what God was waiting to hear.

19:16 **Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.**

That impression is strengthened by the **finally** of this verse.

It is a bit strange that the text says he handed **Jesus** over *to them* to be crucified, we know he really gave Him over to the soldiers to crucify Him. Maybe it means that he handed Him over to their will, as Luke 23:25 says. At any rate, this supports the tendency John has to show Jewish, rather than Roman, guilt.

**Pilate** tried to stay on the middle road, but he found out there is no middle road. The presence of the Light showed him to be in darkness. Jesus' presence brings judgment, in that **Jesus** will cause people to either side with Him or against Him. This theme of judgment also comes up in discussion of 3:17; 8:51; 9:39; and 12:37.

19:17 **Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).**

In accord with Roman custom He carried **His own cross**, actually the horizontal part of the **cross**.

This is an apparent contradiction with the Synoptics, because they report that Simon of Cyrene was pressed into carrying His **cross**. The simple solution is that at first He carried it, and this is what John records, in accord with his emphasis on the obedience of the One sent by the Father. But perhaps at the city gates He is exhausted as a result of the scourgings He has received, and Simon of Cyrene is then pressed into **carrying** the **cross**.

Is there a connection with Genesis 22:6, where Isaac himself carried the wood upon which he was to be sacrificed? Genesis Rabbah 56:4 in its commentary on Genesis 22:6 noted that "Isaac carried the wood 'like a man carries his cross on his shoulder.'"

Another interesting rabbinic note on this is that many rabbinic writings says that the blood of the sacrifices of the temple have the power to forgive sins because of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac. They write, "When I see that blood (that is the blood of the Passover lambs in Egypt), I will pass over you: I see the blood of the binding of Isaac" (Rabbi Ishmael's commentary on Exodus 12:13 in his work, Mekilta, according to Beasley-Murray's commentary on John, pg. 345). Of course we learn in the New Testament that it is Jesus' blood that the temple sacrifices pointed to.

The location of **Golgotha** is difficult to determine. Christian songs have it on a hill, but the New Testament speaks of a **place**, not a hill. Outside the Damascus Gate of Jerusalem's walls, just behind the Arab Bus Station, there is still a hill that clearly has the appearance of a **skull**. Photographs taken of that hill prior to the building of the bus station show that the asphalt of the parking area has covered the "mouth" part of the **skull**, but its "nose" and "eyes" are still visible. That place is called Gordon's Calvary, after the name of the man that found it. Nearby there is a Jewish tomb carved in the solid stone hillside, with an old style cross scratched into an inner wall. Outside that tomb there is strong evidence that the place was once a garden: there is a wine press carved in the stone, for pressing grapes. Also there is a large cistern carved into the stone underground, for storing rainwater so that the garden, the vineyard, could be watered during the seasons there was no rain. That tomb is called the Garden Tomb, and if it was not Jesus' tomb, it is nevertheless very much what His tomb was like.

Catholic and Orthodox Christians prefer a site over which a large church has been build, which stands inside the relatively modern walls of Jerusalem. According to them the place was known as **Golgotha** because the tradition held that Adam's **skull** was buried there.

**19:18 Here they crucified him, and with him two others — one on each side and Jesus in the middle.**

At the place of crucifixion the victim was required to lie down, and the horizontal piece was nailed or tied to his wrists. (If the nail was put into the victim's hand, the flesh of the hand would not bear the weight, but the bone of the wrist would bear the weight.) Then the victim and the horizontal piece were lifted, and the horizontal piece was fastened to the vertical part of the cross. Sometimes there was a small ledge of wood for a seat, which would extend the suffering, because it would allow for more stretching upward for breath as the victim struggled to breath.

The four Gospels tell that He was **crucified**, but none goes into the details of the suffering. Perhaps this is because it was so well-known throughout the Roman Empire.

Perhaps it is noted that He was **crucified** between the **two** criminals because of Isaiah 53:12, which says, "...He poured out His life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors."

Mark 15:27 reports that the **two** were robbers. Perhaps they were friends of Barabbas. Only Luke 23:40-43 reports that one of the **two** repented on his cross.

**19:19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

In the climax of John's irony, **Pilate** has what turns out to be the truth proclaimed in three languages, symbolically declared to the whole world.

**19:20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.**

It was common to have these signs put up at crucifixions for deterrence. The Romans wanted everyone to understand the result of disobeying their laws.

The three Synoptics report the **sign**, but only John mentions that it was written in these three languages. The wording of the sign varies slightly in the different Gospel accounts, perhaps because standards of quotation were low then. In fact, the New Testament is the first document known to have used direct quotations of speech.

**Aramaic** was the common language of the Jews ever since they returned from captivity. Although it is not the same as Hebrew, it is very similar to Hebrew (in fact, Hebrew today is written with **Aramaic** letters.) But the rabbis wrote their "Targums" which are loose **Aramaic** translations and commentaries on the Hebrew text of the Old Testament so that Jews that spoke only Aramaic could still understand the Hebrew text. (Genesis Rabbah mentioned above in the note on 19:17 is a "targum" on Genesis, written in Aramaic.)

**Latin** was the language of Rome, and the legal language of the Empire.

**Greek** (Koine or Common **Greek**, a simplified form than the Classical **Greek** of people like Plato) was the language held in common in what was then the eastern end of the Roman Empire, ever since Alexander the Great conquered those vast tracts of land, and his Greek speaking soldiers retired there as colonists.

19:21 **The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews."**

For them this was a great insult, so of course they objected.

19:22 **Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."**

But they have no more ability to manipulate him. He is sure that Caesar will not object to his little joke on them.

19:23 **When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.**

Roman custom gave the **clothes** of the victim to the **soldiers** that were tasked with the crucifixion. We learn from this verse that there were **four soldiers**. His **clothes** would have included a belt, some sandals, and some sort of headgear, perhaps a turban.

In church history that seamless undergarment has taken on symbolic importance, but the symbolism is unclear. Was it a symbol of His role as High Priest, or of the unity of the church? This seems forced. It was, after all, *taken from Him*. Perhaps it is mentioned simply so that the following perfect literal fulfillment of Scripture could be demonstrated.

19:24 **"Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." So this is what the soldiers did.**

This perfect fulfillment of Psalm 22:18, down to such small detail, might be compared with Matthew 21:2-7 fulfilling Zecharia 9:9 down to the smallest detail.

19:25 **Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.**

In Mark 15:40 we read that they are watching from afar as He dies, but here they are near, apparently still in the early moments of the crucifixion. This is the sort of thing that some say is evidence of contradictions in the Gospels. But what could be more natural than that they were there **near the Cross** at the beginning, but sometime during the approximately six hours that the Lord was on **the Cross** (compare Mark 15:25, 33, and 37) they moved away?

The Greek grammar of this list could allow for two, three, or four different individuals, but as long as we do not allow for two sisters to have the same name, **Mary**, there are four different women here.

In this brief list, Jesus' **mother** is mentioned first, unnamed as she always is in this gospel. The identity of **His mother's sister** is not clarified, but comparing Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40, perhaps she is Salome, John's own mother. That would explain why she is not named: John does not name anyone in his own family. (This **Clopas** does not seem to be the Cleopas of Luke 24:18. The Greek names are not as similar as the English transliterations, and **Clopas** is from a Hebrew name, while Cleopas is from a Greek name.)

**Mary Magdalene** becomes the first to see the Risen Lord. She is from Magdala, just off the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee. In Luke 8:2-3 we see that she was among the women that served **Jesus**, and that she had seven evil spirits cast out of her.

19:26 **When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son,"** **Jesus**, in His own suffering, did not think of Himself, but of His mother's needs. This should be an example to us so that we remember to take care of our elderly parents. We should never use the excuse that we are too busy serving **Jesus** to take care of our parents!

Normally a man's **mother** would be taken care of by his siblings, but at this point they may not have believed in **Jesus** yet. Compare John 7:5 with Acts 1:14 and 1 Corinthians 15:7.

Only here do we realize that John himself is also near the Cross, though he never says so directly.

19:27 **and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.**

There have been various symbolic interpretations of this in the past, like that John represents the faithful church, and Mary is the protector of the church, but it should be noted that John took Mary into his home (providing protection for her), and not the reverse.

19:28 **Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."**

He knew He was about to die, so He knew **all was completed**. He knew He has successfully **completed** the task that the Father had sent Him to do.

He was certainly **thirsty**. Thirst is a part of a crucified person's suffering. He asked, so they would give Him the wine vinegar, and thus fulfill Psalm 69:21, "They put gall in My food and gave Me vinegar for My thirst."

19:29 **A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.**

**Wine vinegar** was a cheap drink that soldiers might drink. They had a **sponge** there in case they ever wanted to give one of the victims something to drink, because a crucified person cannot drink from a cup. This is different from the drink He refused in Mark 15:23, which had a drug mixed into it to deaden the pain.

Some have objected, because a **hyssop plant** does not have a stalk long and stiff to reach way up to a person on a cross, but there are two problems with that objection. First, it is difficult to really identify what **plant** this **hyssop** is, and second, a crucified person is just high enough off the ground so that his feet do not touch the ground. The soldier's purpose of **the hyssop** seems to have been so that he could stay a bit away from the crucified person, perhaps because people being crucified were dangerous or unpleasant to be very near. The NIV adds "a stalk of" before **the hyssop plant**. That is not in the Greek, but again we do not really know with certainty what sort of **plant** the **hyssop** was. Perhaps it had a stalk.

On the divine level, **the hyssop** was there to remind us that Jesus is the Passover Lamb. In Exodus 12:22-23 we read, "Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the door frame. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the door frame and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down."

19:30 **When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.**

**He gave up His spirit.** Again, John makes sure the reader understands this is no contradiction to the power of the King. No one took **His spirit** from Him.

Most likely the expression **It is finished** refers to the task that the Father had sent Him to accomplish. He has perfectly accomplished it all, and this is very much to His glory.

19:31 **Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.**

The expression, **Day of Preparation** was also used in 19:14. It referred to Friday, during which Jews prepared for **the Sabbath**. The next day was **a special Sabbath**, because it took place during the days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

According to Deuteronomy 21:22-23, "If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance."

Carson (pg. 622) reports that a skeleton of a man crucified in the first century was found to the north of Jerusalem. One of his legs had a broken bone, and the other leg had a smashed bone.

**19:32 The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other.**

Crucifixion was an extremely cruel punishment. People could survive for days nailed to a cross, before they died of exhaustion and suffocation. However, if the legs were broken the person, unable to lift himself with his legs, would very soon suffocate.

**19:33 But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.**

According to Mark 15:25 and 34, Jesus suffered about six hours.

**19:34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.**

We are not told why the soldier did this. Maybe it was to make sure He was really dead, maybe it was just cruelty.

John does not tell us if there is any spiritual significance to the **blood and water**, but the way he writes about it indicates that he felt it was significant, at least as a detail of his own eyewitness testimony.

There are several medical explanations for the **blood and water**. The **water** was probably serum, which can separate from the thicker blood cells. That fluid can collect in the area outside the lungs. Another theory is that His heart was pierced, and the **flow** came from there.

**John 19:35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.**

John insists that he is a reliable eyewitness. His goal is that the reader would **believe**, which is repeated in 20:31. Here the theme of witness that is introduced in the Introduction is further developed.

**19:36-37 These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."**

At this crucial point, at the death of the One John tells us is the Word that was with God, that *is* God, these Old Testament quotes show us clearly that the sovereignty of God is at work, not simply happenstance or the will of the Jewish leaders. This is one of many such reminders in the Gospel of John.

Psalm 34:20, "he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken," seems to be one of the texts in mind, but it is also interesting that Exodus 12:46 says of the Passover Lamb, "It must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones."

The other quote is from Zacharia 12:10-11, which reads, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on Me, the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo."

This verse is also referred to in Revelation 1:7. It is such a strange verse that it is given another translation in the Septuagint. This Old Testament verse was most likely an important verse in the evangelization of the Jews, which was John's paramount purpose.

**19:38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away.**

**Joseph** was originally from **Arimathea**, but now apparently a resident of Jerusalem, because he had a grave prepared right near Jerusalem, and because he was a member of the Sanhedrin according to Matthew 27:60. The location of **Arimathea** is not known, although several sites have been offered as possibilities. Luke 23:51 clarifies that it is a Judean city.

The stance of secret believer is not highly regarded in 12:42-43.

By Roman law the family of the victim can receive the corpse, but if the crucified was involved in rebellion, the corpse must remain on the cross until eaten by birds. By Jewish custom nobody is ever refused a burial, but a crucified man would not be buried in a normal grave because the corpse might make the site unclean.

Because of the status he had as a member of the Sanhedrin, **Joseph** could hope to speak with **Pilate**. Nevertheless it was dangerous to sympathize with convicted rebels. **Pilate** probably allowed his request because he knew very well that **Jesus** was not a rebel.

**19:39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.**

Brown (pg. 940) notes that John tends to give introductions to people not mentioned in the Synoptics (Mary of Bethany in 11:2, Lazarus in 12:1, Philip in 12:21, and Nathanael in 21:2). Perhaps John does this because he expects that many of his readers have already read the Synoptics. This explanation implies at least some of the Synoptic Gospels were already written and well-known by the time the Gospel of John was written.

**Myrrh** is a fragrant sap that the ancient Egyptians used to embalm corpses. The Jews used the same substance, but made it into a dry powder to lessen the odor of decomposition. **Aloes** may be from *aloe vera* or *aloe succotrina*, but Brown (pg. 940)

suggests it is a fragrant powder of sandalwood. Psalm 45:9; Proverbs 7:17, and Song of Songs 4:14 mention a similar mixture.

Like this verse, John 7:50 also mentions that **Nicodemus** had come earlier to Jesus.

All four gospels mention that Joseph took care of the permission, but only John mentions **Nicodemus** and his role with the spices.

The large amount of spices cause some liberal scholars to doubt the text's accuracy, but Rabbi Gamaliel was buried with about 90 pounds of spices, and 500 slaves carried the spices of Herod the Great's burial. The reader that considers that amount to be too large should consider the expense of the perfume that His body was anointed with by Mary in chapter 12.

19:40 **Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, linens. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.**

The Romans cremated, and the Egyptians embalmed, but **Jewish burial customs** included the use of spices to cover the odor, and bury the **body**.

John's term **linens** may refer to strips of linen, but according to the Synoptics, a sheet of linen was used to wrap the body. It may be that the plural of the term in John points to a large sheet rather than many pieces. Or it may be that the Synoptic term refers to the kind of cloth rather than its shape.

This explanation, that **this was in accordance with Jewish burial customs**, is another indication that John was expecting non-Jewish readers to read his words.

19:41 **At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid.**

It seems like it is important to John that the grave was as yet unused (he uses a double negative), but he does not say why it was important to him.

See the notes under 19:17 about Gordon's Calvary. There was a Jewish **tomb** carved in the solid stone hillside less than 100 meters from that hillside that looks like a skull. Very near that **tomb** there was also a wine press, and a large cistern. That **tomb** has a room right inside the doorway and another, with places for two bodies, to the right of that first chamber. It appears in that inner chamber that the bench for one of the bodies was never completely finished. If that was indeed the **tomb** in which the Lord was buried, it would be very reasonable if work on completing the inside of the **tomb** was never carried out.

Matthew 27:60 explains that it was Joseph's own **tomb**, and that it was cut out of the rock. Being cut into a solid rock wall, it was an expensive possession, and was probably originally intended to be used for various members of the family.

19:42 **Because it was the Jewish Day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.**

It was important that the grave was nearby, because the Sabbath was near, and they would not be allowed to carry the body once it was Sabbath.

This expression **Day of Preparation** is also used in 19:14 and 31. See the notes under 19:14.

### **F. The resurrection of Jesus 20:1-31**

The four Gospels emphasize different things in the story of the resurrection, but each certainly emphasizes that the tomb was empty. He really rose from the dead.

#### **1. Peter and John at the empty tomb (20:1-9)**

20:1 **Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.** The Synoptics say that several women went to **the tomb**, but John only mentions **Mary Magdalene**. Perhaps **Mary Magdalene** led them there. Perhaps this focus on her is in preparation for her conversation with the Lord in verses 11-18.

John does not mention **the stone** in his account of the burial, or how **the stone** was moved. (It is not there now, and we have no idea what happened to it, but you can see a similar stone at the entrance to the family tomb of Herod the Great. It is rolled back enough so you can easily walk past it into that tomb. It is round, about 5 or 6 feet in diameter, and about a foot thick.) Apparently John assumes that some of his readers have already read one or more of the Synoptics. John also does not mention the guards that Matthew mentions.

20:2 **So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"**

She had no idea that He has risen from the dead, nor does Peter in verses 6-7. Did the terror of the Cross make it hard for her to remember the promises He had made that He would rise from the dead?

John is again named, **the disciple Jesus loved**. The other times this expression is used, the verb is *agapao*, but here it is *phileo*. Note the discussion comparing these verbs under 10:17.

Literally the text says she **came running to Simon Peter and to the other disciple**.... Perhaps the word "to" is repeated because she had to go to two different places, but that is not at all certain.

So many corpses were being stolen in those days that during his reign (41-54 AD) Emperor Claudius issued a decree that required the death penalty for people that were convicted of damaging graves, stealing corpses, or opening the seal of a **tomb**. Mary may well have heard of grave robbers, and feared that may have been the reason the body was not in **the tomb**.

Mary is horrified. Proper burial was extremely important in her culture.

Does she say **we don't know**... because, as we know from the other Gospels, there were other women with her?

20:3 **So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.**

20:4 **Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.**

We do not know for sure why John was able to outrun **Peter**. Perhaps he was younger, or knew a shortcut, or was in better shape.

20:5 **He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.**

John was hesitant to **go in**, perhaps because it was a tomb.

20:6 **Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there,**

But **Peter**, in accord with his character, did not hesitate. At the end of Luke's account at the tomb Luke 24:12 says "he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened."

Chrysostom, according to Morris (pg. 833) says that myrrh becomes like glue, and the burial cloths cannot be removed from the body. That makes it even more difficult to think that anything less than a resurrection miracle happened there.

20:7 **as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.**

In John 11:44 the same term (here translated **burial cloth**) is used of the **cloth** that covered Lazarus's face. Apparently these details about the **cloth** were important to John. Perhaps he gives us this detail to emphasize that he is an eyewitness. We would like to read verses 6-7 and have them say that the **cloth** is in the shape it had been in when it wrapped Jesus' body, but now there is no body, except that **cloth** that was on His **head** was neatly set aside – but the actual words are not quite that specific.

But these words are enough to show that the body was not stolen.

All this can be contrasted to the resurrection of Lazarus, who was resurrected back into a "regular" human body, and needed to be "unwrapped."

20:8 **Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.**

Peter's boldness encouraged John, so he went in too. We have here the testimony of his heart, that he **believed**. Was John boasting that he was the first to believe? See Jeremiah 9:24. Or was he admitting disappointment in himself, that he had to see and then he could believe? See the Lord's comments to Thomas, recorded in John 20:29.

The empty **tomb** was then a powerful statement in evangelism, and it is still a powerful proof. Logically, if He had not died, then the local leaders, in concert with the might of the Roman Empire (whose seal had been violated), would have hunted Him down. And if He had died, and His body had been stolen by someone, the same forces would have found the body and displayed it, and punished the thieves. But all that was impossible,

because He could not be caught by the priests, by Pilate, or by all the Roman soldiers in the Empire.

1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 speak of the importance of the resurrection.

Some Christian non-Jewish interpreters are of the opinion that John represents the Gentile churches, and Peter represents the Jewish churches, and there is competition between the two. However, there is no basis for this idea. Why do the Gentiles get the "better" of the two? If Jewish Christian interpreters were writing, they would claim John as their representative, and leave Peter to their Gentile brothers! Also, in the Gospel of John the two men are friends, and there is no competition between the two, unless you count the running in this passage. Further, it should be remembered that John was just as much a Jew as Peter. The idea that John represents the Gentile churches, and Peter represents the Jewish churches is just another case of abusing the Scriptures for some now unclear reason. When the text gives no hint of a figurative meaning, do not add one or accept one from anyone else. The difference or lack of difference between Jew and Gentile in the church is discussed in other New Testament passages, but it is simply not relevant here. The text is interesting, beautiful, and inspiring enough without people adding their own ideas to it!

**20:9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)**

This indicates that the faith mentioned in verse 8 did not arise from the testimony of the Old Testament. They did not yet accept the written testimony of the Word, the Old Testament **Scripture**, which would have been better. Was John expressing disappointment in himself here? The term **Scripture** here may refer to the whole Old Testament, or to a particular verse. If it refers to a particular verse, it might be Hosea 6:2; Jonah 1:17; Isaiah 53:10-12; or Psalm 16:10.

By the time John wrote these words, he did **understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead**. It is interesting to see that John says Jesus **had to** rise from the dead. This is in accord with John's emphasis on the sovereignty of God.

## **2. Jesus appears to Mary (20:10-18)**

**20:10 Then the disciples went back to their homes,**

John went with new faith in his heart, Peter went "wondering to himself what had happened," according to Luke 24:12. Had they known that Jesus was about to appear there, they certainly would have stayed. But they did not know, and Jesus wanted to speak with someone else first, before seeing them.

**20:11 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb**

After telling the men that **the tomb** was empty, **Mary** Magdalene went back to **the tomb, crying**. We do not know if she met with Peter or John. We do not know if she had a plan there, but she did ask "the gardener" about the missing body.

We know from events like the burial of Saul and his children (1 Samuel 31:9-13) that proper burial was very important in their culture. We do not know if this was her first **look in the tomb**, but she saw something that Peter and John did not see.

**20:12 and sees two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.**

The verb "see" is in the present tense in the Greek. Matthew 28:2 says one angel rolled back the stone and sat on it. That had already happened by the time Mary looked into the grave. Mark 16:5 speaks of a young man sitting on the right side. Since angels sometimes appear as people, that seems to be the language of appearance, and clearly Mark was speaking of an angel. In the Garden Tomb, the right side is more easily seen from the entrance, so maybe Mark 16:5 refers to the initial observation, but John 20:12 and Luke 24:4 are more complete, and mention both angels (*The Life of Christ in Stereo* by Johnston Cheney, pp. 204-206 and 259-260). For some reason the angels do not sit upon the grave clothes, but to the right and left of where the body was.

**20:13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."**

Their question is a very gentle rebuke.

**20:14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.**

We are not told why she turns and looks behind her. We are also not told why she could not recognize Him. Perhaps it was because she was crying, or perhaps she had an experience like the two on the road to Emmaus.

***The Resurrection in John: Mary at Jesus' Tomb  
a devotion on John 20:1-2, 10-16, especially verses 14-16***

Remember that we are never told physical descriptions of the people in the Gospel of John. This makes it so all of us – short or tall, old or young, strong or weak, dark or light – can more easily step into the shoes of any of the people that talk with Jesus in the Gospel of John. Because of this it is easier to identify with them. We can more easily feel that they are our representatives.

And so it is with this Mary Magdalene. We do not know much about her. She has a hometown – well, we all do. Hers was Magdala, near the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is a hilly region, but near some flat land that is now, and probably was then, used for farming. This Mary was among the women that followed Jesus and served Him. She was there when He was crucified and placed in His tomb. She noted the place and went back there very early on the first day of the week, after the Sabbath rules allowed her to go.

Oh, Mark 16:6 and Luke 8:2 tell us that the Lord drove out seven evil spirits from Mary Magdalene. We do not know exactly how they got there in the first place. We do not need to know about that, but we do know that Jesus freed her from a profoundly personal and tragic burden.

She wanted to do what she could for the Lord Jesus, so she went back to the tomb as early as she could, to finish the burial preparations of Jesus' body. John focuses our

attention on Mary Magdalene, but actually we know from the other accounts that she did not go alone.

As early as they could they went out the city gates, perhaps right past the terrible place called Golgotha, to the garden with its burial cave carved into the solid rock of the hillside.

Even now if you go to Jerusalem, you can visit the place declared by Constantine's mother to be the site of His burial – it is now covered with a very large and old church building, or you can go to a place called Gordon's Calvary, about a 100 meters outside the Damascus Gate. There is a hill that still looks like a skull, but the asphalt pavement (of the very nearby Arab bus station) has covered over the base of the hill where the "mouth" of the "skull" was. The caretakers there at Gordon's Calvary are careful *not* to insist that this is certainly the real Calvary, but they show you how if it is not, it is very much like what the actual place looked like. Just about 60 meters beyond the hill that looks like a skull, where Jesus may have been crucified, there is a large garden, which is now planted with flowers, but then certainly was planted with grapevines. It is large enough that it would today or then have been a really wonderful garden or vineyard of a wealthy home.

So Mary Magdalene is in the Garden, and she sees that the body is gone, so she cannot even do the little that she thought she could do, for Him. What kind of pain was Mary Magdalene experiencing? She was weeping there by the tomb.

The Good Rabbi has died.

Jesus who had forgiven all her sins, and freed her from the power of sin, driven out those seven awful spirits, has died.

Jesus who never insulted her or made her feel the shame that haunted her, even though He knew about her background, has died.

Jesus whom she loved, who always helped her so wonderfully, who brought the hope of deliverance for the people against the foreigners, who brought personal hope, an inexpressible personal hope, has died, executed as a criminal, crucified just over there.

Rome, and its horrid people here, won again.

Mary's personal hope that her burden of sin might be forever lifted from her, that hope is crushed and meaningless now.

She must bear her own sin now, the One she thought could free her somehow could not escape the power of Rome and those Jewish leaders.

She has to bear that burden now, for the rest of her life. She has no hope of hearing His voice again, no hope of more understanding about how and why to live her life. That voice will never be heard again.

She had hoped to bring some friends to Jesus, to... introduce them to Him, thinking He could help them. But He cannot. That hope too is crushed. Mary cannot help her friends, she cannot even help herself.

Mary's tears are just about all she has now. What else can she do? She can cry. Maybe she'll just cry her whole life. Through the sobs and tears she just hardly can hear a voice that asks, "Woman, why are you crying?"

She cannot be polite and stop crying to answer, but who is this? It's so early in the morning – but maybe it's the gardener asking her so kindly, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"Why am I crying? In a thousand years could I answer that question the way I should? I'm crying because the One that loved me is gone.  
I'm crying because the One that gave me hope, has died."

The gardener asks, "Who is it you are looking for?"  
(Really, Mary, think about Who He *is*!)

Who am I looking for in this tomb?

Until last Friday I thought He's my Teacher, He is Love, He is the Living Bread, that brings Life better than anything you've seen, Bread for your soul, Living water for your deepest thirst, the Door to the Father, the Good Shepherd, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the Resurrection and the Life, the Light of the World, that the darkness cannot over come.

In a thousand years I could not tell all about Him.

But now this gardener is asking me, "Who is it you are looking for?"  
He that was the Resurrection and the Life, is dead. He that took my sin away, has been condemned and executed as a criminal. How can I say any of this to this kind gardener? But if he is the gardener, maybe at least he knows where the body is, and I can at least do that work....

And then the "gardener" says, "Mary!"

He's not the gardener! The Light shines! The Resurrection and the Life is resurrected and lives! The Living Water that had dried all up flows again!

Her inexpressible pain has become inexpressible joy. The One that loves Mary is not dead at all, what an odd idea that He could die! The One that has lifted Mary's burden of sin is alive! The One that has given Mary hope lives and is alive! What happened last Friday? He is really alive!

Perhaps somehow at that moment Mary was given a joy and hope that lasted in her heart her whole life. Certainly she cried again, certainly she had sorrows and troubles after that morning in the Garden, but quickly or slowly the joy of the resurrection surely overcame all her tears and trouble. After that, she was perhaps ashamed to cry much, remembering that brief conversation with the "gardener" who asked, "Who is it you are looking for?"

Remember that often it is easier to step into the shoes of the the people we meet in John's Gospel. In a way we feel we have almost been in the Garden Tomb that morning. So, how is it with us? Sometimes we feel that the One who loves us is gone. It feels like the One that lifted our burdens and gave us our freedom is gone, or... does not care! Sometimes we cry in our troubles – and need to be asked, "Why are you crying?" "Who is it you are seeking?"

The burdens and troubles you bear are not heavier than Mary Magdalene's that morning, and the answer to those burdens is no different – if indeed Jesus has risen from the dead!

Let's lift up our eyes enough to see that the One who loves us, the One who had lifted our burden of sin, the One who has forgiven all our sins, the One who watches over us – has defeated death, and lives again.

Through the teary eyes of this woman, Mary Magdalene, just outside that empty tomb in a garden just outside the city gates of Jerusalem, we can almost see the resurrected Lord, and hear Him ask us why we are crying, and who we are looking for, and we can almost hear Him speaking our own name.

As we really grasp that, our tears can also become joy – maybe suddenly like what happened to Mary in the Garden, maybe little by little as our personal faith in Jesus grows stronger with exercise, as with discipline and care we decide to believe and continue to really believe in Jesus in our pains.

"Why are you crying?" "Who is it you are seeking?"

**20:15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."**

**20:16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).**

She did not recognize His face, or His voice at first, but once He speaks her name, she knows. All pain is turned to joy.

**20:17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"**

This seems to be a very strange statement by Jesus. I think part of our problem here is that we automatically assume that Jesus is particularly and especially a Giver of Commands, so we read this as a "Thou shalt not touch Me" kind of a verse. But here it is much more likely that He is laughing with her at this time of great joy, and saying, "Oh, Mary, don't hold Me like I'm going away right now. I haven't gotten to the Ascension yet, I'll be around a bit. So now, go tell My brothers, the disciples, that I am going to My Father and your Father...."

**20:18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.**

Mary did what she was told to do, but according to Mark 16:10 and Luke 24:13 they did not believe her testimony.

As we compare these events with Luke 20:19-23 (the events on the road to, and in, Emmaus), it seems like the Emmaus events have already happened before John 20:19-23.

Likewise it seems like John 20:19-23 and Luke 24:36-49 are two aspects of the same conversation.

### 3. Jesus appears to His disciples (20:19-23)

**20:19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"**

In accord with His promise in 14:18, He has come to them. His greeting of **peace** is a normal Hebrew greeting, Shalom! However, in this context He is giving more than a regular greeting. He has offered them **peace**, and now they can understand how it is He can really give it to them! This must have been particularly comforting to them, because they were probably very ashamed of their recent behavior, and fearing His rebuke. Instead He blesses them with Shalom.

**20:20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.**

It seems like every time He appears to them in these passages, there is a reference to something *physical* of the Lord. In this passage He shows **them His hands and side**. Mary had tried to hold onto His feet. On the shore of the Sea of Galilee He cooks breakfast for them. Thomas is invited to put his finger into the nail mark. In Emmaus He took bread, pronounced the blessing, and broke it for them. This is the same Person that was crucified. The same Person, but the body is healed. No, not just healed, it is changed, it is much better. But the same Person. Liberal Christianity likes to refer to "The Jesus of History," then also "The Christ of Faith," but the New Testament knows of only One, Jesus Christ.

**20:21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."**

Once they have seen His hands and side, they are more ready to receive the blessing of peace that He offers. As He gives that peace, He also commissions them to ministry. This expression of the Great Commission in John cannot be separated from the context of the Gospel of John, in which Jesus is referred to as the One Sent by **the Father**, or **the Father** is referred to as the One Who Sends the Son, over forty times. All of those verses can be studied to learn in more detail *how* it is that **the Father has sent** the Son, so that we may know more accurately, how it is that the Son has **sent** us! He was **sent** with utter dependence upon the One that **sent** Him (5:19-20, 30; 6:27; and 8:29). So it is with us. He was **sent** with a strong awareness that He is the Sent One, and that **the Father** is the One who **sent** Him. If we are **sent** by the Lord, we must understand ourselves as **sent** ones, and He as the Sender. He was **sent** for the purpose of bringing salvation to mankind. So we are **sent**, too. Also, 15:9 assures us that we are **sent** with the same love with which the **Father sent** the Son.

Nevertheless, that investigation will leave us unsatisfied. How will I be sent? What will it be like? Will I enjoy this new life there? Where will I go? What will I do there? The answer is found in chapter 21:18-23. There it is as if Jesus says to us, "As the Father sent Me so that I would do exactly what He wanted, in the same way I send you *to do exactly what I want done*. I will send some of you to martyrdom, and some of you may live a long

time before you die. I will send you according to My perfect wisdom. Will you stand strong in faith? Follow Me!"

20:22 **And with that he breathed and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.**

Although the NIV has the words "on them" here, there is no "on them" in the Greek, and Carson says that this verb, when it does not have additional modifiers, just means "to breathe."

The presence of the **Spirit** is closely tied to the sending of verse 21 in this passage. This is no surprise, because in 1:32 and 3:34 the **Spirit** is closely tied to the sending of the Son.

The difficulty of this verse is how it fits in with Acts 2:4, in which the **Spirit** comes. Did they receive the promised Holy **Spirit** twice? When they received the **Spirit** in Acts 2:4 their lives were powerfully changed, but in John 20:23 – 21:25 they are basically behaving as they have all along.

Since the Day of Pentecost, all believers have been indwelt by the **Spirit**, but prior to that His presence was a special gift for particular individuals at particular times, and He could withdraw from those individuals. This event in John 20:22 may have been the last time He was given to some individuals in that way. It appears that this special gift of the **Spirit** became redundant at the Day of Pentecost, when all believers received Him as members of the universal Church.

20:23 **If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."**

The Spirit is closely tied to the sending of the apostles as missionaries, but so is the authority to **forgive** sin. In 9:39-41 we see that the Lord was sent with the authority to **forgive** sin; is the same true of the apostles? Of any that serve in Jesus' name? "As the Father sent Me, so send I you." At the same time it is important to remember that Jesus does not **forgive** the **sins** of people that refuse to believe in Him (John 3:16), and He does not **forgive** the sin of people outside the election of the Father (John 17:2). Neither Jesus nor any sent one forgives **sins** of someone that does not believe, or someone that is not chosen by the Father.

This verse may be used by people that believe clergy have special rights or power. They would probably be inclined to interpret this verse to give special authority to the apostles and their spiritual descendants, but John does not tell us that these words were only spoken to the eleven, He just says that Thomas was not there. But Luke 24:33, speaking of the same events, says that "the Eleven *and those with them*" were "assembled together." How then can we limit this authority to apostles?

Jews, including those in that room with Jesus, understood that only God can **forgive** sin (as in Mark 2:7). Jesus does not want to contradict that understanding, but He wants to include us in the process. Perhaps we should understand these three verses as follows: "I have sent you (vs. 21), you are to go with the help of the Holy Spirit (vs. 22), and preach the Gospel so that whoever hears and believes, is forgiven (vs. 23). If people do not hear and believe, then their sins are not forgiven." (In that way this passage is similar to Romans 10:14-15.) Is that not in perfect harmony with the meaning of the Gospel of John? Again, forgiveness of sin is never separated from being chosen by God, or from

faith in Christ. This verse certainly does not mean that there are people that have authority to forgive anyone's sin, if they are outside God's choice and outside of faith. Remember 6:44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him," and 6:65, "This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled him."

The theme of judgment is clear in the Gospel of John (as in 3:17; 9:39; and 12:31). The work of judging continues, and this verse shows how the disciples are invited to participate in it.

This verse should be interpreted in the context of the sending of the disciples into mission work. If they do indeed go to a particular people to evangelize them, then that decision means that the sin of that people may be **forgiven**. If they decide not to go to a particular people, then the sins of that people will not be **forgiven**. This decision will not be taken outside the sovereignty of God. He sends disciples to places where there are people that He has chosen.

#### 4. Jesus shows Himself to His disciples, including Thomas (20:24-29)

Jesus ministers to Thomas in a special way for Thomas' sake, and we learn an important truth through that ministry. This event is not recorded in the Synoptic Gospels.

**20:24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.**

Even though their number is now actually eleven, the expression **the Twelve** is still used. The name **Thomas** comes from the Hebrew (or Aramaic) word meaning "twin." The name **Didymus** comes from the Greek word meaning "twin." However, the New Testament does not tell us anything about Thomas' twin. We learn about **Thomas** in John 14:5; 20:24-29; and 21:2. The Synoptic Gospels only mention **Thomas** in their lists of **the Twelve**.

As **one of the Twelve** that was not there when **Jesus** appeared to them (we are not told why he missed that event, and empty guessing is only likely to draw us away from the point that John has for us here), **Thomas** only has their verbal testimony. Remember that testimony, and faith by testimony rather than by sign, is a theme that has already come up in this Gospel.

**20:25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."**

Thomas *rejects* their testimony, and his use of the double negative (here just translated as **not**) makes his rejection of their words very emphatic. This rejection of their testimony is important in the Gospel of John, which after all was written as a testimony *so that* people would believe in the resurrection and in Jesus. In other words, Thomas' rejection is an example of what should not happen: verbal witness about Jesus should not be rejected.

Thomas' demand to **put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side** is extreme. He is showing that he is a person who is not easily convinced. (So, if he can be convinced, than any skeptical reader should be convinced too!)

20:26 **A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"**

The Greek says "after eight days" rather than **a week later**, but in Jewish reckoning, that first day, Sunday, would be counted as the first, Monday as the second, Tuesday as the third, etc., so that the eighth day is the next Sunday, **a week later**.

The situation is very similar to the situation a **week** prior, except that **Thomas** was there.

20:27 **Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."**

The Lord's use of Thomas' exact words indicates that He had heard **Thomas**. Surprisingly, He is willing to meet Thomas' rather extreme demands for faith. His love and patience are great.

20:28 **Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"**

We do not know for sure that Thomas did not take Jesus up on His offer, but the flow of the passage makes it seem like **Thomas** accepts Jesus' words as a rebuke, and confesses faith in Christ.

This is a very "high" confession by **Thomas**. Many scholars who do not accept the Bible as the Word of God would say that this is too "early" in the "evolution of religion," that the "primitive church" did not consider Jesus to be **Lord** and **God**. We reject that thinking as contradictory to the clear teachings of the Bible. It is also contradictory to history: the expression "Maranatha," which was common in the New Testament church (see 1 Corinthians 16:22), means "Come, my Lord." Believers confessed Jesus as **Lord** from the beginning of the church.

Others might say that in his surprise **Thomas** swears, like a modern man would, but there is no evidence that the Jews of the first century swore like that. Besides, even a modern man would hesitate to swear in front of his beloved and respected religious leader.

Thomas' use of the term **Lord** relates to the use of this term as a substitute for the name YHWH, which the Jews did not pronounce, much as the NIV uses the term LORD for that name. The term **God** is also very clear. **Thomas** was a monotheist. He was not suggesting that Jesus was "one of the gods" of the gentiles. In this way, **Thomas** goes very quickly from being a serious skeptic to being one who makes a very powerful and high confession.

**Thomas** says, *my Lord and my God*. This is not a liturgical statement, it is from Thomas' heart. The theme of the deity of the Lord Jesus, introduced in 1:1 and 1:18, is well-developed in the Gospel of John.

20:29 **Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**

It seems that **Jesus** was happy with Thomas' faith, but He would be even happier if he had believed without a miraculous experience. This is the climax of a whole series of passages in John about this:

- 1:50 Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that."
- 2:23-25 Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.
- 4:48 "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."
- 6:26 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill."
- 10:38 But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."
- 14:11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.

Hoskyns (pg. 529) quotes an ancient rabbi that says, "A proselyte is more precious to God than all the people of Israel that stood by Mount Sinai. If they had not seen the thunder and fire and lightening and the shaking mountain and the sound of the trumpet, they would not have received the Law or bowed to the Kingdom of God. But the proselyte does not see all that, nevertheless he comes and surrenders himself to God and receives the yoke of the will of God. Is anyone more valued than that?"

### 5. Conclusion: the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel (20:30-31)

20:30 **Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.**

Verse 29 says that people that do not see a sign, but believe anyway, gain a special happiness. In accord with that very truth, the Gospel of John is written so that those that do not get to see a sign can believe and gain that happiness.

20:31 **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.**

There is a textual problem with this verse, because some manuscripts have the verb **believe** in the Present Tense, but this variation does not change the interpretation of the verse.

(However, the possibility of the Present Tense has allowed some interpreters to take this verse to mean that the Gospel of John was written so that **you might keep believing that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing....**" In a sense they seem to want to take out the evangelistic purpose from the Gospel of John, but that is difficult to do if you observe all the evangelism in chapters 1-12!)

It seems best to take the phrase **that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God** to indicate a strong evangelistic intent for this Gospel. John wants unbelievers that read this Gospel to **believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**.

It may be that the phrase **and that by believing you may have life in His name** is just a repetition of the previous evangelistic purpose, but we should remember that the term **life** in John sometimes refers to more than salvation. In 10:10 Jesus says, "I can so that they might have life, *and have it to the full*." Perhaps 10:10 is being restated here, and John means that the Gospel was written so that people would believe (unto salvation) and that **believing** they might **have life** to the full, that is they might enjoy a rich fellowship with Christ and with God. In other words, perhaps this text is saying that the Gospel of John was written so that those that have not yet believed would believe in **Jesus**, *and* that those that already believe would draw nearer to Him and enjoy real **life** with Him. And is not that purpose fulfilled every time a person reads the Gospel of John and comes to faith in **Jesus**, and also every time a Christian reads the Gospel of John and comes away spiritually refreshed and uplifted because reading the Gospel of John we come to know and love **Jesus** better?

A similar purpose can be seen in the Letter of Paul to the Romans, in 1:17, which should be translated, "...the righteous by faith one will live." Paul writes about being a "righteous by faith one" in Romans 1-4 and about how they can really "live" in chapters 5-8.

This understanding of John 20:31 is supported and illustrated by the next passage, because in it the disciples are passing time (we should not use the word "living" about what they were doing!) without **Jesus**, without any faith, but as soon as they understood that **Jesus** was there, they experienced **life** abundantly, as illustrated by the very full catch of fish (21:4-13). In this way, 21:1-13 becomes what is called an "acted parable," that is, a parable all acted out, illustrating the point of 20:31.

## V. Epilogue 21:1-25

### A. Jesus appears to his disciples by the sea 21:1-14

21:1 **Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way:**

21:2 **Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.**

21:3 **"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.**

We do not know if **Peter** meant that he was taking up fishing again as an occupation for the rest of his life, or if he just did not like waiting around doing nothing. Knowing what we do about **Peter**, the second is probably the case.

Is it night here both historically *and* symbolically?

The Gospel of John does not record Jesus' command that they go to Galilee. As noted in the Introduction, this is another instance of the fact that John assumes that his readers

have already read one or more of the Synoptic Gospels. See Matthew 26:32; 28:7; 28:10; Mark 14:28; and 16:7.

**21:4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.**

**21:5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered.**

The question is formed in such a way that we know the questioner expected a negative answer.

**21:6 He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.**

Why did they do what a stranger standing 90 meters away on the shore said? Perhaps because that person had authority or confidence in his voice, or perhaps they were too tired to argue.

**21:7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.**

By now the reader is familiar enough with these two men's character to say, "Of course it is John that would first know that it is Jesus on the shore, and of course it is Peter that must throw himself into the water and get there, rather than going with the slow boat dragging a bunch of fish!"

It is strange to put on clothes and then jump **into the water**. The meaning of some of these terms are rather flexible, so it could mean that **Peter** put on an **outer garment**, or it could mean that he wrapped it up close to his waist with a belt to make swimming easier. Very likely, **Peter** simply wanted to appear before the Lord in wet clothes rather than only partially dressed for work on the fishing boat.

**21:8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.**

John, the eyewitness author, does not say what happened to Peter, he just continues telling what happened to himself in the boat.

**21:9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.**

This is the second **fire** like this in John. The other fire was when Peter denied the Lord! Probably the smells and sounds of that earlier **fire** came to Peter's memory.

**21:10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."**

**21:11 Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.**

**21:12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.**

**21:13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.**

21:14 **This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.**

### **B. Jesus and Peter and John 21:15-24**

21:15 **When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed (boske) my lambs (arnia)."**

21:16 **Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Shepherd (poimaine) my sheep (probata)."**

21:17 **The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed (boske) my sheep (probata)."**

There is a controversy here over whether the thing that **hurt** Peter was

a) that He said for the *third* time (and it was *three* times Peter betrayed Jesus)

or

b) that He said on the third time, do you *at least* φιλέω/*phileo* Me (rather than ἀγαπάω/*agapao*, which He had used the other two times.)

The reader of the NIV can see where *agapao* is used and where *phileo* is used in the Greek because the NIV translates *phileo* as **love** but *agapao* as **truly love**.

A crucial issue here is whether *agapao* is a more pure kind of love than *phileo*. The meaning of both of these verbs is discussed under 10:17. As noted in that discussion, there is a great deal of overlap in these two words. Because of that, the words have to be interpreted in their contexts. In this case, John is shifting his vocabulary from one word to a near synonym with no shift in meaning. This very passage has two other examples of that: besides the two words for "love," there are two words for "sheep" (arnia and probata) and two words for "shepherd," (boske and poimaine). Clearly there are not two distinct meaning between the two words for "sheep" and between the two words for "shepherd," and there are not two distinct meaning between the two words for "love."

21:18 **I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress/tie you and lead you where you do not want to go."**

The expression **stretch out** used here is used several times by Christians to refer to crucifixion, and even once by a non-Christian. Here the Lord is telling Peter he **will stretch out** his arms to be tied to the horizontal member of a cross.

After the victim's arms are stretched out like that, someone then ties the person to that horizontal part of a cross, and then the person being crucified is led away to the place of crucifixion.

There is a famous story about events leading up to Peter's Death, which is interesting, even though it is not from the Bible. In Latin it is called, "Domine Quo Vadis," which

simply means, "Lord, Where are You going?" Here it is, quoted from the apocryphal "Acts of Peter" (written at the end of the second century):

And he [Peter] obeyed the brethren's voice and went forth alone, saying: "Let none of you come forth with me, but I will go forth alone, having changed the fashion of my apparel." And as he went forth of the city, he saw the Lord entering into Rome. And when he saw him, he said: "Lord, wither goest thou?" And the Lord said unto him: "I go into Rome to be crucified." And Peter said unto him. "Lord, art thou being crucified again?" He said unto him: "Yes, Peter, I am being crucified again." And Peter came to himself; and having beheld the Lord ascending up into Heaven, he returned to Rome, rejoicing, and glorifying the Lord, for that he said: "I am being crucified"; the which was about to befall Peter.

It is not known for certain whether this late second century account is historical, but if the point is that Peter being crucified *is* in some sense the Lord Jesus being crucified, then that fits well with the theology of suffering that the Gospel of John has been presenting. The Lord suffered, and He sends His disciples out, just as He was sent out. Note also how Paul says that he participates in the suffering of Christ (Philippians 3:10), and rejoices in his sufferings for them and in his flesh he fulfills what is lacking in the affliction of Christ for His body, which is the church (Colossians 1:24).

**2I:19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"**

**2I:20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?")**

**2I:21 When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"**

**2I:22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."**

We would say in today's English, that information is available on a "need to know basis," and Peter did not need to know!

**What is that to you?** Do not worry about what **Jesus** does with others of His servants, just do what is right!

Remember the private miracle of Nathanael? There are some things we are invited into and other things which are none of our business!

**Jesus** does not ask our permission, He just asks that we willingly participate in His good will, His good plan for our lives.

When we cry out, "Lord, why do I have to suffer? Lord, why me?" this is the answer. This is sometimes all the answer He offers. Do you want to follow Him or not? It is a question of faith. Are you walking in faith, are you believing in Him, so that you can experience life, and experience it in all its abundance?

This passage emphasizes that Jesus has a personalized walk that He has in mind for every individual, a specific life of experiences and growth for each particular individual. He states this in such radical terms: "Peter, you will die a martyr, but John, since you bring

him up, well, if I want him to never die, what is that to you?" **Jesus** is asserting His right to do whatever He wants to with us, His followers.

**21:23 Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"**

If John wrote this Gospel near the end of his life, perhaps he wanted to correct that inaccurate rumor lest he **die** before the Lord returns, and people think that the Lord's word failed.

**21:24 This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.**

John, the author, finally admits to writing this Gospel, perhaps to give the testimony more weight as an actual eyewitness report.

### **C. The greatness of Jesus 21:25**

**21:25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.**

What great humility John has here! He has just mentioned that he wrote the most famous and loved book in the **world**, the Gospel of John. He could be proud of that, and he could draw attention to that. Instead, he imagines other **books, books** in which are written all the things that **Jesus** did. Oh what great **books!** I would love to read such a book! Wouldn't you love to read such a book? (All of this brings attention, honor, and glory to the Lord **Jesus**, and takes it away from John.)

### ***Meditation on Peter and John in John 21*** ***How Does Jesus Train Peter and John?***

John 21 gives us insight into what Peter and John needed personally to be launched into ministry. Jesus knew them both, and shows us how He decided to develop them before sending them.

(This is easy to apply into our lives or the lives of people we are mentoring or training for ministry, because of how in the Gospel of John the characters are never given personal descriptions of appearance. Sarah may have been beautiful, David ruddy, and Leah may have had weak eyes, but nobody in John's Gospel is given physical description. This makes it easy for the people in it to be - besides being actual historical individuals - representatives for us. Pilate is of course Pilate, but he also represents all those that try to compromise, sit on the fence.... Are you a Martha, a Mary, a John, a Peter, a Nichodemus?)

We are only going to look at four things here:

- I Peter's Character
- II The Final Equipping, the Good-Bye that Jesus Gave Peter
- III John's Character
- IV The Final Equipping, the Good-Bye that Jesus Gave John

## I Peter's Character

As we look at how Jesus decided to work with these men, we should first look at who Peter is:

Peter in this gospel is devoted, energetic, and self-assured.

- It is no surprise to us that Peter insisted that he would lay down his life for Jesus, which was an ironic choice of words, because John earlier tells us that it is the Good Shepherd that will lay down His life for his sheep.
- It is no surprise to us that Peter at first refuses to let Jesus wash his feet, then still missing the point, wants his hands and head washed too.
- It is no surprise to us that Peter tries to prevent the humiliation of the Cross by taking a sword and cutting off Malchus' ear, and then denies Jesus three times after the arrest.
- It is no surprise to us that Peter strides right into the empty tomb.
- It is no surprise to us that Peter throws himself right into the water.

This is the self-confident and energetic Peter that Jesus loves, equips, and says good-bye to in chapter 21.

## II The Final Equipping, the Good-Bye that Jesus Gave Peter

As we look in that chapter to learn how the Master equips and says good-bye to Peter, we note in humility that we do not know what happens between the time Peter got to shore and the time the boat arrives, dragging the net full of fish. There is a gap between 21:7 and 21:8, but we were not invited into that part of the story.

Of course in 21:15-17 Jesus reinstates Peter with the painful threefold commission to shepherd His sheep. (It is not painful for Peter because of the shift from a supposedly higher *agape* to a supposedly lower *philos*, John all the time uses synonyms for stylistic variation. It is painful because it is repeated *three* times, to match the *three* denials.) Through this Peter is publicly forgiven and reinstated into ministry.

But what else does the energetic and self-assured Peter need from Jesus before he goes off into ministry?

Verse 18, and the explanation for us in verse 19, is also part of how Jesus loves and equips this energetic and self-assured disciple. This is in no uncertain terms a prophecy that Peter will die on a Roman cross. Jesus understood that the best way He can train and say good-bye to this man is with this violent and then doubly violent "farewell." Peter needed this violent truth about his last hours on earth lodged in his mind, and he needed the command to nevertheless "Follow Me!"

It is as if Jesus told him, "Peter, you who were trying to prevent My death will yourself die that most horrific, shameful, painful of deaths. Will you follow Me anyway? Or will you again reject My plan and My ways? Do you feel I have the right to ask that of you?"

Remember the "Domine Quo Vadis?" story?

Now, in fact He does this today, but thankfully He does not normally tell us ahead of time. He puts His devoted servants through all kinds of strange trouble - children get sick while we travel; a wife falls into deep depression; study and then ministry is pursued

in cultural forms that then become outdated and useless; people will do very strange things to you. I remember one good missionary whose wife went in and erased all his e-mail from his computer. Perhaps there is no need for me to tell you here about the deep tragedies that the Lord allows those that love Him to endure. You have already seen a great deal of that firsthand.

Jesus has the right to do all that, and He has the right to ask us to follow Him through it all.

Now let us get back to Peter. As if that violent statement was not enough, Peter needed the also very "violent," in a sense, knowledge that even though he will die on a cross, his friend John might live all the way until Jesus returns - and again, "Follow Me" anyway!

Does not that just shatter every bit of our human concept of "fairness"? Of course Jesus is absolutely just, but He cares nothing of our petty little concept of fairness. Follow Me Peter, even though you will certainly die by crucifixion - oh, John, I might have him live until I return, but not you. Now, Follow Me!

So is it *fair* that the other guy in the office has a new such and such, while all you get is that old thing?

Is it *fair* that the other guy on the team gets to do such and such, while you have to do that?

Haven't we all wondered why some people are just so healthy, and others get sick, or really ill, so often? Do we object to this, and get bitter against God (or proud of our strength)?

Perhaps you are the one the Lord has blessed. You have the new car and the beautiful, sweet wife. Are you proud of it, or are you surprised, do you wonder why the Lord would be so gracious to you?

Just draw a line through all that comparison thinking, whether it is pride or complaining. Delete it!

And follow Jesus even though He will make the most "unfair" (as a child would put it) things happen in your life!

So, that extreme case - a cross for Peter, and perhaps a very long life for John (it turned out to be long, and John is understood to be the only one of the twelve apostles not to die a martyr's death). That extreme case for Peter. That is what Jesus decided Peter needed: this "violent truth." He had to be cured of any tendency to decide he had a better idea than Jesus. Perhaps we will need such violent treatment from Jesus. If we need it, He will love us enough to give it to us.

### III John's Character

Now, John is totally different in what he needs to be given to be prepared for his life of ministry. Of course we know that he did not live until Jesus returned, but what treatment

did he need? Who was he? He was very different from Peter. Of course they were both sinners that needed to be saved, but beyond that, who was John, and what treatment did he need from Jesus?

John is so humble in this gospel.

He is never mentioned by name, in this gospel. Five times John just has to mention himself. He comes up unavoidably, so he calls himself “the disciple whom Jesus loves.”

Unlike most people we know, John did not really care for the sound of his own name. He just wanted to be known as the disciple whom Jesus loves. He loved to hear the name of Jesus. When he went to a party and had to stick on one of those “Hi my name is...” stickers on his shirt, he would just write “the disciple that Jesus loved.” He was just amazed at Jesus.

- So it is no surprise to us that Jesus put John near Him at the last supper.
- Or that Jesus entrusted His mother into John’s care.
- Or that John dare not enter the tomb.
- Or that it was John that realized it was Jesus over there on the beach that morning.
- Or that in chapter 21 John is following behind Jesus (and Peter) as they walk away from that quiet breakfast on the beach.

He was so humble, he just loved Jesus. That was his “identity,” as we would say now.

Look too at the last two verses of the chapter. John finally has to break out of hiding albeit to his discomfort, and says, “yes, I (even here he does not really use the pronoun ‘I’) wrote this gospel, but let me tell you about another sort of book, wow would I like to read it - imagine the book of everything Jesus ever did - this Jesus I am telling you about is so great that if that book - those volumes - were ever written, the whole earth would not be a big enough library. Library Annex I would fill Mars, and Library Annex II would fill Venus....

Yes, I wrote this little book, but wouldn’t that be a great collection of books! I’d love to read them all!

So in those two verses, humble John both gives this real and needed eyewitness apostolic authority to the Gospel of John *and* speaks humbly of a greater book, a greater library.

#### IV The Final Equipping, the Good-Bye that Jesus Gave John

So if the devoted, energetic, and self-assured Peter needed those violent words about his own death, what treatment did this Apostle John need to be sent out by Jesus?

None. After Pentecost John is already ready to serve Jesus in a life long ministry, because he knew he was “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

There have been men and women of God like John in the past: housewives and missionaries, pastors and church elders, teachers, carpenters. It would be such a shame if today, in this age of smartphones, little computers, and the internet, if this

"sophisticated" age had just wiped out people of such character. But it hasn't. You can be like John: humble and amazed at Jesus.

Peter needed some strong medicine, but he followed Jesus.

If you are like John, follow Jesus.

If you are like Peter, follow Jesus.

### ***Passages about the relationship between faith and signs***

4:48 Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe.

10:37 Do not believe Me unless I do what My Father does.

38 But if I do it, even though you do not believe Me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.

14:11 Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.

20:27 Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe."

vs 28 Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

vs 29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

In the Gospel of John Jesus consistently says that the best faith is faith in Him that is based on testimony. But better to believe because of a miracle, than not to believe at all.

This is not the same as the discussion about whether miracles still occur. Certainly they do still occur. But this is about their role in our lives and in evangelism.

Signs that reveal His glory bring faith, and that faith brings life. But better the faith that is from hearing about Him, rather than the faith from a great sign.

### ***Missiology in John's Gospel***

Biblical Theology is the theology of a particular book or author of the Bible, in the categories and expressions that book or author himself uses. Systematic theology is theology arranged according to categories that are based upon traditional western/Greek logical structures.

Logically we should follow this process:

- 1) determine the original text of a biblical book
- 2) exegete that book

- 3) discover the biblical theology of that book
- 4) repeat this process for all the books of the Bible
- 5) organize that cumulative theology in a way that makes sense in our context

In the biblical theology of the Gospel of John, what is said about “missiology”? What is said about the relationship of the Gospel to the world, or the church and the world? What is said about reaching the lost, world evangelization, church planting, God’s view of the world, sending missionaries, discipling the nations? And how is it said? All of the expressions used above are our categories and expressions; probably none are John’s. How does John talk about this sort of thing? Is he interested in it at all?

He does not record Jesus saying we should “make disciples of all the nations,” or “preach the gospel.” (Actually lots of things are “missing” from the Gospel of John: John does not record anything about children, or casting out demons, or calling people to repentance....)

Let’s look at four foundation stones that are there in the Gospel of John that make a biblical theology of missions in John possible.

1) The teachings in the Gospel of John about salvation are clear: Salvation is by simple faith alone in Christ alone. It is free, and there is no required payback. Over and over again this is stated and demonstrated.

Jesus taught in the Gospel of John that salvation was as free and independent of the action of the saved one as birth is. Just as a child does nothing to get born, so we do nothing to be born again. He taught that salvation was as free and simple as accepting a drink of water. (Not imported bottled and branded mineral water, just a drink of water!)

One passage that is often misunderstood in this area is 8:30-59. It is said that as Jesus is preaching, some of the Jews believed in Him, but not with “saving faith” (as though there was some other kind of faith in Jesus). People say that it must not have been this special “saving faith” because a few verses later “they,” those that just believed in Jesus, oppose Him, and by verse 44 Jesus says they are of their father the devil, and by verse 59 they are trying to stone Him. This is offered as proof of the idea that it takes a certain kind of “saving faith,” and not just faith in Jesus, to be saved. However, those that read the passage that way are misreading it. They fail to remember that the English rule that a pronoun (in this case the “they” of verse 33) must refer to the nearest possible antecedent (in this case the believing Jews of verses 30-32), does not apply in Greek. They also fail to realize that the word translated by the NIV as “answered” (in verse 33) can just as easily be translated “responded.”

What actually happened in this exciting passage is that while Jesus was doing some “street preaching” in an overwhelmingly hostile environment, some people came to faith, real faith, in Christ. (We should expect this!) So Jesus had about ten seconds to say a few precious words to them, before the overwhelmingly hostile crowd *responded* with their venom. (We should expect that as well!) But such hostility did not matter to the several in that crowd that day that heard and believed His preaching. They went home knowing that the I AM has set them free, and if they abide in His word, they will be completely

free from the bondage to sin that had bound them. They went home knowing that this One that they have believed in promised that they would not die in their sins. They left knowing that when He was lifted up, they would understand more.

Let us not make faith more complicated than it actually is, in Greek and in English too. If you are asked whether you believe a particular chair will hold you up, you will know the answer to the question without sitting in the chair. You may or may not want to sit in it, that is an entirely different matter. It may be that you sit in it, it may be that you do not. If you do not believe it will hold you up, you probably will not sit in it (unless you want to hit the floor!), but we probably all believe that all the chairs in a room will hold us up. The point is that the person who believes will certainly know that he believes. If he doubts, he will know that too. Of course, believing in a chair will only get you options of places to sit down, but believing in Jesus gets you salvation. Obeying Him earns you rewards (as in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, and the overcomers of Revelation 2-3), but not salvation.

Some people have tried to work around this by suggesting that the various expressions of faith used in John's Gospel have different nuances, but this is impossible to demonstrate when the data is all examined. "Believe Jesus," "believe in Jesus," or the other expressions used in Greek (like "believe to Him," as in 3:16 *and* 8:30!) are synonymous, and are used for stylistic variation.

2) Jesus' nature is also strongly stated and demonstrated in John's Gospel. He and the Father are one. He is the I Am. He is the Logos that was with God, and is God. He is shown to be worthy of faith and obedience over and over. The contrast between Christ and the old religion is dramatically portrayed in 2:1-10, 13-22; 3:1-15; 4:4-26; 5:1-15; 6:35-59; and 7:37-39.

3) The world loves darkness and hates Jesus. This is pointedly taught in 8:42-47 and 15:18 - 16:4, and it is portrayed in the leaders' reactions to the testimony of the man born blind, especially in 9:16-34. The leaders' stubbornness and unwillingness to consider the facts set before them is tragically humorous in that passage.

4) Witness and testimony are strong and explicit elements in the Gospel of John. Signs and verbal witness are contrasted through the narrative, and verbal witness is preferred. (See 1:50; 2:23-25; 4:48; 6:26; 10:38; 14:11; and especially 20:29) In fact the whole Gospel of John is a verbal witness, as is noted in 20:30-31 and 21:24-25.

Although the central conflict in John is between Jesus and the unbelieving Jewish leaders that reject Him and His claims, there are times when we can see that Jesus has more than that arena in mind. Here are five hints that Jesus, in John's Gospel, has a missiological interest:

1) In the preface of the Gospel, many core thoughts are introduced, including a missiological one:

1:11-12 He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to *all* who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God....

2) John may be intentionally ironic in quoting the Jews in 7:35 “Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will He go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?”

3) The concept of missions is sometimes stated very quietly in John, so as to not confuse the primary drama of the conflict between the Light and the Jewish leaders that will not believe in Him. He was sent by the Father to the land of Israel. What He did there in that drama provides the model and the ground for what those He sends must do all over the world. In chapters 1-12 missions is not the explicit theme, because He is modeling evangelism for us, in His context. You do not press people into missions that you are sharing the Gospel with. In chapters 18-20 He is winning the salvation that missions is to bring to the peoples of the world. But in chapters 13-17 He is discipling men that He will send out as missionaries in chapter 21.

In this passage the concept of world missions pokes through into that drama quietly but clearly:

10:16 “I have *other sheep* that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd.”

4) 12:18-19 Many people, because they had heard that He had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet Him. So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how *the whole world has gone after Him!*”

What an ironic preface to the fact that some Greeks want to talk with Him!

12:20-21 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.”

This passage is interesting. We are never told if Jesus sees those Greeks, or what He says to them. They are brought up because they trigger the comments Jesus makes.

12:23-24 Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

Jesus’ response to the fact that there are some Greeks that want to talk to Him might be paraphrased as follows: “Yes, there are *many* Greeks that need Me, but they mostly need Me to be glorified, to fall to the ground and die, and produce many seed.”

Furthermore, verse 26, “Whoever serves Me must follow Me; and where I am, My servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves Me,” supplements that truth by adding in effect, “Will you too be willing to die for the Gospel, and will you follow Me in being sent?”

5) 12:32 “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”

Given that the world is mentioned in the previous verse, and given that there was progress in preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles by the time this was written down, the reader may have understood that this “all men” is worldwide. By the way, this is an amazing piece of intentional irony by Jesus, because normally the word “lifted up” refers to exaltation, but here it actually points to being lifted up on a cross, BUT being lifted up on a cross is Jesus’ greatest moment of exaltation. The statement contains profound double irony. And we need to understand that just as His obedience is His glory, so *our obedience is our glory!*

But these are only foundation stones and hints of a missiology. The core of John's missiology must be the most common self-designation used by Jesus in the Gospel of John. Over forty times Jesus either refers to Himself as *the One sent by the Father*, or to the Father as *the One who sent Him*. Compare that with the fact that only once in John, in the High Priestly Prayer, does Jesus refer to Himself as the "Christ," and He never, in John, calls Himself the "Messiah." He calls Himself "the Son of God" once, and "the Son of Man" eleven times. (Remember, that does not mean He did not think He was the Messiah, it just means He preferred to use other ways of saying it. See John 4:25-26.) Putting it bluntly, it looks as if Jesus thought of Himself as the Sent One, the Missionary! (Of course "apostle," from the Greek, and "missionary," from the Latin, literally mean "sent one.")

Of the more than forty verses that either say that Jesus is the One sent by the Father, or the Father sent Jesus, six explicitly say that Jesus speaks the Father's words, and six explicitly say that Jesus does the Father's will. So total obedience is explicit in many of these texts, but it is implicit in them all. The Lord's dependence upon the Father is another major theme of these verses. As the One sent by the Father, He is "making Him known," and He is doing it well!

[These sent/send passages are further developed and supported by passages that use the verb "come" (5:43; 9:39; 10:10; 12:27, 46; 16:28; and 18:37), and "give" (3:16; 6:32; and of the Spirit, 3:34 and 14:16). See how 3:16, 17, and 19 tie this giving, sending, and coming all together into one theme.]

John's Gospel seems to present informal moments with Jesus, as opposed to the other three Gospels, which seem to emphasize the Lord's public and formal teachings. That might mean, then, that the idea that Jesus is the Sent One is close to Jesus' heart, that it represents something of His "identity."

Verses like 7:18 and 17:21 show that the Lord sought to glorify the One that sent Him.

Furthermore, there are a few places in the Gospel where we sense that Jesus is exulting in doing the thing He was sent to do. It was His glory and joy.

13:31 When he (Judas) was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in Him."

17:1-10, especially verse 4, "I have brought You glory on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do."

19:30 "It is finished!"

So we have seen the themes of *obedience*, *dependence*, *seeking to glorify God*, and *joy*.

But this idea that Jesus often referred to Himself as the One sent by the Father would be of limited interest to us, were it not that He also says, "As the Father sent Me, so send I you." These over forty expressions inform, bring meaning to, what has become known as

John's expression of the Great Commission: "As the Father sent Me, so send I you." As the Father sent Him, – expecting Him to obediently speak His words and do His will, to show God to the world, to save the world, so Jesus sends His disciples – to obediently speak His words and do His will, to show God to this world, to bring His salvation to this world.

This is how *John* says that through the sent ones the ministry of Jesus continues. Luke began Acts writing about "all that Jesus began to do and to teach," implying that the church would be the continuation of that work. Paul wrote about filling up in his flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions (Colossians 1:24).

So Jesus did what the Father sent Him to do, and He said what the Father sent Him to say. In a sense, although the word is not used that way, we might say Jesus followed the Father. He obeyed the Father. He did what He was sent to do. And we are likewise sent.

But all this is a bit unsatisfying. We feel that we should have an answer to one simple question. Of course Jesus did what He was sent to do, all the way to death, death on a cross, but to what *extent* are we expected to do it?

In the very last event in the Gospel of John this becomes startlingly clear. We learn both about the *extent* of that required obedience, but we also learn that there is *diversity* among the tasks we all are being sent to do.

After reinstating him, Jesus tells Peter

"...when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then He said to him, "Follow Me!" (21:18-19)

So then Peter turns and sees his friend John, and says to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?"

Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow Me."

Peter is told what the limits are for how far he has to follow Jesus, in being a sent one: all the way to his own execution. But not only does he get to be executed, he also has to peacefully accept that his friend John might just live to the Rapture!

We are to follow Jesus, whether to crucifixion (like Peter), or to a perhaps long, long life, like John. It is painfully clear in John 21 that Jesus insists He has the right to treat one sent one radically different from another sent one. And all He will say is, what is that to you? You follow Me!

The Father sent Jesus doing the hardest job in all creation, expecting obedience and success; and Jesus sends us with various tasks, expecting obedience and success.

And what should our reaction be?

It should be the same as Jesus' reaction to how He was sent:

wrapped up in the One who sent Him.

Let's be wrapped up in Jesus  
thoroughly obedient to the One who sent us, and exulting in it!

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